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## Country Star Thomas Rhett Explains Why He's Got Pop And Hip-Hop On His Album

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Depending on who you ask, country music is either better than it's ever been, or it's all blasphemy. Artists are broadening their horizons and taking the genre to new places, blending it with everything from pop to electronic dance music to hip-hop, and while the masses are eating new tunes up, some of those more old fashioned fans might not recognize what the industry calls "country" these days.

One artist who isn't afraid to do things his own way is Thomas Rhett, who recently sent his new album *Tangled Up* to number six on the Billboard 200. His sophomore effort is inspired by an array of different kinds of music, and fellow performers like American Idol Jordin Sparks and up-and-coming rapper Lunchmoney Lewis both feature on the record, which help breathe fresh air into his new collection.

I recently spoke to Rhett before he performed at the iHeartRadio Theater in New York City, where he premiered plenty of new cuts from *Tangled Up* and even brought out Ms. Sparks for a surprise cameo.

Congrats on the album. What would you actually call it? Country mixed with...?

Country mixed with a lot of things that I grew up listening to. The first concert I ever went to was the Rolling Stones. I listened to Led Zeppelin, Aretha Franklin, Frank Sinatra, Hank Williams, and Merle Haggard. I grew up listening to so many different things, and having a dad that also sang, music was innately born into me. Going through high school and college, I'd go see anyone who came to town, it didn't matter the genre. For me to sit down and write the same record as my last one...that would be impossible.

What exactly is *Tangled Up*?

*TangledUp* represents how mixed up the record is. If you listen from track one through thirteen, you'll probably not hear two songs that sound the same. I think *Tangled Up* also describes me as a human being. I'm ever-changing and always evolving, always trying new things. We felt that *Tangled Up* really represented what this record was all about.

You have two features on this album that really surprised me.

You and everybody else!

Jordin Sparks and Lunchmoney Lewis! What made you go that route and not recruit a fellow country artist?

On "Playing With Fire", at the time I was like, "What if we got Miranda [Lambert] or Carrie [Underwood] on this?" At the time, Miranda was already doing a duet with Keith Urban and I think Carrie was already doing something with someone else, so we decided to reach out beyond the genre. By the grace of God Jordin said she really wanted to do it. She flew to Nashville and blew the song out of the park.

The Lunchmoney Lewis song was something that came out of nowhere. I was writing a song called "I Feel Good" with two songs from LA and they happened to know Lunchmoney. I still have not met him or spoken to him to this day. They sent him the track and he got off his bus and recorded a verse, and that was that.

Do you see a trend in country music of mixing traditional sounds with pop or hip-hop?

I think everyone is starting to just enjoy good music, period. There are people who will always want the genre, whatever it is, to stay traditional, to stay what it was like when you were 15 years old, but I just don't think music does that. Music is always changing and evolving, just like us as people. Whenever you do something different, it is going to shock certain people, but there are so many others that when I go to my concerts and I see people showing up early and singing along in the front row, it gives us the confidence and the courage to try something a little bit different.

What are you listening to?

I listen to everything. I'm more of a playlist guy. If I'm working out it's Global Top 50. Whatever is hot, I want to hear what's going on.

Is there anything in particular that has stood out?

I'm a huge fan of Drake. Anything he puts out is great to work out to. Growing up, Eric Church was the reason I even wanted to write songs, and I actually got to write with him last year, which was a dream.

The album just came out, but what does the rest of the year look like for you?

I'm finishing a tour now with Florida Georgia Line, and this fall me and Brett Eldredge are co-headlining the CMT Tour. We're doing twenty dates together. It's the biggest thing that he and I have embarked on. It's going to be fun.

If that's the biggest thing you've embarked on, what will be the next big thing after that?

I guess going out by myself. Bringing an opener or two. I want to see how well I can do on my own.