

Music

On a Date With Country Music's Biggest New Star: Thomas Rhett

By *Jessica Radloff* // 2 Days Ago



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Two and a half years ago, we exclusively premiered the video for Thomas Rhett's "It Goes Like This." At the time, the 23-year-old singer was mainly known for penning hits for big-time country stars like Jason Aldean and Florida Georgia Line, as well as being the son of Rhett Akins. Boy, has a lot changed since then.

His debut album, *It Goes Like This*, spawned five Top 40 hits and three number ones. He has since been nominated for the coveted CMA New Artist Award, the ACM New Artist Award, various CMT Awards, and an iHeart Radio Award. Fresh off of Florida Georgia Line's *Anything Goes* tour, he's teaming up with Jason Aldean in 2016—but not before he joins forces with Brett Eldredge on the *Suits and Boots* tour first.

In between performing on *Ellen* and *Jimmy Kimmel Live!*, Rhett met up with us for an early dinner (along with his lovely wife, Lauren) to discuss why his individual sound is getting everyone talking, how he knew his wife was *The One*, and his friendship with Ashton Kutcher and Mila Kunis. It wasn't the first time we had met—that was back in April at this year's Academy of Country Music Awards, where he showed off some of his

snazzy dance moves on camera—but it was the first time we got a chance to really get to know the talent that is Rhett and why this guy is well on his way to becoming country music's next legendary superstar. Let's go On a Date!

Glamour: Tangled Up has more of a pop/R&B sound, with a little bit of country mixed in. Did you have to convince the label that this was the right sound?

Thomas Rhett: Harder than convincing them about the new record was convincing them to put "Make Me Wanna" out in the first place. The label was like, "Well, yeah, or we could put out this song called 'Take Ya Home,'" which in my opinion is a hit, but it didn't really separate me from a pack of other males in the genre. When that song had the success that it had—and watch people go crazy over that song in concert—it really fueled the fire for me to make me keep venturing in that direction. People tell me I'm like the country version of Justin Timberlake. Actually, the other day someone told me I was an unathletic version of Justin Timberlake, and I was like, "I'll take that."

Glamour: Sam Hunt kind of went in in a different direction with his music, which I think has been so great for the genre.

Thomas Rhett: Totally. 100 percent. Thank goodness for the courage of somebody like Sam to do that because it allows people like me to put out the songs I want to put out, and then I'm not technically the first. Obviously, our songs are different, but they're different in the same way.

Glamour: "Southside" is another great song on the album. What's the story behind that one?

Thomas Rhett: I wrote "Southside" with Chris Stapleton, who is my idol. "Southside" is going to be one of the main songs in the new Chipmunks movie. The Chipmunks choreographed a dance, and they sing it in their own voices, so it's going to be pretty funny.

Glamour: Jordin Sparks sings with you on "Playing With Fire." How'd that come together?

Thomas Rhett: Jordin actually wanted to do a country record before she did anything. When we mentioned this to her, she said, "Absolutely." She came to Nashville and literally made me feel not good about myself because she is such a fantastic singer. She got in there and knocked that song out in like 10 minutes.

Glamour: Let's talk about "I Feel Good." Tell me if I'm crazy when I say this, but part of it reminds me a little bit of Katy Perry's "Last Friday Night."

Thomas Rhett: Oh, yeah. I haven't ever thought about that, but now that I have the melody in my head, it kind of does match up a little bit. I think that's one of my favorite songs in the album. If that song doesn't make you smile, then you might just need a check up in life.

Glamour: You had a hand in writing about seven songs on the album. Which one are you most proud of?

Thomas Rhett: Not just because my wife is sitting right here, but I think "Die a Happy Man" was one of my favorites, one of my proudest moments on the record. It's just honest and raw and real. I wrote it very personally about our relationship. And to see how well it's done already—that's probably my proudest moment.

Glamour: Lauren, I know you were a little shy to star in the video, but looking back, what part is your favorite?

Lauren Akins: My favorite moment is when we were out on the water on our surfboard and the sun was going down behind us, and it's just kind of a silhouette of both of us. That's my most peaceful moment ever: sitting on a surfboard out on the waves. And once we got into it, the video is something we'll have our whole lives. The worst thing was, we rode horses bareback, and I had the crazy horse!

Glamour: You're about to team up with Brett Eldredge for the Suits & Boots tour. This is going to be good.

Thomas Rhett: I came up with the name because me and the band have recently started doing this thing called "Suits Saturday." Every Saturday, no matter whether it's 110 or 10 degrees, me and the band wear full suits. Brett and I both like to dress up for the stage, and it just seemed fitting for the tour. Brett and I get along so well. He's just goofy, and our humor's kind of the same. This tour will end up being a stand-up comedy act. [Laughs]

Glamour: Who decides who goes on first each night?

Thomas Rhett: We're going to flip a coin. Seriously.

Glamour: I just came up with an idea. You guys need to host the CMAs next year.

Thomas Rhett: That'd be awesome, but we probably should get a little bigger in our careers. We probably need about seven more hits apiece. That would be fun, though.

Glamour: Prior to going out on your own though, you were primarily a writer and co-wrote Florida Georgia Line's "Round Here." How'd you come up with it, and how much did it change from conception to the final product?

Thomas Rhett: I wrote it with Rodney Clawson and Chris Tompkins, who write a ton of FGL stuff, and they had come up with the idea. We wrote it one day, and it was one of the hardest songs to let go [of] because it became one of Lauren's favorite songs I'd ever written. But at that point in time, I was just starting to make my first record, and I had no idea what I wanted it to be. So, FGL called and said, "Hey, man, we think this is gonna be a single, and we think it's gonna be a big record, can we cut this?" And I was like, "Yes, absolutely." Joey Moi, their producer, just knocked it out of the park. The demo is so different from the record. I was like 20 years old when I wrote that song, and my voice is a lot different than it is now, but being on tour with them is so fun—to watch them sing that song every night.

Glamour: The CMAs are coming up in a few weeks, and you're nominated for Best New Artist, which I thought was a bit funny because...

Thomas Rhett: How am I new artist?

Glamour: You've been making hits for a few years now. So how long are you allowed to be new artist for?

Thomas Rhett: Obviously, I'm very humbled and grateful. Any sort of nod to anything is a win for me. So, whether it's Best Whatever, I don't care. I think the funnest part about being nominated again for New Artist is the fact that, as long as you're considered that, it must mean that you're staying fresh. At least it's not Best Old Artist! Technically, when I got nominated, I still had not put out my second album, [so that's why I could still be considered for Best New Artist].

We took Thomas Rhett to Olive & Thyme in Burbank after he finished his appearance on Ellen in the afternoon.

Glamour: Of all the songs you've written, which one are you most proud of?

Thomas Rhett: "Beer With Jesus" from my first record. I think a lot of people fully didn't

understand the message of that song.

Glamour: Which is?

Thomas Rhett: I'm a normal, horrible, screwed up human being like everyone else. I mean, I'm not horrible person, but I'm just as screwed up as anybody. I have my own faults, I have my own demons that I wrestle with, and that was just me saying that if I ever had the chance to be face to face with Jesus, what do I think I would have the courage to ask him? I think a lot of people took it as, "So, you wanna get drunk with Jesus." I'm just like, "You didn't even listen to the song." But, to me, that song took so much time and so much thought that I think, still to this day, it's one of my proudest songs I've written.

Glamour: Your dad (Rhett Akins) is an icon in country music. What has he taught you about this business?

Thomas Rhett: My dad is one of my favorite human beings in the world. He's just a good person, and he could entertain a brick wall. [Laughs] I credit so much of my success to him. He always said don't let the fame get to your head and don't ever change from the person that you are. I've really tried to keep that in check. Lord knows, if don't, Lauren'll be right there to knock it back into sense.

Glamour: Legally, your last name is Akins. What made you go by just Thomas Rhett?

Thomas Rhett: I'm a junior, so my dad's name is Thomas Rhett Akins as well. So literally, from the day I was born, it was Thomas Rhett. It wasn't Thomas or Rhett, it was Thomas Rhett. Even growing up in school, I tried to ditch the double name, 'cause it wasn't really cool, but Lauren has always called me Thomas Rhett since the first time we met, and my family still calls me Thomas Rhett. It's one of those things you don't want people to think you're just doing nothing but riding coattails. So it was kind of a way to say...I don't necessarily want to say, "That's not my dad," but, hey, I'm my own artist and this is what I go by.

Glamour: You changed majors four times in college. Explain.

Thomas Rhett: I started by wanting to major in physical therapy. I tore my ACL in high school and got super into how the body worked. Then literally, the first day I walked into anatomy class [at Lipscomb University], I was like, I'm not smart enough to do this. So I switched my major to business, and then I didn't want to take an accounting class, so I switched from business to marketing, and then from marketing to communications because communications for me, in my school, was the easiest, fastest way out of college. And then I ended up dropping out after three years to become a songwriter, so my college experience was very subpar. But Lipscomb is a great university. They keep trying to get me to come back and finish, but I have no time right now.

Glamour: You and Lauren have known each other since first grade. At what point did things go from just being friends to something more?

Thomas Rhett: I think I fell in love with her in seventh grade at church camp. We dated a little bit when we were 15 and 16, and then broke up for about seven years and dated other people. We even double-dated in college with other people we were dating. But, always, in the back of my mind, I was like, "Man, I still really love this girl." So one day, I found out that she and her boyfriend had split, and I knew this was my opportunity. I said, "Hey, I realize this my ruin our friendship, but I physically can't keep being your friend without letting you know how I feel." So, I said something about it, and we dated for six months and got engaged. It was just crazy.

Glamour: How did you know she was The One?

Thomas Rhett: I just kind of always found myself pleasing her. I was like, "How can I get Lauren's attention?" It was constantly that. So, I think when you can find that, and if you can marry your best friend, you should do it.

Glamour: Would you like to start a family down the road?

Thomas Rhett: Absolutely. When we got married we said we were going to wait two years. Next week is our third anniversary, so obviously, we have no kids yet. I think probably in the next two or three years. We want to have some of our own, and we want to adopt some as well. We've really taken advantage of the time we've been given, so every time we get off, like for a week, we're always going to somewhere we've never been. Last year we went to Italy, so it's been fun being able to travel and seeing all the things we want to see.

Glamour: What's your best relationship advice?

Thomas Rhett: If you're single and looking for a relationship, try to find someone who treats you with bunch of respect, and don't just settle. I think settling is the worst thing you could ever do. Don't stay committed to someone just because it's safe. Really try to make sure that person you think you're going to marry is your best friend, and then somebody you see yourself still having a great time with when you're 70 years old.

Everything's better when cookies are involved! (Pictured: Thomas Rhett and wife, Lauren)

Glamour: Is there a couple in country music that you look up to?

Thomas Rhett: Yeah, Lady Antebellum's Charles Kelley and Cassie are good friends of ours. Being around Luke Bryan and Caroline is fun to be around; Dierks and his wife are great. It's a blast to see people be married that long, especially in a time of not a lot of people staying together. I think if you can stay together in this business, I think your marriage is super [strong].

Glamour: Is it true you went to Reba McEntire's Halloween parties as a kid?

Thomas Rhett: Yes, Dad's first tour was Reba, so Reba would always invite her opening acts over to her house. We went a couple years in a row, and I got to become good friends with Reba's son. It used to be at this barn on her property. It was different/weird getting to hang with "celebrities," but those were Dad's friends.

Glamour: And what did you dress up as to these parties?

Thomas Rhett: I was a pumpkin a lot. My grandma used to make all my outfits. I was Wolverine one year. [Laughs] I've been a lot of things.

Glamour: Blake Shelton also helped you with your English homework, I heard?

Thomas Rhett: Yeah, I came home one day and was writing a paper, and Blake looked at my conclusion paragraph and tweaked a couple of words. I was 14. He was like 25. He and Dad are good friends, and they write together all the time.

Glamour: Time for some random questions. If we were to visit your house, what would we walk away thinking?

Thomas Rhett: I had nothing to do with the design of it. The only part of my house that I had a say in was that I wanted a gigantic shower. You could literally fit 25 people in our shower. It is so unnecessary, but every time I come home, I'll stand in that thing for an hour. I love it. But Lauren is all about the greys, whites, kind of thing, so when you walk

in to our house it's a lot of distressed leather, whites and greys, and really antique-y kind of stuff.

Glamour: You meet a lot of people in this industry. What's one of your favorite encounters?

Thomas Rhett: I've always been a fan of Ashton Kutcher. He came to my show at Stagecoach, and I found out he's a big fan of mine. So every time I come to L.A., Lauren and I go to dinner with him and Mila. Sometimes I have meetings with him just to talk about business. He's really smart. It's always fun to meet a guy who you've been watching since you're like 13, and he really is that funny and normal as you would hope he would be.

Glamour: So many people wish they could be rock out on a massive stage like you do. Anything you wish you could do?

Thomas Rhett: I've always wanted to be an actor. I think that would be one of the coolest jobs to just go in knowing that you're the best and just crushing a part that no one ever saw you doing. I always wanted to be James Bond. [Laughs] Second, I would just like to move to Hawaii, open a surf shop, and just sell surf boards. But I love what I do [now]. I just really want to blow people's minds [on stage]. That's really what it comes down to.

Thomas Rhett's second album, *Tangled Up*, is currently available for purchase now. To see him on tour, [click here](#). And don't miss his performance at the Tidal Z benefit concert.