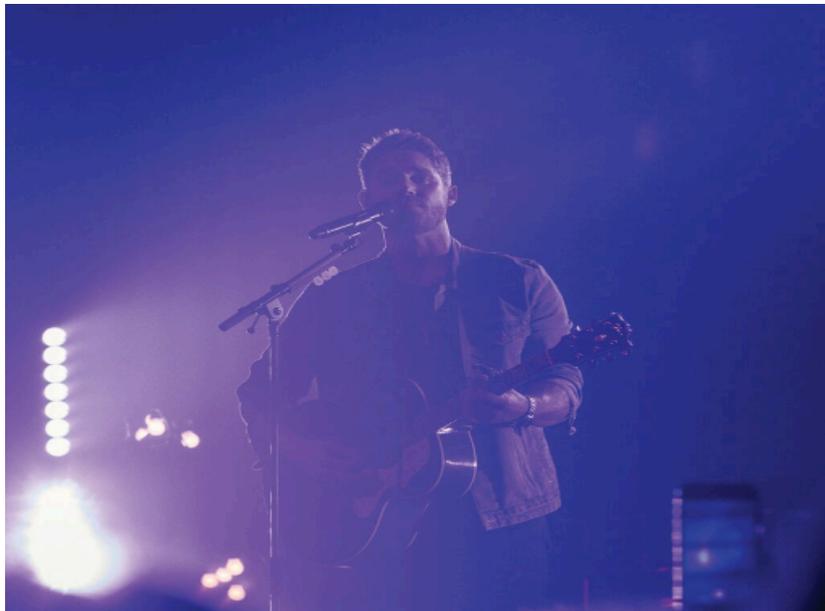




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BRETT YOUNG: IN CASE YOU DIDN'T KNOW



Big Machine breakout and **ACM** New Male Vocalist of the Year **Brett Young** is launching a fourth hit, the tender ballad “Mercy,” from his debut set—following the multiplatinum “In Case You Didn’t Know” and platinum smashes “Like I Love You” and “Sleep Without You,” all of which were Country radio #1s. The native of Anaheim, Calif., was busy alternating headline dates and festivals with support spots for **Thomas Rhett** until he began working on his follow-up set. He’s also newly engaged. All that good news should make him feel better about the hour of his life he spent talking to us, which he’ll never get back.

You’ve been working on the new record?

Yes, we’re on the last single for the first record and a little more than halfway in the recording process for album #2.

I know that you have said elsewhere that the new album’s vibe is going to be a little bit more upbeat than the first, which has a lot of ballads.

Yeah. We knew we needed to do that to avoid me being pigeonholed as just a balladeer. Also, I'm in a very different place in my life right now, engaged to be married. That naturally affects the project—there's a really peppy, uptempo, happy feel. Even some of the songs that are topically sad have a brighter, more cheerful [musical] feel.

You're a California native; walk me through the process of your decision to move to Nashville.

During my 10 years playing music in Southern California, I made myself a promise that if I ever stopped seeing any kind of growth, that I would hang it up. By the time I was ready to leave L.A., I had been making a solid living by playing music for quite some time; I just felt like it had reached a ceiling. The bars and restaurants kept getting nicer, but it didn't feel like a small enough community that the executive I needed to help me take the next step was going to walk in the door while I was playing for a dinner crowd.

Were you playing your own material?

To make a living, I was pretty much playing covers for three to four hours. On my nights off I'd play my material at **The Hotel Cafe, Viper Room, Room 5, Genghis Cohen**—the songwriter circuit. The cover gigs were every Tuesday night in Santa Monica and every Wednesday night at the **Lounge Bar** and **The Montage** in Beverly Hills. During **Grammy** week, The Montage would always have everybody who was attending the Grammys, so I got to meet some really cool people. It was never the executives, though.

What were you singing in those gigs?

I would try to mix in country music. L.A. wasn't really ready for it, so that was people's excuse to go get another drink. I stuck to pop music: **Ed Sheeran, The Fray, Adele**. You remind yourself you're playing for a paycheck.

Other writer/performers have told me that by learning to play other people's hits, you can go into the DNA of how pop songs work and gain a deeper understanding that informs your own writing.

I think that DNA you're talking about lives in my music when I'm making country records. People always tell me, "There's nobody that really sounds like you or writes like you." I don't think that was a God-given skill set. I think it happens because of what you're talking about. I think that spill-over was a huge catalyst for me to be able to put out my first record and have it sound fresh.

I wanted to ask you about Big Machine and how you decided to go there.

It's been a dream. It's funny, I moved to Nashville to focus more on the songwriting after all those bars and restaurants and some of those gigs that felt thankless. I thought, "I love music, but maybe it's time to hang up [performing] and just write songs for other people." But to do that, you have to demo the song. So I was singing on all these demos and trying to pitch the songs to other artists, and the label A&R people we were pitching to wanted to know who was singing on the demo. It ended up getting me meetings as an artist. I always say, "If you wanna make God laugh, tell Him your plan."

It was a really bizarre turning point for me. Within a year of moving to Nashville, I'm taking meetings with almost every major label. But the way Big Machine followed up made it very clear that they were excited. **Laurel Kittleston** in A&R first brought me in to play for people, and then she basically cornered [EVP] **Jimmy Harnen** at an event for **Reba**. He heard the music and I was in his office playing that week. The following week I was playing in the basement of his house for the radio team; the week after that I was playing

for **Scott Borchetta** and **Dann Huff**. Dann talked about his vision for my record and basically said he wanted to make **John Mayer's** *Continuum*, but for the country market. I said, "You basically just won my heart." Jimmy said he envisioned the music being a little bit more stripped down, so it could be my voice and the lyric out front, because I'm lyrics first. If you want the story to be first, you've got my attention. It was a whole lot of people saying what I needed them to say.

What was the recording process with Dann like?

The first record was so much fun to make, because I've never seen anything like the way Dann works. He hires musicians he knows; if you tell them what vibe you're going for, they're already going to be 99% spot on with whatever they play. And Dann communicates with his musicians so well that the tweaks happen so perfectly and so fast. And he's just a great person—he cares so much about me being happy. On the first record, even though I was a nervous unsigned artist, he made it fun and comfortable.

Is Dann working on the new record as well?

Yes. I don't know if I'll work with anybody else. He's become one of my favorite people on the planet. Actually, making this second record with him has become as much fun as any other part of the music business for me. We'll cut vocals at his house and sit down with his family. Big Machine fosters that. They're a family over there, and I think that kind of trickles down—the experience I've had with Dann I've also had with Jimmy, the whole promo staff and Laurel. Everybody wants this project to do well. That means everything to me.

I would say the excitement around the new album is mostly because of how patient my new fans have been. They've only had 12 songs for over two years now. We're on our fourth single. We've considered getting greedy and trying to put another single out on this record. The reason we're coming with new music is because the fans have been patient and they deserve more than 12 songs. The sophomore slump is a real thing, and I was super-nervous in the writing process. But as we're getting into the studio and picking songs, I think I'm more excited about the second one than the first one. I'm fired up; I can't wait for everybody to hear this new record.