

(12.10.18) - <https://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/country/8488988/brett-young-interview-ticket-to-la>

Brett Young On New Album, 'Ticket To LA': 'I Wouldn't Change a Thing'



Last year, Brett Young unabashedly shared his story of heartbreak on his self-titled debut album and parlayed his misery into three No. 1s on Billboard's Country Airplay chart, including triple-platinum hit, "In Case You Didn't Know."

Young's ready to make the same kind of impact with his sophomore set, *Ticket To L.A.* -- only this time he's not heartbroken at all. In fact, he's happier than he's ever been. His latest project, released Dec. 7, reflects his bliss.

The 37-year-old singer married longtime love Taylor Mills in November, and their relationship played a big part in how Young's lighthearted second album came together. Ironically, Mills was also the muse for Young's first album, as the two had a period where the two split before getting engaged. But in Young's eyes, having the same woman inspire each album made *Ticket To L.A.* particularly unique.

"When you look back at the first record, me and Taylor were completely broken up, and so as much as the first record reflected how heartbroken I was, the second one is a reflection of what a different place I'm at in my life," Young says. "Getting to see the transition that I made as a person through the jump from album one to

album two is kind of a cool way to look at it. Even if you aren't listening to the words, the feel of the production and tempo is a lot peppier and happier."

Young, whom ASCAP named its 2018 Country Songwriter-Artist of the Year, found a balance on the 12-song LP. He worked with new co-writers, including hitmakers Ross Copperman and Ashley Gorley, and wrote with tunesmiths Zach Crowell and Jimmy Robbins again to make sure fans found a consistency between the two sets. Young also teamed with his buddy and mentor Gavin DeGraw on "Chapters," an autobiographical tune that shows that Young's still eager to bring variety to his material, no matter how smitten he may be nowadays.

Billboard spoke with Young about his pepped-up process for *Ticket To L.A.*, working with some of his biggest inspirations and why it's important for him to still bring some sadness to his albums.

Was there anything that you took away from the reaction to your first album that played into the creation of *Ticket to L.A.*?

Something that I learned over again is that people love sad songs. And the reality is that there's more heartbroken single people out there than there are people that are experiencing happily ever after. Having relearned that with the first record, it was important, because now I'm going in at this completely different place in my life where I'm sickeningly happy. It was a good reminder that you can't write a whole record full of 13 happy songs.

When [you're not writing about] what you're living, your existing reality, you have to draw from other places. So it really challenged me as a writer. But it was good that we went there, because some of my favorite songs on the record are sad, and they came from a completely different place -- more of a headspace and creative space than a life space.

Was Taylor one of the first people to hear the record before it was done?

She was definitely my test audience for this whole process, and at the end of every songwriting session, she'd have to listen to the demo 30 times with me to decide if I was completely happy with it or not, so she was involved from the ground level. She's my biggest fan and she's an amazing support system, but she was probably tired of the songs by the time they were finished [*laughs*].

The album closes with "Don't Wanna Write This Song," a somber ballad. What made you decide to end the album like that?

I like putting pure ballads at the ends of records. I feel like sequencing the record is so much about tempo, and if you put it smack-dab in the middle, you kind of suck the energy out when there's still four or five songs left. I never want the ballad to be the reason people don't continue to listen through the rest of the record.

["Don't Wanna Write This Song"] is going to be "Mercy 2.0." When you get to that third verse, you realize that it's not a breakup song, and that [the subject of the song is] actually dead. I've never killed off somebody in a song before, so that was an interesting undertaking. I wrote this one with Sean McConnell, who I wrote "Mercy" with, as well as Zach Crowell. It was already a big undertaking to say that we wanted to try writing "Mercy 2.0," but we got to where the bridge would happen, and we all kind of realized that we had to kill her. It was a strange realization. We ended up writing an alternate ending just in case that was too dark.

When we demoed it out, everybody agreed that that was the right thing to do, to let her go. That's one of my favorites on the record, because we wrote specifically in that vein so that it would feel like a breakup song until you got [to the end]. We put "Mercy" at the end of the first record, and [the end] seemed to be the right place for ["Don't Wanna Write This Song"]. So it was just sticking with what worked on the first record -- a "If it ain't broke, don't fix it"-type thing.



Which other songs are you most excited for people to hear?

The actual writing of “Don’t Wanna Write This Song” is something I’m really proud of, so that’s definitely one of my favorites on the record.

For obvious reasons, another one of my favorites is “Chapters,” not just because I wrote it with Gavin, but also because it’s the first time that I’ve done something that autobiographical. It’s not a love story, it’s not about a girl -- It’s about my life.

“1, 2, 3, Mississippi” is going to be a sleeper on the record. I think every little boy remembers counting alligators or Mississippis when they grew up playing sports, and so I think the spin on it that we put, where it’s not sports, but it’s a girl -- it’s the mechanism that the guy has learned to kind of calm or slow himself down -- I think is a cute little trick.

I know you're buddies with Gavin, but how did you get in a room and write “Chapters?”

Being friends with Gavin for years now, I’ve avoided intentionally asking him [to write with me]. I’ve never wanted to mix business with pleasure. Now that we both live in Nashville, [we’ve] have been spending quite a bit of time together, and for whatever reason, I felt comfortable with it. He knew that my record label had been asking for what they called a “life song” -- anything that wasn’t about a girl. And he said, “Well, if that’s what they want, I want to write something to make the record. This is your record, you need to write *your* story.”

The thing that we didn’t expect going in was how easy it would be to make the third verse my story as well as his story, being that music is how both of our lives have ended up. We didn’t even think about featuring him on it until after we started realizing that that third verse could apply to both of us.

What does it mean to you to have him on a track?

It’s one of those things that’s a silent confirmation or validation. This life is not the glamorous, fun, party life that people think it is. It’s hard, you never get to be home and sometimes it wears you down. Without these little reminders that you’re supposed to be doing this and you’re in the right place, it would be easy to consider walking away for it for something a little bit less hectic. You’re finding little ways to reward or congratulate yourself to make you feel like it’s all worth it, and that was another one of those personal validations where it felt like a huge milestone.

You also wrote with a number of writers you didn't work with on the first record: Ashley Gorley, Shane McAnally, Ross Copperman. How did you link up with them?

All of the new names that you see that weren't on album one were kind of bucket list goals for me. They were all really kind of exciting, but what's most exciting is that a couple of them became regular writes for me.

Ross and Ashley, we had just started writing together as I closed the first record. So we didn't have the opportunity to get on the first record together, but we have great chemistry. There are songs we've written that didn't make the second record that'll probably be considered for the third one.

Was there anything that felt different about being in the room with higher-profile songwriters?

The biggest difference I noticed was that at that level they all have this willingness to scrap a song and let it go if they don't think it's great. Whereas, when I first got started, it was like, "No, we have to finish a song today."

Your songwriting reputation is tied to every product that you finish; I don't want anybody finishing a piece of crap and then saying it's written by Brett Young. So it's also protecting the legacy a little bit, too.

You said "Don't Wanna Write This Song" is a "Mercy 2.0," but do you think there's an "In Case You Didn't Know 2.0" on *Ticket to L.A.*?

"Change Your Name." If we did it right, and I think we did, it's going to be a 2019 wedding song of the year-type deal. I had written a song very similar to that for the record called "Aisle," and one thing I always want to make sure I don't do is pick songs just because I wrote them -- it needs to be "best song wins." I thought ["Aisle"] was going to be on the record, and then I heard [this one] and I just went, "Oh, it's better than mine."

I'm sure fans are going to want to hear "Aisle" eventually.

Well, we're going to need 3.0 as well, you know? [*Laughs.*]

How does what you envisioned for *Ticket to L.A.* compare to the finished product?

I wanted it to sound enough like the first record and for the songs to pull at the heartstrings the same way that the first record did, but also switch it up enough that you're also not boring [listeners] and you're kind of expanding who you appeal to. On the songwriting side, that kind of handled itself because of being in a different place in my life. But on the production side, there's just a little more of that kind of Motown production subtlety that we threw in -- a lot in the bass line -- because I grew up listening to soul music and R&B.

Honestly, I'm not just saying this, I could not be more proud of this record. People talk about the sophomore slump all the time. It's a real thing, and until you have the finished product in your hand, you don't know how you did. But I wouldn't change a thing.