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Brett Young Plays The Long Game With Sophomore Album 'Ticket To L.A.'



Brett Young

“It was really important to me to not be another sophomore slump conversation,” BMLG Records artist **Brett Young** says, seated in an Airbnb in East Nashville. “I heard enough about it that I was determined not to fall into that.”

His second album, *Ticket To L.A.*, which releases Friday (Dec. 7), follows a wave of four consecutive No. 1 singles, setting a high bar for his next outing.

His self-titled debut album on BMLG Records, as well as each single released from the project, has earned at least Platinum status. He earned the ACM's New Male Vocalist of the Year honor. His tender love song "In Case You Didn't Know" earned 3x platinum sales and cemented Young as an eloquent conveyor of his polished, pop-soul sound.

But beneath his effortlessly soulful voice and relaxed persona is an artist with an intense vision, and the hustle to make that happen. Talking about his new 13-song project, which features 10 tracks co-written by the hitmaker, Young seems to be equal parts passionate songwriter and album strategist. While Young delved into plenty of heartbreak on his debut project, *Ticket To L.A.* strikes a decidedly brighter tone.

In addition to his career success, Young, 37, wed longtime girlfriend Taylor Mills in November.

"The vibe of this album is different because Taylor and I are happy, and I'm at a different place than when I wrote the last record. With this album, I had to make sure every song wasn't a sappy love song, and that we had some sad songs on the project," he says. "It's hard to do when you are happy."

Young drew on some older material for some of those heartbreak songs, including the new album's "Used To Missin' You," which was penned earlier in his relationship with his wife Taylor, when the two had been on break. The track was penned with Jimmy Robbins and Jon Nite around the time he neared the completion of his debut project, which also contains "Left Side Of Leaving," another Young/Robbins/Nite co-write.

"'Missin' You' almost went on the first album," Young compares of "Left Side Of Leaving." "The only reason we didn't was they were both peppy breakup songs."

The first half of the album plays like an unexpected whirlwind relationship that suddenly falls apart from a chance meeting in "Ticket To L.A.," the first conversations and heady rush of attraction on songs like "Catch" and "Let It Be Mine," to the confusion and loss that comes with tracks like "Used To Missin' You."

Elsewhere on the album, the hopeful "Runnin' Away From Home," seems a response to the devastation that runs through "You Ain't Here To Kiss Me" from his debut album. While the later song chronicles Young's attempt to exit a dying relationship with a one-way ticket out of California, "Runnin'" ruminates on that decision with *What Was I thinkin'/flyin' away that night...walkin' away from you was like runnin' away from home.*



However, isn't until the album's ninth track, "Chapters," that Young turns those laser-focused observations directly inward.

"From the very beginning, the label has been asking me to write what they call a 'life song,'" he says. "There's a girl in every song up until 'Chapters.' I tried and I wrote a ton of them but there was something missing with all of them. They were fine songs but not good enough to be on records, in my opinion."

It took teaming up with friend and fellow musician **Gavin DeGraw**, whom Young has long idolized, to set the right tone for the song.

"I never wanted to mix business with pleasure, so I waited a lot of years to ask him to work with me," Young says. When he finally made the ask, DeGraw had one stipulation for the writing session.

"He said, 'You've been telling me the label wants a life song, so if we are going to write it, we are going to write your life story.'"

“Chapters,” which Young penned with DeGraw and Ross Copperman, chronicles Young’s story from rising baseball talent who was sidelined by an injury, to one of country music’s best-selling new artists. DeGraw co-writing and singing on the track makes it almost full-circle, given that listening to DeGraw’s *Chariot* album inspired Young to take up music following a sports injury.

“Everything about that song is special to me,” Young says. “Just a combination of getting to write it with Gavin, and the third chapter of my life is music. That’s his story, too, so the fact that we got to write both of our stories in that third verse, it was very clear that he should sing on that third verse, too.”

In his resolve to make his sophomore effort a success, artistically and commercially, Young threw himself into the songwriting process, even in the midst of a heavy touring schedule, both of his own shows and more than 50 shows opening for Lady Antebellum last year. He estimates he had around 500 of his own co-written tracks to choose from for the project, in addition to listening to outside cuts.

“I wanted to have too many songs to choose from on this record,” he says. “There were maybe two weekends that I didn’t have writers on the road with me, and I had writers out during my Caliville Tour. I probably wrote 150 songs per year for each of the two years while the first album was out,” he notes. “We put ourselves in an awesome position that there were songs that didn’t make this record that were good enough, too, that will probably go on the next one. This record isn’t even out and I’m already looking to ride the third album.”

In many ways, Young is indeed focused on playing the long game.

“You go into it initially with very broad goals—‘I want success,’” he says. “Then as some of that starts you begin refining what that means. Through all of this I learned how interested I am in the business side of things—publishing, touring logistics, stuff that I thought I wanted to hire a bunch of people to take care of so I wouldn’t have to think about it, I find myself asking more questions and wanting to learn about it.

“I didn’t know I was going to feel this way, so it’s been interesting to see myself gravitate toward that,” he says. “I think that is probably the side of me that when the time does come—when you’ve started a family and your kids are old enough—when I think ‘What do I do in this business that doesn’t cause me to have to be gone four days a week?’”

In the years to come, Young says he could see himself delving into A&R and publishing.

“I’m most interested in finding talent,” he says, “whether that means going into A&R or potentially staring some sort of artist development thing. If not that, then something involving writing. What’s interesting is when I moved to Nashville four and a half years ago, it was to pursue the writing side of the industry. My investor at the time—one of my best friends—when he and I met, his goal was to get into publishing but then he met an artist, so the joke is kind of on both of us...I moved to Nashville to be a writer and I got a record deal; he wanted to get into publishing and he met an artist.”