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## BROOKS & DUNN GET A 'REBOOT' WITH THE HELP OF COUNTRY MUSIC'S UP-AND-COMING TALENT



[Brooks & Dunn](#) never intended to record a new album. The country duo, made up of [Kix Brooks](#) and [Ronnie Dunn](#), tells *Billboard* it was their manager Clarence Spalding who convinced them to record their new collaborative project *Reboot*, out April 5.

Spalding, who manages [Reba McEntire](#), [Jason Aldean](#) and [Rascal Flatts](#), among others, reached out to the duo shortly after meeting [Luke Combs](#) at a concert in Chicago. When the newcomer realized who Spalding managed, he shared how Brooks & Dunn influenced him as an artist. Taken aback by Combs' passion, Spalding wondered if other up-and-coming acts felt the same and whether his clients would be interested in recording an album. He then put together a list of young artists and told Brooks & Dunn that he would call each act one time to discern their interest.

"He said, 'We want some artists that are on the cusp of breaking big, and some of them are up-and-coming,'" Dunn recalls while seated in the upstairs loft of his barn in Nashville.

“There's a couple of artists on here that are just scratching the surface, which is also really cool to have a chance to be a part of, hopefully, somebody's success and getting started,” Brooks adds.

Spalding more than delivered on his phone calls. The 12-track album has the duo teaming up with a versatile roster of new talent including Combs, [Kane Brown](#), [Thomas Rhett](#), [Brett Young](#), [LANCO](#), [Ashley McBryde](#), [Brothers Osborne](#), [Midland](#), [Cody Johnson](#), [Jon Pardi](#), Tyler Booth and [Kacey Musgraves](#). Each act chose the song they perform with the duo as well as put their own spin on the reimagined versions of Brooks & Dunn's biggest hits.

While certain artists like Pardi (“My Next Broken Heart”) and Combs (“Brand New Man”) stuck faithfully to the original arrangement, others like Musgraves (“Neon Moon”) and Rhett (“My Maria”) put their own distinct flair on Brooks & Dunn's standards.

The artists didn't meet ahead of time before recording the songs and instead simply figured things out together in the studio. One of the album's many highlights is Brown's powerful interpretation of “Believe.” After meeting for the first time at Nashville's Blackbird Studio, Dunn recalls he and Brown trading off each line of the song while in adjoining vocal booths.

“Kane really stands out to me. He came in real quiet and sat on the sofa. He picked, surprisingly enough, ‘Believe,’ which is probably the most vocally challenging,” Dunn admits of the CMA Award-winning song featured on 2005's *Hillbilly Deluxe*. “It's a hard one to sell. You can't sing it. You have to talk it to an extent, but you can't talk it too much.”

He adds, “None of us had heard that side of Kane expressed before. So, we didn't know. It was just like, ‘Hell, let's throw it up in the air and see what happens.’ We walk in the vocal booth; they start the song. The second he opened his mouth to sing I stepped back and went, ‘Dude, he can sing!’”

Brooks & Dunn say Brown's performance set the tone and the attitude for the project. Another collaboration they look back fondly on is Musgraves' unique take on “Neon Moon.” They praise the singer for her reinterpretation which includes the use of a vocoder. “She came in with such a different progressive twist and the song still stood up,” Dunn marvels.

Fans attending Musgraves' headlining show at Ryman Auditorium earlier this year witnessed the three singers perform the song together for the very first time. The duo jokes about rehearsing with Musgraves, likening her to Reba McEntire when they don't listen to her stage commands.

“Kacey is really cool. It was fun at rehearsal with her because Ronnie and I have never really rehearsed a whole lot. You can tell she was running her show and she really wanted us to do right,” Brooks recalls with a laugh. “She's scolding us like Reba. It was great seeing her in her element. Walking out there at the Ryman -- which is obviously a great room -- it does make you feel good to see your fans light up and still care about something you did along the way.”

While Brooks & Dunn are open to the idea of collaborating with each artist on upcoming tour and festival dates as well as a televised special if the idea presents itself, they say nothing has come together yet. Proud of the production and artistry on *Reboot* and excited about the chance to introduce their music to a new generation, the duo say it is a testament to the songwriting on each recording that has allowed their music to survive the test of time.

“The songs, that's what's important. People would ask us in the early days, ‘What do you want at the end of the line?’ We just want to create music that withstands the challenge of time,” Dunn explains.

His bandmate chimes in, marveling at their long run together. “To think some, probably 20 years after a lot of those hits were going on, that the music is what's being recognized...that makes me feel really good,” Brooks concedes. “The chances of a 20-year run like we've had were damn near zero.”