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BROOKS & DUNN 'SLOW-DANCED' 'REBOOT,' BUT RECLAIMED PINNACLE WITH TODAY'S COUNTRY STARS

Slow-danced is how Ronnie Dunn describes the first reaction he and duo partner Kix Brooks had when pitched the idea of their now chart-topping “REBOOT” collaboration project.

The men comprise Brooks & Dunn, a [Country Music Hall of Fame-bound duo](#) that boasts more album sales than any duo in music history. With hits that range from “Boot Scootin’ Boogie” to “I Believe,” their ability to musically swing from heartfelt and insightful to boot-stomping ushers of the party crowd bridged their way to decades of relevance and made them a leading influence on today’s generation of country singers.

"Brooks & Dunn ... those were guys growing up, and they still are," said multi-platinum selling country singer Luke Combs. "Their influence is one of the main reasons I'm doing this to this day. The guys are living legends. It's like hamburgers. Everybody loves hamburgers and everybody loves Brooks & Dunn."



Duo doubtful at first

The “REBOOT” concept – the brainchild of the duo’s manager Clarence Spalding – was sparked by Combs covering the duo's "Brand New Man" at his concerts. Spalding wanted to pair Brooks & Dunn with country music’s hottest up-and-comers to rerecord some of the duo’s biggest hits. The duo wasn’t convinced.

“That is flattering, but at the risk of starting to sound dated,” Brooks said. “I always say, ‘I’m not Willie Nelson.’ You’re not ready for people to go ‘I grew up listening to your music.’ It’s weird.”

The album, which is available now, struck a chord with country music fans. Released earlier this month, “REBOOT” marks the first time Brooks & Dunn has topped the album charts since 2009. In addition, the album’s success earned the duo its 10th Billboard 200 Top 10 album, the most of any country duo or group in the chart’s history.



Artists on the 12-song project include Kane Brown, Thomas Rhett, Brett Young, LANCO, Ashley McBryde, Brothers Osborne, Combs, Midland, Cody Johnson, Jon Pardi, Tyler Booth and Kacey Musgraves.

In the beginning, Dunn said, the duo’s input on the album was “very minimal.” He explained that at this point in their career the only way to dust off “all the material” is to do an album where the songs are remastered or hope someone comes up with something creative. When Combs’ manager sent Brooks & Dunn an acoustic clip of the singer performing one of their songs, the duo realized its path was clear.

Spalding said he would only invite artists to participate once. He didn’t want to pester them into doing the project. But the genre’s hottest stars clamored to record with the record-setting duo.

Brooks & Dunn let each singer decide which song they wanted to perform. Pardi was only interested if he could sing “My Next Broken Heart” as identical to the original recording as they could make it. Young, however, did a reimagined version of “Ain’t Nothing ‘Bout You” and the men explained Musgraves’ version of “Neon Moon” was drastically different than the original. Since Musgraves performed the song with her band nightly on stage, she had already logged hours injecting her individuality.

Powerhouse vocals from McBryde

Singing with McBryde was another highlight for Brooks & Dunn. Brooks was familiar with the “Girl Going Nowhere” singer, but Dunn hadn’t heard of her. Brooks pitched McBryde on “You’re Gonna Miss Me When I’m Gone,” and he said the pair worked out the vocal parts while McBryde was driving in her car. However, the men weren’t prepared for her powerhouse vocals the day she came to the studio.

“It was a holy s--t moment when she started singing,” Dunn said. “I walked in and she’s all tatted up looking cool, and I thought she was from Austin (Texas). And she is cool. But that voice when she started singing.

“I’m in one (vocal recording) booth and she’s in the other,” Brooks said. “I’m like, ‘Alright, I better step up here.’ I’ve sang this song a few times, but man this girl can go.”



McBryde said “You’re Gonna Miss Me When I’m Gone” is part of the soundtrack to her life. As a preteen, she learned how to rope steer in her front yard while listening to Brooks & Dunn.

“For them to ask me to add my voice to my favorite Brooks & Dunn song was like receiving the stamp of approval from the country music industry,” McBryde said. “Kix and Ronnie made it impossible to be nervous. The direction on this song felt so natural to me, so organically right. They remain the greatest duo of all time.”

While admittedly iffy on the project at first, Brooks & Dunn are proud of the album they created. In addition to reconnecting with their old hits and meeting country music's next generation, Brooks said every song was a walk down memory lane.

"It was fun," he said. "There was a lot of ... 'Remember when we cut this?' A lot of times when you're cutting a new record, especially a song you didn't write, you're getting familiar with it and you're not sure how to treat it. But this is fun. They were already our babies. They had already climbed the mountain. It's kinda fun pushing them back up there again."

“REBOOT” is out now, but Brooks & Dunn don’t have time to relax. The duo will be inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame this fall and the Las Vegas residency they share with Reba McEntire - Reba, Brooks & Dunn: Together in Vegas – includes multiple dates this summer at Caesars Palace.