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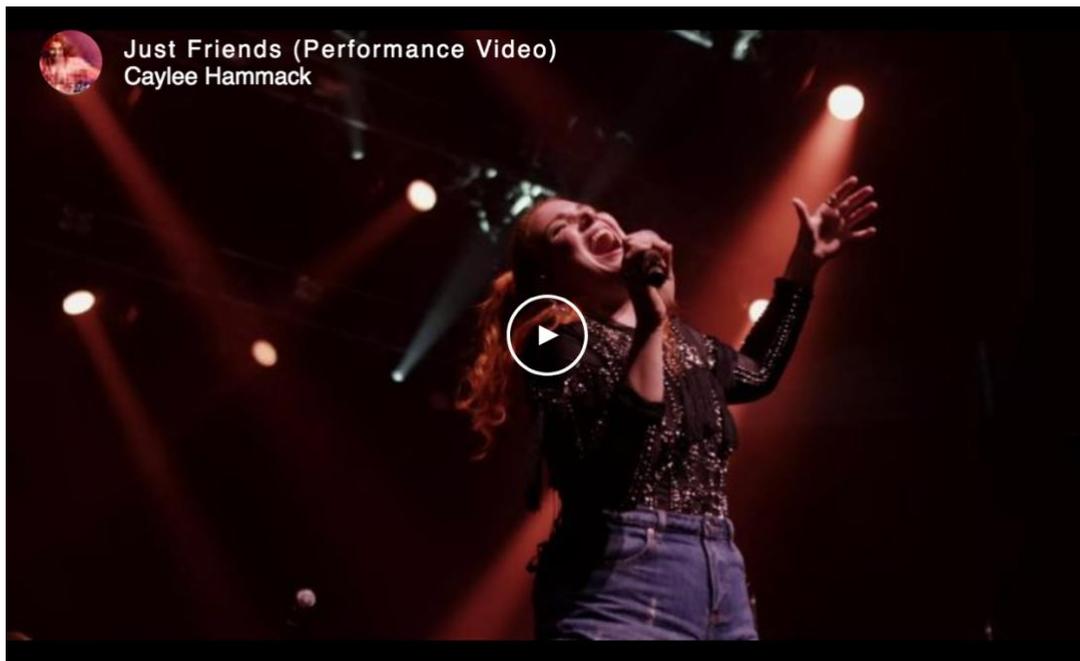
## VIDEO PREMIERE: NASHVILLE'S CAYLEE HAMMACK CHANNELS DOLLY, WEEZER IN 'JUST FRIENDS'

One of country's most promising newcomers turns her regrets over un-friendzoning a pal into a '90s-alt-rock-influenced banger.



It's not just [Caylee Hammack](#)'s red hair that's boldly aflame in her new music video for "Just Friends," for which *Variety* has the exclusive premiere. She's incensed that a former pal talked her into un-friend-zoning her, with predictably unsatisfactory romantic results, and that ire plays out in an amusingly feisty single that uses traditional country and distorted alt-rock as twin fuels for the fire.

As the Georgia native puts it, "The first part of the song kind of sounds like I'm trying to replicate Dolly Parton as if I'm on 'The Porter Wagoner Show,' and then the next part feels like Weezer should step on stage. There's a part of me that wants to listen to old country songs and cook everything in a cast-iron skillet, but there's also the kid that was raised on '90s alternative music that wants to be a rebel and rock out and have a little bit more angst than sweetness in her music. So I feel like 'Just Friends' gave me that chance to tip my hat to those two different genres that raised me."



It's a two-part song, really, opening with a more vulnerable intro that has Hammack sounding like the second coming of Dolly before she goes grunge. It turns out she spent a lot of her childhood doing Dolly impressions, so that momentary affect comes naturally.

"Oh yeah, I was kind of like a bird — I could mimic most sounds I could hear. I was a really annoying child, to say the least," she says with a laugh. "I did a bunch of the golden classics of country — Patsy Cline, Loretta Lynn, Tammy Wynette and Lynn Anderson were really the ones that I connected to the most. Sometimes I'd try to do Reba or Lee Ann Womack, but it was mostly some of the older singers that I really latched onto, and just didn't have any other way to learn how to sing. My way of learning to sing was imitating others, and then as I became an adult, I found my own voice by starting to write."

But after the intro, those trills give way to some rock 'n' roll distortion. "I love Weezer, Cake and Everclear," Hammack says. "But I'll be honest. When I sent all these songs in to Capitol (Nashville) Records, I thought this was going to be the one they were going to push back on and go, 'Ahhh, we don't know about this.' Because when we were producing it out, we kind of just went out on a limb. I knew that it may be edgy for country music. But to me country music is a story, and this is the story of my heart getting broken and me putting it back together — and reprimanding the person that decided to break it. And I thought that that was very much a country topic, but I knew that I should go out on a limb just a little bit sonically, because I didn't know if I'd ever get that chance again.

"And man, it kind of surprised me when the whole team was like, 'We think that may be a single. That may be the next song we release after "Family Tree" so that fans can get to know you.' That was a really exciting moment because I thought it was maybe just going to be buried on the B-side one day."

As she indicated, the story in the song isn't just conjecture.

"I made the mistake of dating someone in the industry," Hammack confesses. "And when something like that doesn't work out, it bleeds into your work life. I've always tried to keep personal and professional lives separate, because my biggest fear is anything getting in the way of my craft. But the funny thing is, the personal side is what fuels that creative side. So this time it was only a few months of dating, and it was one of those things ... The one thing I hate more than burnt coffee is indecisive men. And this one couldn't make up

his mind or make up his heart, and because of it, I felt like I got played with. For a while, I was sweet and sad about it and forgave him. And it was probably a few months after that I started kind of getting angry. ... I had pulled out my guitar and started playing the first, sad part of 'Just Friends,' and then I thought well, this is too sad and way too slow. So I started writing something else and leaning into the anger of it. And that's when I came up with that 'You should have never come over' melody."

Her regret over the relationship is still palpable, as is her glee that she got such a banger out of it. "I was so excited to have a friend in the industry that I could trust and that I felt understood things that I was going through. So when he wanted to be more, I told him that we should just stay friends. Like, 'I'm afraid of losing you in my life.' I was like, odds are we're going to either break up or get married — and a lot of people break up; not many get married. And man, my mama even told me, *'Don't date him.'*

"So it was really fun to be able to get all of these truths out of my life and put them in this song that's sassy and snarky and kind of sad but also bad-ass, at least in my humble opinion. So when we got to the point when (producer) Mikey (Reeves) and I were ready to do harmonies on everything, we bought about \$70-80 worth of Sonic, and we had literally like a pound of tater tots and eight or nine Sonic slushies, along with a lot of tequila and vodka. We invited just a bunch of our friends over at about 9:30 or 10 o'clock, set up microphones, everybody mixed the drinks they wanted to drink, and it's probably six of us dancing around and drinking and screaming into the microphone to get those backgrounds." So maybe the secret really is Sonic in the sonics.

"Just Friends" followed Hammack's well received debut single, "Family Tree," which also had a bit of autobiographical snark but was decidedly on the sweeter side. She's been on the country festival circuit this year, including a recent CMA Festival appearance, where "it was my first official CMA Fest that I wasn't playing at Tootsie's, you know, just working for tips. I was actually on the stages and people — at least a few people! — knew who I was, which was really cool. It was a whirlwind, man. I felt brain-dead afterwards, but it was really enjoyable.

There's plenty more summer festival circuit to go where that came from, interspersed with TV appearances like her recent shot on "The Today Show." "I miss my dog," she says. "Sometimes I miss getting to put everything in drawers and not living out of a suitcase, but it's what I've signed up to do. And [Luke Bryan](#) told me that if I can make it through the first year, I can make it through anything. It's six months in and I'm still smiling."