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Jason Aldean on his new album, return to Las Vegas and 'pretty special' run of country hits

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Jason Aldean breaks down the title of his new album, "9"

Jason Aldean sits down with the Tennessean to talk about his new album, "9" *Mike Fant, Nashville Tennessean*

When Jason Aldean burst into country music with his self-titled debut album in 2005, he wasn't too concerned about the next five, six, seven ... or eight albums that would follow.

He only wanted the first album to do well enough to get his shot at a follow-up.

"I was just hoping I'd get to make album No. 2," Aldean told the USA TODAY Network - Tennessee.

With a trio of top 10 country radio singles on that debut release, Aldean got the green light for a second album. And a third. And a fourth. And, eventually, a 15-year career boasting arena tours, nearly two-dozen No. 1 hits and Artist of the Decade honors at the Academy of Country Music Awards last spring.

Aldean returns this month with his ninth album, "9," a studio effort that again finds the Georgia-raised entertainer teaming with longtime producer Michael Knox. Featuring the lead single "We Back," the album comes accompanied by a Las Vegas residency in December and 2020 headlining arena tour.

"9" drops Friday via Macon Music/Broken Bow Records.

"It's been a great run over the last 15 years or so," Aldean said. "To be able to have nine albums — and not only have nine albums but have them do as well as they've done — and have the career that I've had over the last 15 years has been pretty special.

"I'm just excited we can still make these records and people are still excited to hear them."



'This is the record'

Aldean delivered 15 tracks on each of the five albums released this decade (so far), from 2010's "My Kinda Party" to 2018's "Rearview Town." But on "9," he pushes the track count a step forward, literally, to 16 songs — his longest studio effort to date.

"I remember turning it in and saying, 'I don't care what you guys want to do with it,' " Aldean said. "It can be a double album if you want to do it that way, or whatever. But, you know, this is the record."

No, it won't be a double album. But it makes sense that an Aldean release could push into two-disc territory. He and Knox get pitched about 5,500 songs per record cycle, Knox said. The producer spends roughly 18 months narrowing the pool of tracks; he's already started on the follow-up to "9."

From the field of 5,500, Knox brings Aldean about 40 to 50 tracks that could make an album.

"We're competing with 22- and 24-year-old artists," Knox said. "We can't be average. We gotta be exceptional. The only way to do that is, best song wins.

"The best song wins no matter what."



'Not wanting to fail'

On “9,” Aldean pays homage to the arena-ready country-rock that built his career (“We Back,” “Dirt We Were Raised On,” “Tattoos and Tequila”), embraces pop-leaning production (“Got What I Got,” “Keeping It Small Town”) and country storytelling (“I Don’t Drink Anymore”).

Regarding the genre-bending sound that’s helped define his career, Aldean said he’s “never wanted to paint myself into a corner.”

“I hear songs that I like that I want to record, and if it happens to be a traditional country song, then so be it,” Aldean said. “If it happens to be something that’s a little more pop-oriented, then so be it.”

“I felt like my influences were so scattered out and came from so many different places, and I never wanted to limit myself to what I could go in and cut,” he continued. “It was more about, ‘All right, let’s, let’s keep cutting things and pushing it a little bit to see what we can get away with here and what we can’t.’”

Knox echoed Aldean’s drive to find top-tier tracks.

“The thing that sets us apart from everybody else is our way of not wanting to fail,” Knox said. “The way to do that is to cut the best songs.”

From the album, Aldean points to “Champagne Town” — with a booming hook that hears him singing “I’m here drinkin’ whiskey/ In a champagne town/ Are you tryin’ not to miss me/ Like I’m tryin’ not to miss you now” — as a potential “monster” track. He also notes how a tried-and-true Aldean dust-up like “Cowboy Killer” differs from “I Don’t Drink Anymore,” the turn-of-phrase country cut co-written by Neil Thrasher.

On “I Don’t Drink Anymore,” he sings: “So I don’t drink anymore/ Ever since she left/ I don’t drink anymore/ And I don’t drink any less.”

“It’s two completely different songs, but both really cool,” he said. (“I Don’t Drink Anymore”), it’s just one of those classic country hooks. I thought it was really well written. And, you know, (it’s) a phrase people have probably used a ton before, but you’d never heard a song that put it that way.”

And then there's "Talk About Georgia," a familiar down-tuned nod to Aldean's home state, penned by members of his longtime band.

"They know if they throw Georgia in there, I'm gonna always take a second listen to it," Aldean jested. "They play on stage with me every night, so they know the kind of grooves and stuff that I like."

Return to Vegas

Aldean takes "9" on the road starting next month with a three-night residency at Las Vegas' MGM Park Theater. He plays Dec. 6-8 at the 5,000-person venue.

The shows will be Aldean's first in Las Vegas since a gunman open fired on his 2017 headlining set at the Route 91 Harvest festival, killing 59 people and leaving more than 500 wounded.

In Vegas, Aldean said he plans to welcome Route 91 survivors back to his show by helping them "feel a little more at ease" in a smaller, closed-air venue.

"I still think there's a little bit of a healing process to go through out there with some of those people," he said. "That's part of the reason we want to go back. And partly for us, too ... just mentally, for us to go back and (for) our last show in Vegas not to be Route 91."



Jason Aldean performs for Amazon drivers

Amazon created a pop-up truck stop and concert with Jason Aldean in the parking lot of Nissan Stadium to celebrate National Truck Driver Appreciation Week.

And he'll kick off 2020 with a 21-show arena tour that spans three months — the next step toward another album.

"I kinda never thought we'd make this many records," Aldean said. "So ... here we are."

What's on Jason Aldean's playlist?

Aldean shared a few of the bands that he's been spinning.

Post Malone. "That new album came out. So I've been listening to that a lot."

Plus, the "older stuff": Alabama and George Strait.

And, a few rock throwbacks: Three Doors Down and Fuel.

