

EASTON CORBIN
About to Get Real

Easton Corbin has found the sweet spot. Like few recording artists today, the rural Florida native has landed on the secret formula for effortlessly mixing contemporary country with the traditional sounds on which he was raised. And that musical alchemy is what defines *About to Get Real*, his new album on Mercury Nashville.

Easton's third major-label release, it's a record that is country music for a broad fan base. Like a winning candidate, Easton and his music appeal to young party-minded fans and country purists alike. Radio-ready beats sidle up alongside fiddle and steel guitar, blending seamlessly to create an at once modern and timeless sound. Songs like earnest Top 10 single "Baby Be My Love Song" and the clever take on romance "Guys and Girls" bring country music into the 21st century, not with jarring genre mash-ups, but with the finesse of producer Carson Chamberlain and the maturity of Easton's textured voice.

"There's not a whole lot of traditional country music out there today. But what's great about the country genre is how wide it is—there's room for everybody," says Easton, proud to carry the torch for traditional country, albeit in his own modern way. "I'll always wave that flag, but you still have to grow as an artist, not only in the studio but on the stage entertaining as well."

Easton's growth is apparent on *About to Get Real*, the mark of an artist who was able to capture the lightning-in-a-bottle success of his 2010 self-titled debut and its two Number One singles—"A Little More Country Than That" and "Roll With It"—and channel it into a career. He was the first solo male artist in 17 years to have his first two singles go Number One. If 2012's *All Over the Road* and its Top 10 singles "Lovin' You Is Fun" and the title track showed Easton furthering his reputation as a promising singer, the 12 tracks of *About to Get Real* paint a picture of a likely future Male Vocalist nominee.

"I definitely feel that I've discovered my natural sound with this album. If I try to do anything other than straight-ahead country, then that would just sound forced. And to have any longevity in this business, you really have to know who you are," Easton says.

Just as importantly, he also knows what makes for an Easton Corbin song.

"If it has a steel and fiddle in it, that definitely attracts me," he says with a grin. "But it has to be a song that I relate to in some way. And that's where maturing and growing older comes into play. As you have more life experiences, that comes through in your music and your writing."

Along with working with his producer to find just the right songs, Easton co-wrote three of the tracks on *About to Get Real*: the steel-heavy Seventies ballad "Like a Song," the nostalgic slice-of-life "Diggin' on You," and the surprisingly sweet "Damn Girl," which finds him apologizing to a particularly fine woman for his spontaneous titular exclamation.

"You apologize, but the girl has such an effect on you that you're just floored, and those words just come out," Easton laughs.

Like much of *About to Get Real*, the song, while light on the surface, shows increasing depth upon further listens. Easton is adamant about cutting songs that go beyond the bottle and the bonfire—so much so that he even re-recorded *All Over the Road*'s stunning

ballad "Are You With Me" for this album, convinced it's the type of song country needs right now.

"Country music isn't only about having a good time and drinking and this and that. It's also about serious subject matter," he says. "It touches on each end of that spectrum, from happy-go-lucky to heavy. And that's the basis of country music, that whole human experience."

"Like a Song" best addresses that solemn side. Co-written by Easton, the album's closing track compares a lost love to an unforgettable song and was inspired by events in his own personal life. "It looks at that lonely, gnawing, nagging feeling after a breakup," he says.

Other tracks celebrate the liquid lubrication and nights out with friends that help us shed such feelings. "Yup" is a deceptively simple chronicle of a much-too-late weeknight in a bar spent pursuing the pretty girl across the room, while the honky-tonkin' "Wild Women and Whiskey," co-written by Ronnie Dunn, name-checks Jim Beam and Jack Daniel's — as well as George Strait and Alan Jackson. It's as wonderfully intoxicating as its title and lyrics imply, and another example of Easton finding that musical sweet spot.

"I grew up around my grandparents a lot, and my grandpa's favorite singer was Roy Acuff, and my grandma's favorite singer was Bill Monroe. I also fell in love with George Jones, Merle Haggard and Keith Whitley," he says. "All that definitely shapes who I am musically."

As does Easton's keen ear for today's language. The storyteller is able to take a modern phrase and, with just a change of inflection, twist it on its head, giving it a more classic, refined meaning. He does it in "Damn Girl." He does it in the title track.

Easton laughs, aware that such clever wordplay—the deft merging of the old with the new—is a metaphor for the entire album.

"*About to Get Real* was a great title for this record because I just love what that says. It pretty much explains everything," he says. "When country fans listen to this album, I want them to take away that, even though the music mixes the modern with the classic, it's entirely real. Like the music of my heroes, it's the real deal."

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