

billboard Country Update

BILLBOARD COUNTRY UPDATE

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Morgan Wallen's 'One Thing' Makes Three
>page 4

HARDY, Lainey Wilson Lead ACM Noms
>page 8

Makin' Tracks: Tim McGraw In Good 'Standing'
>page 10

Country Coda: When Lee Brice Put Charts In 'Drive'
>page 12

From Three-Song EPs To 36-Song Albums: Sizing Up The Modern Country Collection

Size matters.

And if country albums were real estate, the property would range from tiny houses to mansions, expanded by a host of duplexes and apartment complexes.

Morgan Wallen's No. 1 album *One Thing at a Time* boasts a hefty 36 tracks, while **Bailey Zimmerman's** top 10 *Leave the Light On* fea-

tures a more traditional nine. **Jason Aldean** dropped two sets, *Macon and Georgia*, that were intended to form a double album, *Macon, Georgia*. **ERNEST** stretched his *Flower Shops* project into the deluxe *Two Dozen Roses* album. **Mitchell Tenpenny** and **Dustin Lynch**

have released EPs offering as few as three songs, and **Alana Springsteen** recently put out a six-song EP, *Twenty Something: Messing It Up*, that represents the first of three volumes that will fill out as an 18-track album. The options are wide enough that official press releases sometimes avoid distinguishing between albums and EPs, instead referring to a new release as an innocuous "collection."

Numerous country executives have confessed to confusion over the developments — how many different versions of an

album/EP/collection are there? And which product level is a particular artist working? It's not clear if music buyers, who may only focus on just a handful of individual artists, are as flummoxed.

"If we're going to be completely honest, they might be a little confused as to 'OK — is this an album? Is it an EP or LP? Is it a digital single bundle?'"

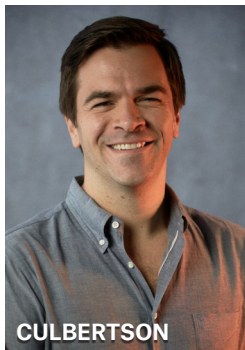
Big Loud senior vp/GM **Patch Culbertson** says. "But really, they're not tripping over themselves too much as to what it truly is. It's just 'Is this great music that's being pushed to me from this artist?'"

That "digital single" reference is behind the range

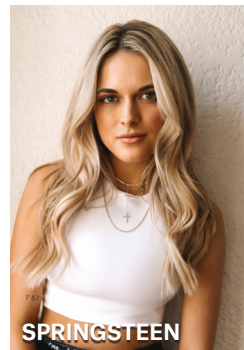
of options. When music was tied to physical formats, vinyl albums could hold only 22-23 minutes of music on one side before the sound quality began to deteriorate. CDs were limited to 79 minutes.

Record labels were free to issue two- or three-disc projects, but manufacturing the extra disc and/or odd-size packaging incurred an extra cost.

In the streaming age, those limitations disappeared. The audience was able to pick specific tracks out of a collection



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for streaming or downloading, and its consumption simultaneously became easier to track. As a result, labels now tailor the size of new album or EP releases to a range of factors, particularly the artists' recording volume and the demand of the fan base.

"It varies by every single artist in every situation," says Sony Music Nashville COO **Ken Robold**. "I'd like to say, 'Yeah, here's the formula,' but there really isn't one anymore. It boils down to where the artist is with the songs and where they are in their fan development stage."

Figuring out the right formula for a particular artist is more art than science, even though there's plenty of data to work with. In the case of Wallen, who landed 35 cuts from his 36-song *One Thing* on the Hot Country Songs chart dated March 18, all the material was consumed by a ready public. But if a label is too aggressive and releases more songs by an artist than the audience desires, some of that music will likely get overlooked.

"If you're Morgan Wallen and the world's on fire, there'll be a lot of people that listen to it," says **Brantley Gilbert**, whose 10-song *So Help Me God* will become a 15-track project with the April 21 release of a deluxe edition. "But depending on where somebody is in their career, a lot of these cats, if you release a 15-, 20-song album, you may have a few die-hards roll all the way through it, but you end up burning a lot of songs."

Those die-hards are the core audience for an artist, and steadily releasing music helps keep them focused, even if a concurrent radio campaign satisfies more passive customers with a lone song from that artist that stays in rotation for over a year.

"People are listening at an alarming rate to a lot of music," ERNEST says. "Giving them a chunk is like giving them a playlist for a month or two, depending on how long they want to listen."

Feeding the demand can be accomplished in more incremental ways than when physical product was dominant. In another era, labels typically released entire albums and picked one single to work to radio, hoping to generate sales for the entire project. Now, a lone track can create interest, and there's no requirement to immediately capitalize with a full album that may not quite connect.

"It's a song-by-song world now," says Robold. "You're just sort of stacking songs on top of one another. That way, an EP, it sort of introduces fans to this artist, not in such a huge dose. But it hopefully just gets more fans to say, 'OK, I like this artist,' and continue to feed that fan base and grow it."

The projects with 30 tracks or more by Wallen and Bryan are high-profile releases that have definite short-term appeal. Under the old model, they carried long-term risks. When vinyl double albums became a late-'70s/early-'80s fad, two-disc projects by the likes of **Willie Nelson** and **Bruce Springsteen** worked like bonus entries in a streak of ongoing successes. On the other hand, double sets by **Elton John**, **The Electric Light Orchestra** and **Dan Fogelberg** were followed by commercial drops one or two albums later, likely signaling that fans had gotten their fill of those particular acts. Thus far, there's no sign that stuffing 30-plus songs into an album has adversely affected Wallen or Bryan.

"It's a fair question: Are you kind of super-saturating the market?" Culbertson asks. "Really the amount of data that we have access to, we can tell if that is happening or if there's kind of a cooling-off effect. Right now, it's not a concern at all."

That may partially be because music fans no longer have to purchase music they don't like. When buyers had to pay for the entire album, it likely damaged the artist's brand if the collection failed to meet expectations. Now the buyer/streamer doesn't end up forking over money for music that doesn't connect, and the consumer therefore doesn't necessarily feel burned. But it often takes longer for artists to get a full investment from the audience.

"It's difficult to break artists, but it always has been," notes Robold. "When people's only option was to buy a CD, if you had something working, it was a pretty good sort of level of comfort that people would be spending the 12 bucks to buy that CD. Now it's literally micro-pennies, and it's building it song by song. That's really, really tough, but when artists connect, there's still nothing like it." ●



ALAN POJNER



ALEXA CAMPBELL



CHARLES SYKES

LOCASH performed on the Bravo reality show *Summer House* during the April 10 episode. From left: LOCASH's Chris Lucas, *Summer House* personalities Ciara Miller and Paige DeSorbo, and LOCASH's Preston Brust.



Dillon Carmichael (center) welcomed KXLY Spokane, Wash., music director Sean "Slim" Widmer (left) and station personality Kevin James when he performed April 7 at Nashville North in Post Falls, Idaho.



HUNTER BERRY

Chris Stapleton's "You Should Probably Leave" took song of the year during the Association for Independent Music Publishers' Nashville Country Awards on April 5 at the Ryman Auditorium. From left: co-writers Chris DuBois and Ashley Gorley, and Spirit Music Nashville vp of A&R/production Derek Wells and senior creative director Kara Jackson.



Chayce Beckham (center) took part in a surprise Tiny Couch interview that KVOO Tulsa, Okla., posted on YouTube on April 10. Questions were submitted by KVOO personalities Tige Rodgers (left) and Daniel Baker.

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ACM AWARDS VOTER GUIDE

E-NEWSLETTER

Billboard will publish the official Academy Of Country Music Awards Voter Guide in mid-April, in partnership with the Academy Of Country Music.

Timed with final ballots, this special digital issue will highlight the artists and emerging talent in contention for the top awards, including Song of the Year, Female and Male Vocalists, Album of the Year, Entertainer of the Year, New Female and Male Artist, and more.

Take this opportunity to remind the industry of your artists' accomplishments over the last year, as ACM members prepare to cast their ballots.

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billboard Country Airplay

AIRPLAY
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ON THE CHARTS **JIM ASKER** jim.asker@billboard.com

Morgan Wallen Scores His Ninth Country Airplay Top 10 With 'One' — And Makes Chart History

Morgan Wallen notches his ninth top 10 on *Billboard's* Country Airplay chart as "One Thing at a Time" (Mercury/Republic/Big Loud) rises to No. 10 on the list dated April 22. In the week ending April 13, the song gained by 9% to 17.3 million impressions, according to Luminate.

"One" is the title track to Wallen's latest LP, which has spent its first five weeks at No. 1 on both Top Country Albums and the all-genre *Billboard* 200. It drew 173,000 equivalent album units in the week ending April 6.

Meanwhile, Wallen is the first artist to simultaneously post three solely billed songs in the top 15 since Country Airplay launched in January 1990. "Thought You Should Know," which ruled for three weeks, ranks at No. 5 (22.8 million, down 4%), and "Last Night" rises 17-13 (16.1 million, up 28%, good for Most Increased Audience honors).

Two other artists have charted three songs at once in the Country Airplay top 15, but with other credited acts:

Tim McGraw, for two weeks in 2016 (thanks to collaborations with **Big & Rich** and **Florida Georgia Line**), and **Kenny Chesney**, for two frames in 2004 (**Jimmy Buffett**, **Uncle Kracker**).

'**ROCK**' **STEADY Bailey Zimmerman's** "Rock and a Hard Place" (Elektra/Warner Music Nashville/WEA) becomes the first song to lead Country Airplay for four weeks in 2023 (34.2 million, down 1%).

The track is Zimmerman's second straight career-opening No. 1 on the chart, after "Fall in Love" led for one week in December. Meanwhile, his new single, "Religiously," ranks at No. 56 (980,000, up 3%). ●



JOHN SHEARER

MOST INCREASED AUDIENCE			
TITLE Imprint/Label	Artist	GAIN (IN MILLIONS)	
LAST NIGHT Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	Morgan Wallen	+3.488	
DANCIN' IN THE COUNTRY Hubbard House/EMI Nashville	Tyler Hubbard	+1.495	
ONE THING AT A TIME Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	Morgan Wallen	+1.420	
GOLD Capitol Nashville	Dierks Bentley	+1.367	
5 LEAF CLOVER River House/Columbia Nashville	Luke Combs	+1.216	
IT MATTERS TO HER Triple Tigers	Scotty McCreery	+1.184	
NEXT THING YOU KNOW MCA Nashville	Jordan Davis	+1.155	
HANDLE ON YOU MCA Nashville	Parker McCollum	+1.080	
TENNESSEE ORANGE Megan Moroney/Columbia/Columbia Nashville	Megan Moroney	+0.993	
LOVE YOU ANYWAY River House/Columbia Nashville	Luke Combs	+0.823	

MOST INCREASED PLAYS			
TITLE Imprint/Label	Artist	GAIN	
LAST NIGHT Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	Morgan Wallen	+698	
NOBODY'S NOBODY EMI Nashville	Brothers Osborne	+685	
DANCIN' IN THE COUNTRY Hubbard House/EMI Nashville	Tyler Hubbard	+534	
NEXT THING YOU KNOW MCA Nashville	Jordan Davis	+459	
GOLD Capitol Nashville	Dierks Bentley	+441	
IT MATTERS TO HER Triple Tigers	Scotty McCreery	+385	
BURY ME IN GEORGIA Zone 4/RCA Nashville	Kane Brown	+337	
ONE THING AT A TIME Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	Morgan Wallen	+336	
HANDLE ON YOU MCA Nashville	Parker McCollum	+335	
5 LEAF CLOVER River House/Columbia Nashville	Luke Combs	+303	

RECURRENENTS			
THIS WEEK	TITLE Imprint/Label	Artist	TOTAL AUD. (IN MILLIONS)
1	SHE HAD ME AT HEADS CAROLINA Warner Music Nashville/WMN	Cole Swindell	18.989
2	THANK GOD Zone 4/RCA Nashville	Kane Brown With Katelyn Brown	18.907
3	YOU DIDN'T BMLG	Brett Young	16.421
4	YOU PROOF Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	Morgan Wallen	14.890
5	WHAT MY WORLD SPINS AROUND MCA Nashville	Jordan Davis	14.830
6	THE KIND OF LOVE WE MAKE River House/Columbia Nashville	Luke Combs	13.471
7	WHAT HE DIDN'T DO Big Machine	Carly Pearce	10.342
8	WHISKEY ON YOU Arista Nashville	Nate Smith	9.546
9	SON OF A SINNER Bailee & Buddy/BMG/Stoney Creek	Jelly Roll	8.988
10	5 FOOT 9 Hubbard House/EMI Nashville	Tyler Hubbard	8.783



TEXAS REGIONAL RADIO REPORT

WEEK ENDING APRIL 13, 2023

THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	WKS ON CHART	TITLE (Label)	ARTIST	TW SPINS	SPINS +/-	THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	WKS ON CHART	TITLE (Label)	ARTIST	TW SPINS	SPINS +/-
1	2	28	DAMN THIS HEART OF MINE (Independent) ★★1 Week at 1★★	William Beckmann	2067	257	11	9	20	FAST CAR (Independent)	Randy Rogers Band	1192	-145
2	3	28	FRIDAY BEERS (Independent)	Drew Fish Band	1740	50	12	13	14	LAKEVIEW GROCERY STORE (Independent)	Jamie Richards	1178	71
3	4	21	LOVING ALL NIGHT (Independent)	Jesse Raub Jr.	1637	63	13	1	23	KEEP UP WITH A COWGIRL (Independent)	David Adam Byrnes	1169	-778
4	5	26	MOUNTAIN SONG (Independent)	Flatland Cavalry	1631	61	14	14	25	LONELY (Independent)	The Stateline Band	1160	92
5	6	22	COWBOY CONSTITUTION (Independent)	Curtis Grimes	1537	54	15	15	23	VELVET CHAINS (Independent)	Ryder Grimes	1141	82
6	7	13	SUNNY AND 72 (Independent)	Kin Faux	1504	66	16	16	12	CORAZON (Independent)	Matt Castillo	1129	78
7	8	10	HONKY TONK ROLL (Independent)	Wade Bowen	1486	107	17	17	17	THINKIN' 'BOUT CHEATIN' (Independent)	Brandi Behlen	903	30
8	10	13	ANYMORE (Bill Grease Rec)	William Clark Green	1387	82	18	22	11	WHAT THE WHISKEY GAVE YOU (Independent)	Cynthia Rausch	841	69
9	11	23	LOCAL PARTICIPATIN' HONKY TONK (Independent)	James Robert Webb	1253	51	19	20	8	WINE, BEER & WHISKEY (Independent)	Cannon Brand	838	44
10	12	22	IT GOES ON (Independent)	Mark Powell	1203	61	20	21	14	GOIN' GOIN' (Independent)	Donice Morace	824	49

Texas Regional Radio Report Top 100 is compiled from weekly online playlist reports from 86 radio stations located in Texas and surrounding states, including reports from specialty shows, internet and satellite radio outlets. Songs are ranked by total plays. For tracking, complete chart methodology and more information, visit www.texasregionalradio.com, or contact Dave Smith at 972-252-8777. Copyright 2023, Texas Regional Radio Report

billboard Country Airplay

AIRPLAY
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THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	WKS ON CHART	TITLE Imprint/Label	Artist	AUDIENCE (IN MILLIONS)		PLAYS		
					THIS WEEK	+/-	THIS WEEK	+/-	RANK
1	1	27	ROCK AND A HARD PLACE Elektra/Warner Music Nashville/WEA ★★ No. 1 (4 weeks) ★★	Bailey Zimmerman	34.174	-0.314	8498	86	1
2	4	38	GOLD Capitol Nashville	Dierks Bentley	25.827	+1.367	6649	441	3
3	3	36	HANDLE ON YOU MCA Nashville	Parker McCollum	25.741	+1.080	6788	335	2
4	6	34	WAIT IN THE TRUCK Broken Bow/Big Loud	HARDY Featuring Lainey Wilson	24.113	+0.638	6374	228	4
5	5	24	THOUGHT YOU SHOULD KNOW Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	Morgan Wallen	22.828	-0.968	4976	-154	7
6	8	37	WILD AS HER Combustion Masters/RCA Nashville	Corey Kent	22.074	+0.268	6020	178	5
7	7	26	GOING, GOING, GONE River House/Columbia Nashville	Luke Combs	21.077	-1.086	4573	-252	10
8	9	20	DANCIN' IN THE COUNTRY Hubbard House/EMI Nashville	Tyler Hubbard	20.821	+1.495	5519	534	6
9	2	48	HEART LIKE A TRUCK Broken Bow	Lainey Wilson	18.923	-7.784	4964	-1737	8
10	11	14	ONE THING AT A TIME Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	Morgan Wallen	17.322	+1.420	4327	336	12
11	10	39	YOU Warner Music Nashville/WAR	Dan + Shay	16.957	+0.261	4751	110	9
12	12	45	HUMAN CoJo/Warner Music Nashville/WMN	Cody Johnson	16.179	+0.483	4233	144	14
13	17	8	LAST NIGHT Mercury/Republic/Big Loud ★★ Most Increased Audience ★★	Morgan Wallen	16.059	+3.488	3958	698	15
14	13	31	IT MATTERS TO HER Triple Tigers	Scotty McCreery	15.646	+1.184	4458	385	11
15	14	21	TENNESSEE ORANGE Megan Moroney/Columbia/Columbia Nashville	Megan Moroney	15.291	+0.993	4250	267	13
16	15	40	BROWN EYES BABY Hit Red/Capitol Nashville	Keith Urban	13.773	-0.088	3791	90	16
17	16	43	WATER UNDER THE BRIDGE MCA Nashville	Sam Hunt	13.356	-0.225	3730	33	17
18	18	15	MEMORY LANE Columbia Nashville	Old Dominion	11.689	+0.698	3516	154	18
19	19	32	HOW IT OUGHTA BE Harpeth 60/BMLG	Shane Profitt	9.304	+0.033	3087	-6	19
20	20	55	GOOD DAY FOR LIVING Quartz Hill	Joe Nichols	7.988	-0.405	2811	-13	20
21	24	9	NEXT THING YOU KNOW MCA Nashville	Jordan Davis	7.914	+1.155	2568	459	22
22	21	33	GIRL IN MINE Stoney Creek	Parmalee	7.597	-0.220	2597	97	21
23	22	24	HATE MY HEART Capitol Nashville	Carrie Underwood	7.336	+0.048	2394	83	24
24	23	50	EVERYTHING SHE AIN'T Songs & Daughters/Pigasus/Big Loud	Hailey Whitters	7.306	+0.524	2442	157	23
25	26	28	YOUR HEART OR MINE Capitol Nashville	Jon Pardi	7.122	+0.448	2315	278	25
26	29	23	YOU, ME, & WHISKEY Valory	Justin Moore & Priscilla Block	6.335	+0.574	2043	91	27
27	28	11	ANGELS DON'T ALWAYS HAVE WINGS Valory	Thomas Rhett	6.135	+0.033	1969	42	28
28	27	41	SOMETHING IN THE ORANGE Belting Bronco/WAR	Zach Bryan	6.030	-0.226	2151	24	26
29	30	13	NEED A FAVOR Bailee & Buddy/BMG/Stoney Creek	Jelly Roll	5.682	+0.291	1890	140	29
30	31	11	DRINKABY Warner Music Nashville/WMN	Cole Swindell	4.963	+0.221	1765	76	30

COUNTRY AIRPLAY CHART LEGEND

RANKINGS

Country Airplay is ranked by total audience impressions for the week ending Sunday based on monitored airplay by Mediabase of 145 stations by Luminate. Audience totals on the chart are derived, in part, using certain Nielsen Audio-copyrighted Persons 12+ audience estimates (under license © 2023, Nielsen Audio). The list of all Country Airplay chart reporters can be viewed in Luminate's online platform.

TIES

On Country Airplay, if two songs are tied in audience, the song with the larger increase in audience is placed first.

BULLETS

Awarded on Country Airplay to titles gaining audience or remaining flat from the previous week. A song will also receive a bullet if its percentage loss in audience does not exceed the percentage of monitored station downtime for the format. Titles that decline in audience but increase in detections will also receive a bullet if the total audience erosion for the week does not exceed 3%.

RECURRENTS

On Country Airplay, descending titles below No. 10 in either audience or detections are moved to recurrent after 20 weeks, provided that they are not still gaining enough audience points to bullet or if they rank below No. 10 and post a third consecutive week of (non-bulleted) audience decline, regardless of total chart weeks. Plus, songs that ascend to a peak between Nos. 1 and 5 will remain on the chart for one additional week even if dropping below No. 10.

HOT SHOT DEBUT

Awarded to the highest-ranking new entry on Country Airplay.

MOST INCREASED AUDIENCE

Most Increased Audience on Country Airplay lists the songs with the greatest week-to-week increases in total audience.

AIRPOWER

Awarded on Country Airplay to titles ranking inside top 20 in plays and audience rankings for the first time, with increases in both plays and audience.

BREAKER

Awarded on Country Airplay to titles achieving airplay (at least one detection) at 60% of reporting stations for the first time.

billboard Country Airplay

AIRPLAY
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THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	WKS ON CHART	TITLE Imprint/Label	Artist	AUDIENCE (IN MILLIONS)		PLAYS		
					THIS WEEK	+/-	THIS WEEK	+/-	RANK
31	32	5	STANDING ROOM ONLY McGraw/Big Machine	Tim McGraw	4.281	+0.062	1724	20	31
32	33	13	LOOKING FOR YOU RCA Nashville	Chris Young	3.922	-0.111	1335	76	33
33	34	30	CAN'T HAVE MINE Curb	Dylan Scott	3.271	+0.093	1490	77	32
34	25	2	FIRES DON'T START THEMSELVES Capitol Nashville	Darius Rucker	3.207	-3.472	759	-682	45
35	42	3	5 LEAF CLOVER River House/Columbia Nashville	Luke Combs	3.182	+1.216	759	303	44
36	37	8	BURY ME IN GEORGIA Zone 4/RCA Nashville	Kane Brown	3.118	+0.775	1031	337	37
37	NEW		NOBODY'S NOBODY EMI Nashville ★★ Hot Shot Debut/ Breaker ★★	Brothers Osborne	2.671	+2.669	686	685	49
38	35	30	EXCUSES Combustion/Wheelhouse	Kolby Cooper	2.518	-0.002	1033	-37	36
39	39	13	GOD GAVE ME A GIRL Triple Tigers	Russell Dickerson	2.279	+0.088	972	81	38
40	38	12	STARS LIKE CONFETTI Broken Bow	Dustin Lynch	2.250	+0.006	876	60	41
41	40	19	WE GOT HISTORY Riser House/Columbia Nashville	Mitchell Tenpenny	2.237	+0.109	872	32	42
42	41	15	IF YOU GO DOWN (I'M GOING DOWNTOO) Black River	Kelsea Ballerini	2.099	+0.079	1119	54	34
43	36	5	LIGHT ON IN THE KITCHEN Warner Music Nashville/WMN	Ashley McBryde	1.991	-0.411	709	48	48
44	53	3	LOVE YOU ANYWAY River House/Columbia Nashville	Luke Combs	1.976	+0.823	327	124	-
45	44	23	HEAVEN BY THEN Valory Brantley Gilbert And Blake Shelton Featuring Vince Gill	1.933	+0.024	918	11	39	
46	43	33	WORTH A SHOT RCA/Columbia Nashville Elle King Featuring Dierks Bentley	1.882	-0.068	1037	-15	35	
47	47	11	FEARLESS (THE ECHO) Big Machine	Jackson Dean	1.723	+0.028	853	26	43
48	45	22	IF HE WANTED TO HE WOULD EMI Nashville	Kylie Morgan	1.682	-0.032	736	-25	47
49	48	20	MIND ON YOU RECORDS Nashville	George Birge	1.589	-0.105	682	-23	50
50	46	8	ALL I NEED IS YOU BMLG	Chris Janson	1.562	-0.138	879	11	40
51	49	10	23 19/BMG/Wheelhouse	Chayce Beckham	1.409	-0.067	600	-1	51
52	51	28	SOUNDS LIKE SOMETHING I'D DO Stoney Creek	Drake Milligan	1.328	-0.074	740	-2	46
53	50	25	OVER FOR YOU Warner Music Nashville/WEA	Morgan Evans	1.240	-0.189	514	-30	54
54	NEW		CREEK WILL RISE Valory	Conner Smith	1.076	+0.449	554	229	52
55	52	15	UP THERE DOWN HERE Big Loud	Jake Owen	1.045	-0.220	493	-60	55
56	54	3	RELIGIOUSLY Elektra/Warner Music Nashville/WEA	Bailey Zimmerman	0.980	+0.030	217	-1	-
57	59	2	DRIVE YOU OUT OF MY MIND Interscope/MCA Nashville ★★ Breaker ★★	Kassi Ashton	0.930	+0.249	457	77	56
58	55	5	GIVING UP ON THAT Mercury Nashville	Dalton Dover	0.883	-0.011	526	5	53
59	56	14	FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH Bad Realm/Atlantic	BRELAND	0.836	+0.043	395	-10	58
60	58	3	MARRY THAT GIRL Stone Country	Easton Corbin	0.736	+0.051	339	-1	60



UNITED24 ambassador Brad Paisley (right) met Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on April 12 in Kyiv, Ukraine, where he performed "Same Here" in St. Michael's Square.



Martina McBride was among the celebrities who attended the T.J. Martell Foundation's 21st annual Nashville's Best Cellars Dinner on April 10 at the Loews Vanderbilt. From left: Blackbird Studios co-owner John McBride, Martell Foundation chairman John Esposito, Martina McBride, Galante Entertainment CEO Joe Galante and former Medtronic senior strategic solutions manager Wendy Buck.

ALAN POJZNER



ON SALE: MAY. 13, 2023

40 UNDER 40

On May 13th, *Billboard* will publish its annual 40 Under 40 Issue, celebrating the next generation of leaders in the music industry. This issue will profile 40 power players who are making their mark in music, touring and live entertainment.

These progressive young leaders' innovation and creativity will continue to create excitement in the music business.

Advertise in this issue to reach the music industry's most influential and affluent - from the young disrupters to the seasoned veterans - who paved the way.

ON SALE: 5/13
Issue Close: 5/2
Materials Due: 5/4

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NASHVILLE & NATIONAL TOM ROLAND



CATHARINE POWELL

Officials with the Ryman Auditorium unveiled a statue of the late Charley Pride on April 12 on the Nashville venue’s Icon Walk. Providing their approval: widow Rozene Pride and son Dion Pride.

HARDY, WILSON LEAD IN ACMs

The wait is over for final nominations in the 58th annual Academy of Country Music Awards. But now the waiting begins to see who wins, particularly for “wait in the truck” collaborators **HARDY** and **Lainey Wilson**, who topped the competition when the ballot was revealed April 13.

HARDY snared seven nominations, while Wilson claimed six. They potentially share trophies in three categories, as “wait in the truck” found a lane among the song, visual media and music event of the year contenders.

As a songwriter and producer on “wait,” **HARDY** received double nominations for the song and music event entries. He picked up an additional song of the year nod as a co-writer of **Morgan Wallen**’s “Sand in My Boots,” and he nabbed a spot among the artist-songwriter of the year nominees.

Wilson earned nominations for each of her three “wait” appearances, and is also among the finalists for female artist, while “Heart Like a Truck” garnered single of the year consideration, and *Bell Bottom Country* nabbed an album of the year slot.

Miranda Lambert amassed five nominations, including her 17th for female artist, edging her past 16-time nominee **Reba McEntire** for the most appearances in that category.

Kane Brown, **Luke Combs** and **Cole Swindell** also claimed five nominations each. Brown shares three of his entries with wife **Katelyn Brown** for their duet “Thank God,” while Swindell’s are all in conjunction with “She Had Me at Heads Carolina.” **Jo Dee Messina**’s appearance on a remix of Swindell’s single placed her in the music event category, marking the first time in 22 years that she has made the ACM list.

Wallen and **Chris Stapleton** secured four nominations apiece, while **Cody Johnson** notched three.

Voting for the awards is open from April 17 through April 24 in advance of the May 11 ceremony at The Ford Center at the Star in Frisco, Texas. **Dolly Parton** and **Garth Brooks** will host the event, which Prime Video is livestreaming for the second straight year.

Go [here](#) for the full list of finalists.

RADIO & RECORDS®

Big Loud/Songs & Daughters signed singer-songwriter **Lauren Watkins** to a recording deal. A seven-song EP, produced by **Joey Moi** (**Morgan Wallen**, **HARDY**) will be released April 21 ... **Jon Kurland** started as iHeartMedia executive vp of business affairs/chief entertainment counsel. He was previously Amazon Global Media & Entertainment senior corporate counsel ... Neuhoff Communications promoted **Michele Mitchell** to vp of content and digital strategy from head of digital operations and strategy. The 20-station chain fields three country signals: **WDZQ** Decatur, Ill.; **WFMB** Springfield, Ill.; and **WKOX** Lafayette, Ind. ... Urban One agreed to acquire Cox Media Group’s Houston cluster, a four-station group that includes country **KKBQ** and classic country **KTHH** ... Alpha/Portland, Ore., promoted **Geoff**

Moyer to co-director of sales from general sales manager, RadioInk.com reported. The position covers seven stations, including country **KUPL**... **WMIL** Milwaukee released morning co-host **Shaun “Ridder” Ridderbush**, according to RadioInsight.com. The daypart still features **Scott Dolphin** and **Shannen Oesterreich** ... **WLFP** Memphis will move to 99.7 FM from 94.1, replacing adult contemporary **WMC-FM**, RadioInsight.com reported. The shift ups the station’s power from 50 kilowatts to 300,000 watts. WMC morning co-host **Erin Austin** will segue to WLFP middays ... Country Radio Broadcasters is accepting applications for the Country Radio Seminar agenda committee [here](#) by April 19 ... CRB will host a CRS360 webinar, “The Lifecycle of a Song: Why Can’t Radio and Records Find a Happy Medium?,” at 1 p.m. CT on April 20. Sign up [here](#).

‘ROUND THE ROW

Granger Smith announced April 11 that he will leave the music industry following his 2023 concert tour to transition into the ministry. The last date on the schedule is currently Aug. 26. In tandem with the shift, W Publishing Group will issue his book *Like a River: Finding the Faith and Strength to Move Forward After Loss and Heartache* on Aug. 1 ... Nashville-based Outback Presents promoted **David Lower** to booking manager from head of production. Reach him [here](#) ... Deluge Music re-signed songwriter **Mason Thornley** to a publishing agreement ... **Luke Combs** and Opry Entertainment Group announced plans to partner on a renovation of the Wildhorse Saloon in downtown Nashville. Branded around his single “Hurricane,” the venue is expected to debut in summer 2024 ... **Tim McGraw** launched Down Home, a Nashville-based entertainment, media and marketing company associated with his management firm, EM.Co, and social content company Shareability. Shareability founder **Tim Staples** is Down Home co-founder/CEO, and EM.Co vp **Brian Kaplan** will act as chief strategy officer. Down Home established a partnership with Santa Monica, Calif.-based Skydance (*Star Trek Beyond*, *Mission: Impossible — Fallout*) ... Syndicated TV show *The Song* is making episodes available for on-demand streaming through a new partnership with Hitkor.com ... The National Recording Registry included **John Denver**’s “Take Me Home, Country Roads,” **Bobbie Gentry**’s “Ode to Billie Joe” and **Jimmy Buffett**’s “Margaritaville” among the 25 entries for 2023, announced April 12 ... The Grand Ole Opry announced eight members for its NextStage class of 2023: **Ashley Cooke**, **Jackson Dean**, **ERNEST**, **Chapel Hart**, **Corey Kent**, **Kameron Marlowe**, **Megan Moroney** and **Ian Munsick** ... Nashville’s Pet Community Center opened a new veterinary clinic, the Phran Galante Center for Pet Wellness, on April 7. The facility is named after a late former member of the Nashville music community ... The Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum placed 13 songs written by students through the museum’s Words & Music program onto its [website](#). ●



Matt Stell (left) visited with **KTTS** Springfield, Mo., personality **Rick Moore** when he performed April 7 at *Midnight Rodeo*.



ALEXA CAMPBELL

Carly Pearce performed “Blue Moon of Kentucky” with **Ricky Skaggs** on April 11 when she made her 100th Grand Ole Opry appearance.

billboard



2023

KANSAS 50TH ANNIVERSARY

With a legendary career spanning five decades, KANSAS has firmly established itself as one of America's iconic classic rock bands. This "garage band" from Topeka released their debut album in 1974 after being discovered by Wally Gold, who worked for Don Kirshner, and have gone on to sell more than 30 million albums worldwide.

Composing a catalogue that includes sixteen studio albums and five live albums, KANSAS has produced eight gold albums, three sextuple-Platinum albums (Leftoverture, Point of Know Return, Best of KANSAS), one platinum live album (Two for the Show), one quadruple-Platinum single 'Carry On Wayward Son,' and another triple-Platinum single 'Dust in the Wind.'

KANSAS appeared on the Billboard charts for over 200 weeks throughout the '70's and '80's and played to sold-out arenas and stadiums throughout North America, Europe and Japan.

'Carry On Wayward Son' continues to be one of the top five most played songs on classic rock radio, and 'Dust In the Wind' has been played on the radio more than three million times!

Please join Billboard as we celebrate the 50 years of Kansas' success as one of the most compelling acts in the history of American rock.

CONTACTS

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International: Ryan O'Donnell | rodonnell@pmc.com

ISSUE DATE 5/13 | AD CLOSE 5/2 | MATERIALS DUE 5/4

MAKIN' TRACKS TOM ROLAND tom.roland@billboard.com

A Life Well Lived Finds Good 'Standing' In Tim McGraw's Timely New Single

Gauged solely by its title, "Standing Room Only," it's understandable if listeners expect **Tim McGraw's** latest single to be a song that celebrates big concert moments or triumphant sports events.

In fact, it's a crucial lesson about acting with integrity for the benefit of friends, family and the community in general. The question McGraw asks about life in the bridge of "Live Like You Were Dying" — "What did you do with it?" — is a query that gets revisited, at least in spirit, in "Standing Room Only."

"To me, it's like the last point on a triangle with 'Humble and Kind' and 'Live Like You Were Dying,'" he explains. "They all, to me, have this big, universal feel. You know, I'm just the vessel. They're not my songs. I just feel lucky to be in the same universe with these songs and to be able to sing them every night. It's almost like they belong to everybody."

The "Standing Room Only" copyright actually belongs to songwriters **Tommy Cecil** ("Home Alone Tonight," "You Were Jack [I Was Diane]"), **Craig Wiseman** ("Live Like You Were Dying," "The Good Stuff") and **Patrick Murphy**, a singer-songwriter-pianist signed to Warner Music Nashville. They wrote it over Zoom in April 2020, roughly a month into the coronavirus pandemic, when the outbreak and online writing were both still new to Music Row composers.

Cecil presented the "Standing Room Only" title with the twist already built in.

"It was inspired by something in a movie, and I don't remember what [movie] it was," says Cecil. "But the thought I wrote down was, 'When he dies, at his funeral, everybody will be standing. It'll be so packed that there will only be standing room.'"

The idea connected immediately. Wiseman blurted out the first two lines of the chorus: "I wanna live a life, live a life/Like a dollar and the clock on the wall don't own me." It launched them into a song about prioritizing character over wealth, about spreading hope instead of hoarding power.

"It's just a song about treating everybody, in my opinion, the way that you want to be treated," Murphy suggests. "Be kind to every single person that you come into contact with each day because you have no idea what that person's going through."

They worked in a non-sequential order, fitting key phrases into the chorus or into the verses as the ideas surfaced. The opening lines focused on misplaced anger and the loss of old friendships, and Wiseman diverted the narrative in the last half of that verse down a symbolic road, with the protagonist chasing a pot of gold in a downpour. He shakes his fist at the sky, only to catch a life-changing thunderbolt in the midst of the storm. It's a metaphor that Wiseman wasn't entirely certain his co-writers would accept.

"Most songs, I just try to say, 'F-150,' you know, and get down to the chorus," he says. "It was so fun to be able to actually write and use the metaphor."

That thunderbolt represents a light-bulb moment when the singer reframes his life, letting go of temporary, short-term distractions and emphasizing meaningful, long-term results.

"You have to get right in the middle of a wrong decision to realize what the right decision is," says Wiseman.

As the writing progressed on "Standing Room Only," Wiseman rolled out one more key phrase, forming the song's bridge: "Stop judging my life by my possessions/Start thinking 'bout how many headlights will be in my procession." His co-writers were stunned.

"I looked at Craig, and I said, 'Craig, where did that come from?'" Cecil remembers. "Craig goes, 'Well, I've been trying to write toward that the whole song.'"

Counting the number of headlights following the hearse is not the literal point, says Wiseman. It's about making a difference among the lives that one does touch.

"You could actually fall into the same trap you did chasing money and stuff if [the attendance] was your only thing," he observes.

When the song was completed, Wiseman recorded a guitar/vocal and sent it to Cecil. He used it as a template for a full demo with Murphy singing lead over a piano-based production loaded with ethereal elements that highlighted the spiritual quality of the message.

Since Murphy was the participating artist, he had been the original target for "Standing Room Only," but he was only 22 at the time and wasn't entirely certain if he had enough life experience to convince an audience that he fully understood it.

"Toward the end, they had asked me, 'Hey, do you think this is a song for you? Should we pitch it?'" recalls Murphy. "I was very appreciative for them even asking, and so I was like, 'You know, let's just see where the song could go. Maybe I will cut it. But if it ends up in a different artist's hands that we love, why not?'"

The song languished for months with little feedback, but Cecil — who repeatedly played the demo — refused to let it go. He ultimately tweaked the percussion in it, then resent it to Wiseman for an evaluation. Within a half hour, Wiseman responded: "Hey, man, it's on hold for McGraw."

McGraw had just released his *Here on Earth* album and wouldn't be recording for a while, but "Standing Room Only" was special. In fact, when the sessions started a year or more later in a high-ceiling recording studio owned by drummer **Shannon Forrest**, McGraw and co-producer **Byron Gallimore** (**Jo Dee Messina**, **Sugarland**) waited until they had cut at least 15 other songs and fully knocked off the pandemic rust before they tackled "Standing Room."

McGraw tempered the ethereal ambience from the demo and grounded his recording with more standard instruments, highlighting the communal, neighborly tone of the story.

"I wanted it to be more of a band-sounding song, and I wanted the earthiness in it," McGraw says. "I wanted the human aspect in the record because of everything that's going on in the world and because of what this song says. I wanted my vocal to be really out front so you really hear the story."

He caught about 80% of the final vocal during the tracking session, and it finds him sonically mirroring the song's intent. The back half of the chorus is pitched near the top of his natural range, and by challenging himself in the performance, his art reflects the message.

"You're not taking the easy way out," he says. "The song challenges everyone to be the best of themselves that they can be and challenges me to be the best of myself I can be. Therefore, the way you sing it, the way you approach it, should challenge yourself to be the best that you can be."

Big Machine released "Standing Room Only" to country radio on March 9 via PlayMPE. It reaches No. 31 in its fifth week on Country Airplay, making a mark with an affirmation when many communities — Nashville, in particular — need to hear it.

"The song just came along at a time when I thought it was important for something to say, and I love having those kinds of songs," McGraw notes. "To be an artist that songwriters will bring those kinds of songs to, and to be able to record a song like that and have people actually listen to it, that doesn't escape me. And I'm grateful." ●



billboard Country Airplay Index

TITLE Publishing-Licensing Org. (Songwriter) Chart Position

23 Chayce Beckham Publishing Designee, BMI (C. Beckham) 51

5 LEAF CLOVER Songs Of Universal, Inc., BMI/Boatload Lyrics, BMI/WC Music Corp., ASCAP/Damn Country Music Publishing, ASCAP/Sony Cross Keys Publishing, ASCAP/Family Farm Songs, BMI (L.Combs, J.L.Alexander, C.McGill) 35

A

ALL I NEED IS YOU Anthem Red Vinyl Music, BMI/Buckkilla Music, BMI/Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp., BMI/Murphy, The Wolf Music, BMI/Mandy's Favorite Songs, BMI/Round Hill Songs II, ASCAP/Sony Cross Keys Publishing, ASCAP/Master Of My Domain Music, ASCAP/WC Music Corp., ASCAP/Mitchell Marlow Music, ASCAP/KJM Music Publishing, ASCAP/Five Miles West Songs, BMI (C.Janson, B.Clawson, A.G.Gorley, Mitch Oglesby) 50

ANGELS DON'T ALWAYS HAVE WINGS Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp., BMI/Be A Light Publishing, BMI/Music Of Big Family, BMI/Dragon Publishing, BMI/MVZ Music, BMI/Music Of MAM, BMI/Sony Tree Publishing, BMI (Thomas Rhett, J.C.Bunetta, J.C.Dimmsdale, J.Thompson) 27

B

BROWN EYES BABY WC Music Corp., ASCAP/Music Of The Corn, ASCAP/Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp., BMI/Speakers Go Boom Music, BMI/Quivira Road Songs, BMI/Sony Tree Publishing, BMI/MVZ Music, BMI/Red Bandana Publishing, BMI/Big Loud Mountain, BMI/Bo Wallace Publishing, BMI/Wild Wild Music, ASCAP (W.L.Bundy, R.Clawson, J.Thompson, M.C.Wallen) 16

BURY ME IN GEORGIA Sony Tree Publishing, BMI/Songs Of Family Publishing, BMI/Sony Timber Publishing, SESAC/Chorus 2 Music, SESAC/Blunts And Bonfires Music, SESAC/Kobalt Music Publishing America, SESAC/McGinnIntellectual Property, SESAC/True Blue Works, SESAC/Sony Accnt, ASCAP/Pile Of Schmidt Songs, ASCAP/The Money Tree Vibez, ASCAP (K.Brown, J.Hoge, M.McGinn, J.M.Schmidt) 36

C

CAN'T HAVE MINE Curb Songs, ASCAP/Curb Congregation Songs, SESAC/Good Vibes, Good Times Music, SESAC/Songs Of Universal, Inc., BMI/EpochEntertainment/Farm, BMI/Songs Of Riser House, BMI/Sony Countryside, BMI (D.Scott, M.Alderman, J.Melton, D.Wilson) 33

CREEK WILL RISE Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp., BMI/Horns, Team Harmonies, BMI/South Lick Creek Songs, BMI/Songs Of Miller Crow, BMI/Times By Triangles/Baker, BMI/Concord Tunes, SESAC/Card Tables Music, SESAC/Hang Your Hat Hits, SESAC/Songs Of Universal, Inc., BMI/Family Farm Songs, BMI (C.McGill, C.Smith, C.La Corte, P.Weiling) 54

D

DANCIN' IN THE COUNTRY T Tree Music, BMI/Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp., BMI/EMI Blackwood Music Inc., BMI/Iris In The Sky With Diamonds, BMI/Sony Timber Publishing, SESAC/Cuts Like A Nite Music, SESAC/Songs Of Universal, Inc., BMI/MAROMA Music, BMI (T.R.Hubbard, R.Copperman, J.M.Nite, K.Urban) 8

DRINKABY Nontypical Music, ASCAP/Pile Of Schmidt Songs, ASCAP/Rednecker Music, BMI/Relative Music Group, BMI/Sony Accnt, ASCAP/Sony Tree Publishing, BMI/The Money Tree Vibez, ASCAP/WC Music Corp., ASCAP/Who Wants To Buy My Publishing, ASCAP (H. Phelps, J.Pardi, J.M.Schmidt, M.W.Hardy) 30

DRIVE YOU OUT OF MY MIND Wolf Shirt Publishing, BMI/Creative Pulse Music, BMI/Todd Sherman Clark, SOCAN (K.Ashton, T.P.Wood, T.S.Clark) 57

E

EVERYTHING SHE AIN'T WC Music Corp., ASCAP/Pigasus, ASCAP/Cockeyed Hat Music, BMI/Harolds Purple Heart Music, BMI/Little Louder Songs, BMI/Songs Of Kobalt Music Publishing America, Inc., BMI (H.Whitters, B.Simpson, R.Lyndel) 24

EXCUSES Songs Of Combustion Five, BMI/McGusta Music, ASCAP/Hell Write Songs, BMI/Sony Tree Publishing, BMI/940 Songs, BMI (K.Cooper, Brett Tyler, J.Walker) 38

F

FEARLESS (THE ECHO) Little Louder Songs, BMI/Emiloon Songs, BMI/Songs Of Kobalt Music Publishing America, Inc., BMI (J.Dean, C.L.Dick, J.S.Sherwood) 47

FIRES DON'T START THEMSELVES

Sony Cross Keys Publishing, ASCAP/Songs By Slip, ASCAP/Sony Tree Publishing, BMI/Southern Boy Songs Worldwide, BMI/Jacob Rice Publishing, BMI/Sony Countryside, BMI (B.Hayslip, J.Rice, Disbell) 34

FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH Pen Point Guard Music, BMI/Reservoir 416, BMI/Big Loud Mountain, BMI/Round Hill Works, BMI/Mustaine Music, BMI/Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp., BMI/Hold On Can I Get A Number 1 Music, BMI/Songs Of Universal, Inc., BMI/Jimmy Sad Publishing, BMI/Long And Curly Entertainment, BMI (D.G.Breland, R.H.Black, J.R.Durrett, G.James) 59

G

GIRL IN MINE 33 Creative, BMI/Reservoir 416, BMI/Sony Countryside, BMI/M.Thomas Music, BMI/Sony Cross Keys Publishing, ASCAP/Master Of My Domain Music, ASCAP/Poppy's Picks, ASCAP/Concord copyrights, BMI/These Are Pulse Songs, BMI/Creative Pulse Music, BMI/Track & Feels Publishing, SESAC/W.C.M. Music Corp., SESAC/Tape Room Publishing, SESAC/Songs By Slip Joint, BMI (D.Fanning, M.Thomas, A.G.Gorley, T.P.Wood, C.Brown) 22

GIVING UP ON THAT Sony Tree Publishing, BMI/DropTime Music, BMI/Whiskey Dixie Music Publishing, BMI/Universal Music Corp., ASCAP/Brummy Cooper Otis Music, ASCAP (D.Dover, A.Craig, J.Pierce) 58

GOD GAVE ME A GIRL Big Hits N Gravy, BMI/Sony Cross Keys Publishing, ASCAP/Michael Scott Paper Company Publishing Company, ASCAP/Songs Of Universal, Inc., BMI/Family Farm Songs, BMI/Round Hill Songs III, ASCAP/Foxwood Entertainment Group Music Division, ASCAP/Big Blue Nation Music, ASCAP (R. Dickerson, A.G.Gorley, C.McGill, Z.Crowell) 39

GOING, GOING, GONE Songs Of Universal, Inc., BMI/Bootleg Lyrics, BMI/Keep Choppin Publishing, BMI/Exit 183 Songs, BMI/Sony Tree Publishing, BMI/Young Man Publishing, BMI (L.Combs, R.Fulcher, J.McNair) 7

GOLD EMI Blackwood Music Inc., BMI/Iris In The Sky With Diamonds, BMI/Emiloon Songs, BMI/Little Louder Songs, BMI/Songs Of Kobalt Music Publishing America, Inc., BMI/Sony Cross Keys Publishing, ASCAP/Caleb's College Fund, ASCAP/DudeTunes, ASCAP/Kobalt Songs Music Publishing LLC, ASCAP (R.Copperman, L.C.Dick, A.G.Gorley, D.Bentley) 2

GOOD DAY FOR LIVING Spirit Two Nashville, ASCAP/Spirit Vault Songs, ASCAP/VesVesYal, BMI/Mason Gannon Music, BMI/Songs Of Kobalt Music Publishing America, Inc., BMI/Revelry Music, BMI (D.Cohen, B.Hamrick, N.Mason) 20

H

HANDLE ON YOU Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp., BMI/Parkmac Publishing, BMI/Spirit Nashville One Crescendo, BMI/Tunes Of Fluid, BMI/Rust And Chrome Music, BMI (P.McCollum, M.Criswell) 3

HATE MY HEART Carrie-Okie Music, BMI/Spirit Two Nashville, ASCAP/4TheKiaz Music, ASCAP/Spirit Vault Songs, ASCAP/Sony Tree Publishing, BMI/Relative Music Group, BMI/Rednecker Music, BMI/Concord Sounds, ASCAP/410 Music, ASCAP (C.Underwood, D.A.Garcia, M.W.Hardy, H.Lindsey) 23

HEART LIKE A TRUCK Sony Accnt, ASCAP/Sony Countryside, BMI/Songs Of Riser House, BMI/Songs Of Wild Cat Well Music, BMI (L.Wilson, D.Wilson, T.Anderson) 9

HEAVEN BY THEN Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp., BMI/Indiana Angel Music, BMI/Don't Be A Gypsy, BMI/Sullivan's Guns Music, BMI/TDP Publishing, BMI/Hits From The Tape Room, BMI/Sony Tree Publishing, BMI/Relative Music Group, BMI/Rednecker Music, BMI/Reservoir 416, BMI/Wake And Jake Music, BMI/Big Dogger Songs, BMI/WC Music Corp., ASCAP/Nontypical Music, ASCAP/Who Wants To Buy My Publishing, ASCAP (G.Gilbert, B.Berryhill, M.W.Hardy, J.Mitchell, R.Montana, H.Phelps, T.Philips) 45

HOW IT OUGHTA BE Anthem Music Publishing I, BMI/Old Tom Music Publishing, BMI/Tennessee Backwoods Music, BMI/Fraser Made Music, BMI/WC Music Corp., ASCAP/KJM Music Publishing, ASCAP/Mitchell Marlow Music, ASCAP (S.Prontt, D.Frasier, Mitch Oglesby) 19

HUMAN BMG Gold Songs, ASCAP/Heytone Music, ASCAP/Sne And I, LLC, BMI/Songs Of Mighty Isis Music, BMI/It's Killer Music, BMI/Songs Of Kobalt Music Publishing America, Inc., BMI (T.Lane, T.Meadows) 12

I

IF HE WANTED TO HE WOULD Songs Of Smack Blue, BMI/Songs Of Kobalt Music Publishing America, Inc., BMI/Bad Angel Entertainment, BMI/Ben There Wrote That Publishing, BMI/Artist 101 Publishing Group, BMI/Hits From The Tape Room, BMI/Round Hill Compositions, BMI (K.Morgan, Z.Holub, B.J.Johnson) 48

IF YOU GO DOWN (I'M GOING DOWN TOO)

Sony Cross Keys Publishing, ASCAP/Feel Your Way Through Publishing, ASCAP/Music Of Big Family, BMI/Dragon Bunny Music, BMI/Smackwood Music, GMR/Tempo Investments-Smack Hits, GMR/Warner Geo Met Ric Music, GMR (K.Ballerini, J.C.Bunetta, S.McAnally) 42

IT MATTERS TO HER Songs Of Universal, Inc., BMI/Dagum Music, BMI/Songs With Words That Rhyrne With Truck, BMI/Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp., BMI/Little Brocephus Music, BMI (S.C.McCreery, L.T.Miller, R.Akins) 14

L

LAST NIGHT Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp., BMI/Big Loud Mountain, BMI/Sony Cross Keys Publishing, ASCAP/Master Of My Domain Music, ASCAP/Poppy's Picks, ASCAP/Rap Kinopm Music, ASCAP/Presentation Music, ASCAP/Sony Tree Publishing, BMI (J.Bryon, A.G.Gorley, J.A.Hindlin, Charlie Handsome) 15

LIGHT ON IN THE KITCHEN Canned Biscuit Songs, BMI/Damn Country Music Publishing, ASCAP/Songs Of Harpeth Valley, BMI/Sony Cross Keys Publishing, ASCAP/Sony Tree Publishing, BMI/Trittle Rae Creative Inc, BMI/WC Music Corp., ASCAP/Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp., BMI (A.McBryde, C.R.Harrington, J.L.Alexander) 43

LOOKING FOR YOU Sony Tree Publishing, BMI/Sir Reginald The Fifth, BMI/Sony Cross Keys Publishing, ASCAP/Monsters Hate Puppies Publishing, ASCAP (Young Man Publishing, BMI/WeisDwi, ASCAP (C.Young, C.DeStefano, J.McNair, E.L.Weisband) 32

LOVE YOU ANYWAY Songs Of Universal, Inc., BMI/Bootleg Lyrics, BMI/Keep Choppin Publishing, BMI/Exit 183 Songs, BMI/Sony Countryside, BMI (L.Combs, R.Fulcher, D.Isbell) 44

M

MARRY THAT GIRL Lottievillie Music, BMI/Sony Tree Publishing, BMI/Songs Of Universal, Inc., BMI/No Man Can Eat 50 Eggs Music, BMI/Cowboy Revival Music, BMI/Round Hill Works, BMI/Cactus Town Music, BMI (E.Corbin, A.Craig, S.Minor, W.Kirby) 60

MEMORY LANE WC Music Corp., ASCAP/Bird And Bean Music, ASCAP/Twelv6 Dogwood, ASCAP/Trevor's Advocate Publishing, ASCAP/Universal Music Corp., ASCAP/Turs And Chorus, ASCAP/Big Music Machine, BMI/Big Ass Pile Of Dimes Music, BMI (M.Ramsey, T.Rosen, B.F.Tursi, J.Dillon) 18

MIND ON YOU Whiskey Side, ASCAP/Peertunes, Ltd., SESAC/Marlow Sinclair Songs, SESAC/MTNoize, SESAC/Average ZIS Music Publishing, BMI (G.Birge, J.Boyer, M.Tyler, Colt Ford) 49

N

NEED A FAVOR Austin Nivarel Publishing, ASCAP/BMG Gold Songs, ASCAP/Sony Cross Keys Publishing, ASCAP/Rob Ragosta Publishing Designee, BMI/Balle'e's Ballads, BMI/BMG Platinum Songs US, BMI (A.A.Nivarel, J.Ragosta, R.Ragosta, J.B.DeFord) 29

NEXT THING YOU KNOW Songs Of Universal, Inc., BMI/Hold On Can I Get A Number 1 Music, BMI/Sony Accnt, ASCAP/Sony Cross Keys Publishing, ASCAP/Family Farm Songs, BMI/Anthem Music Publishing I, ASCAP/Jordan Davis Music, ASCAP (G.James, J. Osborne, C.McGill, J.Davis) 21

NOBODY'S NOBODY Trampy McCauley, ASCAP/All The Kings Pens, ASCAP/WC Music Corp., ASCAP/SonsStein Publishing, ASCAP/Sims Da Via Music, ASCAP/Concord copyrights, BMI/Marvel Madness Music, BMI (J.Osborne, T.J. Osborne, M.A.Elizondo, Jr., K.Marvel) 37

O

ONE THING AT A TIME Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp., BMI/Big Loud Mountain, BMI/Bo Wallace Publishing, BMI/Sony Cross Keys Publishing, ASCAP/Michael Scott Paper Company Publishing Company, ASCAP/Songs Of Universal, Inc., BMI/Ern Dog Music, BMI/Sony Songs LLC, BMI (M.C.Wallen, A.G.Gorley, E.K.Smith, Charlie Handsome) 10

OVER FOR YOU Artist Publishing Group West, ASCAP/LiveMadLove, ASCAP/SongsByME, BMI/Sony Ballad, BMI/Tim Sommers Music, BMI/Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp., BMI (G.Warburton, M.E.Love, M.Evans, T.Sommers) 53

R

RELIGIOUSLY Alexander Palmer Songs, BMI/Bailey Zimmerman Publishing, BMI/Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp., BMI/Cuts Of Reach Music, ASCAP/1Fart Creations, BMI/Esse Jaye Music, ASCAP/Mighty Oak Music Co., BMI/These Are Pulse Songs, BMI/Concord copyrights, BMI (A.Palmer, A.R.Shawn, B.Zimmerman, F.Romano, Marty James) 56

ROCK AND A HARD PLACE Songs In The Key Of Black, BMI/Will Music, BMI/Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp., BMI/Vacant Heart Publishing, BMI/Speakers Go Boom Music, BMI/Goat Island Bay Music, BMI (H.Warren, J.Hackworth, J.Haney) 1

S

SOMETHING IN THE ORANGE Zach Lane Bryan Publishing Designee, BMI/Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp., BMI (Z.L.Bryan) 28

SOUNDS LIKE SOMETHING I'D DO Sony Countryside, BMI/Marzia Music, BMI/DESTON SONG SLAYER, BMI/BMG Platinum Songs US, BMI/Staletish Music, BMI/Music Of Big Deal, BMI/Highland House Of Hits, BMI/Me Gusta Music, BMI (D.Milligan, B.Beavers, T.A.McBride) 52

STANDING ROOM ONLY Amped 11 Publishing, BMI/Tommy Cecil Publishing Designee, BMI/Play It Again Entertainment, BMI/Sony Tree Publishing, BMI/Round Hill Songs BLS IV, ASCAP/Big Loud Proud Songs, ASCAP/Red Toe Rocker, ASCAP (T.Cecil, P.Murphy, C.Wiseman) 31

STARS LIKE CONFETTI Red Bandana Publishing, BMI/MVZ Music, BMI/Music Of MAM, BMI/EMI Blackwood Music Inc., BMI/Crickit On The Lip, BMI/Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp., BMI/Spirit Two Nashville, ASCAP/Kyler's Kinda Night, ASCAP/Miller Crow Music, ASCAP/Round Hill Songs III, ASCAP/Sony Tree Publishing, BMI (J.Thompson, Thomas Rhett, Z.Crowell) 40

T

TENNESSEE ORANGE Georgiamo Music, SESAC/Sony Timber Publishing, SESAC/Reservoir 416, BMI/33 Creative, BMI/Bone Bonie Creative, BMI/Major Bob Music, Inc., ASCAP/Sony Tree Publishing, BMI (M.Moraney, D.Fanning, P.Jenkins, B.Williams) 15

THOUGHT YOU SHOULD KNOW Big Loud Mountain, BMI/Bo Wallace Publishing, BMI/A Boy Named Ford, BMI/Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp., BMI/Sony Tree Publishing, BMI/Pink Dog Publishing, BMI (M.C.Wallen, N.Galyon, M.Lambert) 5

U

UP THERE DOWN HERE Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp., BMI/IMVIVE CREATIVE MUSIC, ASCAP/WC Music Corp., ASCAP/Concord copyrights, BMI/These Are Pulse Songs, BMI/Creative Pulse Music, BMI (Z.Dyer, S.Overstreet, T.P.Wood) 55

W

WAIT IN THE TRUCK Sony Tree Publishing, BMI/Relative Music Group, BMI/Rednecker Music, BMI/Thomas Publishing Global, BMI/Round Hill Verses Publishing, BMI/Wro Wants To Buy My Publishing, ASCAP/WC Music Corp., ASCAP/Nontypical Music, ASCAP/Sony Accnt, ASCAP/Pile Of Schmidt Songs, ASCAP/The Money Tree Vibez, ASCAP (M.W.Hardy, H.Phelps, J.M.Schmidt, R.Blair) 4

WATER UNDER THE BRIDGE Universal Music Corp., ASCAP/Between the Pines, LLC, ASCAP/Concord Tunes, SESAC/Card Tables Music, ASCAP/Hand Your Hat Hits, SESAC/Miller Crow Music, ASCAP/Round Hill Songs III, ASCAP/Tempo Investments-Smack Hits, GMR/Smackwood Music, GMR/Warner Geo Met Ric Music, GMR/Sony Accnt, ASCAP/Smackwood Music, ASCAP (S.L.Hunt, C.La Corte, S.McAnally, J.Osborne) 17

WE GOT HISTORY Sony Countryside, BMI/Riser Ten Music, BMI/Concord Sounds, ASCAP/Jackiebox Publishing, ASCAP/Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp., BMI/Black Jeans Music, BMI/Neon Cross Music, BMI/Sony Accnt, ASCAP/The Money Tree Vibez, ASCAP/Pile Of Schmidt Songs, ASCAP (M.Tepenny, A.Aibert, D.Dawson, J.M.Schmidt) 41

WILD AS HER Combustion Music, BMI/Anthem Music Publishing I, BMI/Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp., BMI/Red Creative, BMI/Downtown DMP Songs, BMI/Big Loud Brett Songs, BMI/Round Hill Compositions, BMI/SonofGroceries Music, BMI/Big Loud Mountain, BMI (M.C.Wallen, Brett Tyler, K.Archer) 6

WORTH A SHOT Tempo Investments-Smack Hits, GMR/Warner Geo Met Ric Music, GMR/EMI Blackwood Music Inc., BMI/Iris In The Sky With Diamonds, BMI/Smackwood Music, ASCAP/Sony Accnt, ASCAP/Smackborne Music, ASCAP (S.McAnally, R.Copperman, J.Osborne) 46

Y

YOU BMG Gold Songs, ASCAP/Beats And Banjos, ASCAP/Buckeye26, ASCAP/WC Music Corp., ASCAP/Invrnmusic, ASCAP/LawinWranglers, ASCAP (D.Smeyers, D.M.Barnes, J.Reynolds) 11

YOU, ME, & WHISKEY WC Music Corp., ASCAP/Where I Started Music Publishing, ASCAP/Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp., BMI/Don't Be A Gypsy, BMI/Sony Cross Keys Publishing, ASCAP/Anthem Coal Mining Songs, ASCAP/Randolph County Music, ASCAP/Taylor Made by The Red White And Blue, ASCAP (J.L.Alexander, B.Berryhill, C.Taylor) 26

YOUR HEART OR MINE Songs Of Universal, Inc., BMI/HonkintonkaHoHo Music Publishing, BMI/Universal Tunes, SESAC/Phat Cooper Otis, SESAC/Universal Music Corp., ASCAP/Brummy Cooper Otis Music, ASCAP (B.Butler, J.Ebach, J.Pierce) 25

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10 Years Ago Lee Brice's 'Truck' Rumbled To No. 1

In 2013, the singer-songwriter banked his third of eight Country Airplay leaders

On April 20, 2013, **Lee Brice's** "I Drive Your Truck" shifted to No. 1 on *Billboard's* Country Airplay chart.

Jessi Alexander, Connie Harrington and **Jimmy Yeary** penned the song after Harrington heard an interview with a father who continued to drive the truck of his son who had been killed in battle while serving in armed forces.

Sumter, S.C., native Brice has recorded

eight Country Airplay leaders among 12 top 10s. He has also co-written hits for other artists, including two No. 1s: **Garth Brooks'** "More Than a Memory," the only song in the chart's history to debut at the summit, in 2007, and **Eli Young Band's** "Crazy Girl," in 2011.

Brice is currently on his Beer Drinking Opportunity Tour. His next stop is on April 15 in Lethbridge, Canada.

Brice has also released a new single, "Save the Roses," which he co-authored with **Kyle Jacobs** and **Jimmie Lee Sloas**. Jacobs, who co-wrote Brooks' "More Than a Memory," died Feb. 17. Brice posted on social media in tribute on Feb. 22, "He was, without a doubt, one of the best people anyone could ever hope to have in their corner."

—JIM ASKER

Brice onstage at San Manuel Amphitheater in San Bernardino, Calif., in 2013.



THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	WKS ON CHART	TITLE Imprint/Label	Artist	AUDIENCE (IN MILLIONS)		PLAYS		
					THIS WEEK	+/-	THIS WEEK	+/-	RANK
1	2	19	I DRIVE YOUR TRUCK Curb	Lee Brice	38.937	+0.102	6182	39	1
2	3	11	DOWNTOWN Capitol Nashville	Lady Antebellum	37.975	+2.252	5866	281	2
3	5	25	IF I DIDN'T HAVE YOU Stoney Creek	Thompson Square	35.344	+2.092	5570	285	3
4	6	25	I CAN TAKE IT FROM THERE RCA Nashville	Chris Young	34.463	+2.899	5566	353	4
5	7	16	MAMA'S BROKEN HEART RCA Nashville	Miranda Lambert	32.620	+3.365	5230	427	5