

## Darius Rucker - Learn To Live

Having your first country album debut at #1 on the Billboard charts – following a multi-week #1 debut country single – is a huge achievement by anyone’s measure. When you add to that the *New York Times*’ claim that your debut album is “one of the year’s most vibrant country albums,” and *Variety*’s declaration that “Country music has a new major star, and the genre may never be the same” – well, it can be pretty heady stuff.

So it comes as no surprise that Capitol Records Nashville artist Darius Rucker is delighted by the critical and commercial success of his first country album, *Learn to Live*, and very proud of the #1 single, “Don’t Think I Don’t Think About It” – on which Rucker was a co-writer.

However, what Darius Rucker mostly feels these days is grateful . . . Grateful that the millions of fans that knew Rucker as the voice of Hootie & The Blowfish, the Grammy-winning group whose album *Cracked Rear View* sold more than 16 million copies, happily followed the singer/songwriter in his natural evolution to country music. Grateful that hundreds of country radio programmers embraced him as a welcome addition to the genre – as did the nation’s countless country music fans. . . Grateful that Nashville songwriters and established country artists have recognized him as one of their own . . . Grateful that he has been embraced by media and invited to perform on The Late Show, The Tonight Show, The Ellen DeGeneres Show, and more . . . And finally, grateful that, as a seasoned performer who has already experienced the fickle highs and lows of fame, he’s grounded and secure enough these days to truly appreciate this new phase in his music career.

With the critically-acclaimed *Learn to Live*, the listener realizes that this project is steeped in the country traditions of meaningful lyrics and resonant melodies, yet is still an album that sounds completely modern.

And, as the best country albums do, *Learn to Live* takes the listener on a voyage through life’s experiences. The album’s arc covers major life themes such as falling in love, birth and death. “This CD is a journey,” Rucker says. “I realized I’m 42. I’m not going to write many songs about drinking, chasing girls or booty calls. I was going to write songs about having kids and stuff - songs about life.”

Guests on the album include Brad Paisley on the humorous “All I Want” and Vince Gill and Alison Krauss on the inspirational “If I Had Wings.” Gill and Krauss made Rucker, the ultimate fan, dizzy with delight. “They sounded like angels. You have these two artists singing on top of my voice . . . it gave me chills.”

Rucker has always had a close kinship to country music and country artists. “Growing up in South Carolina, it was always around, always on the radio,” he says. First a fan of Buck Owens, Rucker naturally gravitated towards Dwight Yoakam, New Grass Revival and Rodney Foster in his twenties. “When I first heard Rodney’s voice on Foster &

Lloyd's 'Crazy Over You,' I thought, 'this guy's voice is bigger than Texas.' I'm thinking, 'this is cool songwriting.' ”

Fans of the Hootie & The Blowfish - many of whom had already made the natural migration from pop to country radio - realize that the band's catchy songs were rooted in the same elements that make great country music. In fact, Rucker says, “We talked about being a country band, and I just got outvoted! They also used to kid me about how I always was bringing them country songs that they had to turn into rock songs . . .” Therefore, making his first country CD was not so much a big leap for Rucker as simply a slight shift in Rucker's musical evolution. As *Billboard* magazine noted, “*There's a sense of purpose that makes Rucker feel like a member of the country family, rather than an interloper... Sounds like country may have a shining new star.*”

As a student of great songwriting, Rucker earned his advanced degree while working on *Learn to Live*. “Writing with those songwriters was like going to Songwriting University,” he says. His professors/co-writers included such legendary writers as Rivers Rutherford (Brad Paisley, Tim McGraw, Gretchen Wilson); Frank Rogers (Brad Paisley, Trace Adkins) and Clay Mills (Diamond Rio, Reba McEntire). “So many people in pop try to write all these psychedelic crazy lyrics, and I'm sure I've been part of that - but that's something you don't find in country music. The thing I like most about country songs is that they keep it simple. I love that, and I love the melodies.”

Fellow South Carolina native Rogers also served as the album's producer, a job he secured immediately after meeting Rucker: “In the first 30 minutes, we wrote 'All I Want.' The label asked if I wanted to meet the other [potential producers] and I said, 'Never mind. I met my guy'.”

The success of first single, the bittersweet “Don't Think I Don't Think About It,” shows that Rucker had country fans at hello. The single, co-written by Rucker with Clay Mills, soared to number one at radio even more quickly than anticipated. “It just breaks your heart,” says Rucker of the song. “And it was country enough that it wouldn't be perceived as me being pop and just putting fiddle on a song.”

That song and the universal emotion it evokes typifies the stripped-bare nature of *Learn to Live*. “I want people to take away a sense of realness,” Rucker says. “I want everybody to find a song on it that they can relate to and go, 'Wow, I did that, too.' ”

For Rucker, the welcome mat that country radio has laid out for him has been extraordinarily gratifying. “The reception has been unbelievable,” he says. But smart programmers know that teens raised on Hootie are now confirmed country listeners, so hearing Rucker is like hearing an old friend. “People listen to country music because they know it's where you can find *songs*.”

While Hootie & the Blowfish are an ongoing project, Rucker's solo career is taking center stage for the foreseeable future. He is devoted to promoting *Learn to Live*, and is

currently enjoying success with the second single from the album, “It Won’t Be Like This For Long.”

“You know, I had been in that little twangy rock cocoon for a while . . . But now I get to come out and sing *these* songs,” says Darius Rucker. “I plan to be doing this for a long time. This isn’t a one album deal – it’s a career thing.”