

billboard Country Update

BILLBOARD COUNTRY UPDATE

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Hotter Than Hell: The Devil Makes A Comeback In Country Music

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Satan is real.

Or, at the very least, real trendy in country music.

The devil, or demons, have been referenced in a string of current and recent singles, including **Jelly Roll's** "Halfway to Hell" and "I Am Not Okay," **Tyler Braden's** "Devil I Know," **Ashley McBryde's** "The Devil You Know" and **Jackson Dean's** "Heavens to Betsy."

Mitchell Tenpenny's "Demon or Ghost," recorded with metal band **Underoath**, was released Aug. 9; **Lee DeWyze** issued "Devil in the Details" on Aug. 2; **Stephen Wilson Jr.'s** "The Devil" is the opening track on his debut project, *Son of Dad*; and **Lainey Wilson's** just-released *Whirlwind* slips in "Devil Don't Go There."

It's not like it's an entirely new subject — **The Louvin Brothers'** "Satan Is Real" ranks among classic country's deepest discussions of the dark angel and his role in humanity — but the current volume of devil themes, and the weight of the songs they appear in, seems significant.

"We see more people confessing what they're really feeling and being a little more open and honest," says songwriter **Ashley Gorley**, who co-wrote "I Am Not Okay," which references "the

devil on my back and voices in my head." "I think the devil is real, so I think it's showing up in people's writing."

One obvious source for the topic lies in the pandemic. When COVID-19 forced creatives off the stage and into their houses, they had plenty of time for self-examination, questioning who they were, why they had made certain life choices and the

meaning of the world around them.

"It's very easy to look at the past few years and recall moments of dark, and I think that with the darkness comes the imagery," DeWyze notes. "As far as the devil being in music now, it's almost like it represents those things, whether it be the faith and redemp-

tion or the existential struggle, or, you know, a physical being literally at your door."

Historically, the devil has represented temptation in country music. **Marty Robbins'** "Devil Woman," **Alan Jackson's** "Between the Devil and Me," **Joe Nichols'** "Brokenheartsville" (in which "the devil drives a Coupe de Ville") and **Terri Gibbs'** "Somebody's Knockin'" (depicting him with "blue eyes and blue jeans") all place Satan in the equation as its characters grapple with sexual tension and betrayal.



TENPENNY: CHELSEA ROCHELLE; JELLY ROLL: MELISSA MAJCHRAK; DEWYZE: KALIN GORDON PHOTOGRAPHY

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“The devil is always, I hate saying it, but an interesting character to me,” confesses Academy of Country Music songwriter of the year **Jessie Jo Dillon**, who co-wrote “Halfway to Hell.” “It’s like this tempter or temptress always.”

The ultimate temptation comes when the devil persuades a victim to sell their soul for a short-term outcome. That’s at work in the movie *Damn Yankees* when a Washington Senators fan plots to bring down the New York baseball team. It’s at the heart of the legend behind blues icon **Robert Johnson**. And it’s the storyline in the **The Charlie Daniels Band’s** Luciferian country tale, “The Devil Went Down to Georgia.”



ERICK ANDERSON

DANIELS

“It personifies the duality of dark and light, and the feeling of struggling with those demons,” Jelly Roll notes.

“My favorite devil song by far is ‘The Devil Went Down to Georgia,’” **Jon Pardi** adds, “because the guy won. He won the fight.”

Beyond that song’s surface entertainment, though, is a much deeper concept that hints at the never-changing struggle between right and wrong. Cheaters and criminals, in general, earn their reputations by stealing short-term gain while ignoring potential long-term consequences. It’s a battle that plays out daily in politics, in finance, in barroom pickup lines and even in artistic decisions.

“My favorite songwriter ever, **Bobby Braddock**, told me, ‘Mitchell, are you writing music for a lunchtime or a lifetime?’” Tenpenny recalls. “I think there’s a lot of lunchtime music right now, and we need that lifetime music again. Can we make a quick buck to this? Yes, but it’s going to kill so many souls, and that’s where the devil gets involved, in my opinion, and why we keep using him as a metaphor.”

Musical trends in country have made it easier to chase the devil thematically. **HARDY**, Jelly Roll and Tenpenny are among the artists who have employed hard rock in varying degrees within country. Acts in that format have often toyed with Satanic imagery in songs, stage wear and graphics, and the infusion of power chords and death screams into country practically requires the devil to tag along.

“As far as the look and aesthetics, the devil and demons have always been in the rock’n’roll scene,” Tenpenny maintains. “T-shirts and metal, skeletons, skulls, that kind of thing has always been a part of it. I think that that definitely has an influence.”

But another musical development that may have paved the way for Satan’s ascent in country might well be **Eric Church**. Particularly notable is his track “Devil Devil” from *The Outsiders*, with a spoken-word “Princess of Darkness” prelude that links Music Row to hell: “The devil walks among us, folks, and Nashville is his bride.” Church even employed a 40-foot inflatable devil on his 2015 tour, nicknaming the blow-up doll “Lucy Fur.”

Church’s road guitarist **Driver Williams** co-wrote Dean’s “Heavens to Betsy,” alluding to demons in the opening verse and expressing surprise in the chorus that St. Peter would “ever let a sinner like me in” to heaven. That latter phrase is a direct homage to



JOE PUGLIESE

CHURCH

Church’s debut album, *Sinners Like Me*.

“Eric has a theme of good versus evil that kind of goes throughout his writing,” Williams observes. “I just can’t help it if that rubs off on me in the writing room a little bit just because I do look up to him so much as a songwriter.”

“You look at all the major superstars right now, from **Luke [Combs]** to **Morgan [Wallen]** to **Thomas Rhett**, their idol is Eric — Jelly Roll, too. So I definitely see Eric’s handiwork rubbing off on all of these major superstars that are having moments right now.”

Satan, it turns out, may contribute to artists’ successes when he appears because he offers so much possibility for the protagonist.

“You immediately become the hero in the story,” DeWyzé says, “when the devil is placed in it.”

Ultimately, the devil is having his moment because the world seems so tough. The pandemic may be behind us, but years of political turmoil and cultural negativity that predated COVID-19 still drag down the national conversation. That most certainly plays in the background as the devil takes the spotlight.

“Country music looks at that and it tries to give a positive at the end,” Pardi suggests. “We may be singing about darker times, but there’s always a light at the end of the tunnel in country music.” ●



TERRY WYATT/GETTY IMAGES

Trisha Yearwood (left) received the Academy of Country Music’s Icon Award on Aug. 21 during the annual ACM Honors. Joining her are Garth Brooks and Ashley McBryde.



Ketch Secor made a surprise appearance during a Molly Tuttle performance for Honor Society members on Aug. 22 at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum in Nashville. With him is Live Nation president of Nashville music and business strategy Sally Williams.



Lainey Wilson (right) chatted with Apple Music Country host Kelleigh Bannen for the Aug. 30 episode of *Today’s Country Radio*.



Corey Kent (center) performed Aug. 21 for a WSLC Roanoke, Va., concert series at Sidewinders Saloon. He’s accompanied by WSLC music director Rachel Rodes Metcalf and Mel Wheeler/Roanoke operations manager Brett Sharp.

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

Double Shot: Post Malone & Blake Shelton's 'Drink' Hits Country Airplay Top 10, Shaboozey's 'A Bar Song' Rules For Sixth Week

Post Malone's "Pour Me a Drink" (Mercury/Republic/Big Loud), featuring Blake Shelton, hops three spots to No. 10 on Billboard's Country Airplay chart (dated Sept. 7). It increased by 18% to 18.6 million audience impressions Aug. 23-29, according to Luminate.



SHELTON (left) and MALONE

JOHN SHEARER/GETTY IMAGES FOR CMA

Post Malone adds his second Country Airplay top 10, after "I Had Some Help," featuring Morgan Wallen, led for four weeks beginning in June. Both singles are from his first country LP, *F-1 Trillion*, which soared in at No. 1 on the Aug. 31-dated Top Country Albums chart and the all-genre Billboard 200 with 250,000 equivalent album units earned in the United States.

Shelton banks his 36th Country Airplay top 10 and his first since "Minimum Wage" hit No. 9 in June 2021. He ties fellow Oklahoman Reba McEntire for the ninth-most top 10s; Kenny Chesney and George Strait lead all acts with 61 each dating to the chart's 1990 start, followed by Tim McGraw with 60.

SIX-PACK Shaboozey rules Country Airplay for a sixth total and consecutive week with "A Bar Song (Tipsy)" (American Dogwood/EMPIRE/Magnolia Music). The track, which drew 28.8 million in reach among chart reporters (down 3%), is only the second country career-establishing No. 1 to reign for as many as six weeks (counting acts' first Country Airplay entries as a lead artist or their initial songs promoted to country radio): Carrie Underwood's "Jesus, Take the Wheel" logged six weeks on top in early 2006. 🍀

MOST INCREASED AUDIENCE

TITLE Imprint/Label	Artist	GAIN (IN MILLIONS)
POUR ME A DRINK Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	Post Malone Featuring Blake Shelton	+2.842
DIRT CHEAP CoJo/Warner Music Nashville/WMN	Cody Johnson	+2.383
CHEVROLET Broken Bow	Dustin Lynch Featuring Jelly Roll	+1.994
MILES ON IT Joytime Collective/RCA Nashville	Marshmello & Kane Brown	+1.917
HIGH ROAD YellaBush/Columbia/RECORDS Nashville	Koe Wetzel & Jessie Murph	+1.165
LOVE YOU, MISS YOU, MEAN IT Row Crop/Capitol Nashville	Luke Bryan	+1.021
GONNA LOVE YOU Stoney Creek	Parmalee	+0.825
YOU LOOK LIKE YOU LOVE ME SAWGOD/Columbia/Nashville Harbor	Ella Langley Featuring Riley Green	+0.774
I AM NOT OKAY Bailee & Buddy/BMG/Republic/Stoney Creek	Jelly Roll	+0.758
JUST TO SAY WE DID Blue Chair/Warner Music Nashville/WEA	Kenny Chesney	+0.758

MOST INCREASED PLAYS

TITLE Imprint/Label	Artist	GAIN
DIRT CHEAP CoJo/Warner Music Nashville/WMN	Cody Johnson	+893
POUR ME A DRINK Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	Post Malone Featuring Blake Shelton	+752
CHEVROLET Broken Bow	Dustin Lynch Featuring Jelly Roll	+417
MILES ON IT Joytime Collective/RCA Nashville	Marshmello & Kane Brown	+381
LOVE YOU, MISS YOU, MEAN IT Row Crop/Capitol Nashville	Luke Bryan	+321
WIND UP MISSIN' YOU Back Blocks/EMI Nashville	Tucker Wetmore	+270
HIGH ROAD YellaBush/Columbia/RECORDS Nashville	Koe Wetzel & Jessie Murph	+267
AIN'T NO LOVE IN OKLAHOMA Universal Studios/Atlantic/Seven Ridges/Columbia Nashville	Luke Combs	+251
YOU LOOK LIKE YOU LOVE ME SAWGOD/Columbia/Nashville Harbor	Ella Langley Featuring Riley Green	+221
YOUNG LOVE & SATURDAY NIGHTS RCA Nashville	Chris Young	+219

RECURRENTS

THIS WEEK	TITLE Imprint/Label	Artist	TOTAL AUD. (IN MILLIONS)
1	OUTSKIRTS MCA Nashville	Sam Hunt	15.555
2	WHERE IT ENDS Elektra/Warner Music Nashville/WEA	Bailey Zimmerman	15.281
3	WORLD ON FIRE RCA Nashville	Nate Smith	13.104
4	BULLETPROOF RCA Nashville	Nate Smith	11.691
5	FAST CAR River House/Columbia Nashville	Luke Combs	10.645
6	PRETTY LITTLE POISON 717/Warner/WEA	Warren Zeiders	8.965
7	THINKIN' BOUT ME Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	Morgan Wallen	8.512
8	TRUCK BED Big Loud	HARDY	8.427
9	SAVE ME Bailee & Buddy/Broken Bow/BMG/Stoney Creek	Jelly Roll With Lainey Wilson	8.381
10	LAST NIGHT Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	Morgan Wallen	7.947



TEXAS REGIONAL RADIO REPORT

WEEK ENDING AUGUST 29, 2024

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	16	GOD'S DOIN' (Independent) ★★ 1 Week at 1 ★★	Curtis Grimes	1524	111	11	9	28	DAMN GOOD FRIENDS (Independent)	Keller Cox	1043	-93
2	3	20	HEARTBROKE (Independent)	Joey Green	1433	75	12	17	12	DRUNK SINCE DALLAS (Independent)	Grant Gilbert	924	89
3	5	12	WHOLE LOTTA LUBBOCK (Independent)	William Clark Green	1348	97	13	15	16	WAKE UP LONELY (Independent)	Caleb Young	923	39
4	7	13	SOME GIRLS DON'T CRY (Independent)	Billie Jo Jones	1295	127	14	18	13	HEAVEN SHINES DOWN ON YOU (Independent)	Sundance Head	906	90
5	8	17	BAD BOY GOOD MAN (Independent)	Brandi Behlen	1243	102	15	14	22	SUNSHINE (Independent)	Deryl Dodd	875	-16
6	6	15	OUTRUN THE RAIN (Independent)	James Lann	1241	56	16	19	13	LOST IN THE COUNTRY (LuckySky Music)	Tori Martin	867	68
7	10	12	ALL I WANNA DO IS DRINK (Independent)	Randy Rogers & Wade Bowen	1214	83	17	16	21	TANGLED (Independent)	Darrin Morris Band	849	2
8	4	31	BLUE SKY GOODBYE (Independent)	Drew Fish Band	1102	-212	18	23	8	WHEELS (Independent)	Shane Smith & The Saints	832	103
9	11	14	SMOKE & MIRRORS (Independent)	Chad Cooke Band	1087	47	19	21	20	DARLIN' (Independent)	Jenna Paulette	779	25
10	13	8	HUNGOVER AGAIN (Independent)	Casey Donahew	1083	87	20	20	12	BEER'S BETTER ON A BOAT (Independent)	Clay Hollis & Jesse Raub, Jr.	778	17

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 2024, Texas Regional Radio Report

billboard Country 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	18	A BAR SONG (TIPSY) American Dogwood/EMPIRE/Magnolia Music	★★ No. 1 (6 Weeks) ★★ Shaboozey	28.763	-1.017	6811	-530	3
2	2	17	I HAD SOME HELP Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	Post Malone Featuring Morgan Wallen	28.137	+0.127	6631	69	6
3	5	38	CHEVROLET Broken Bow	Dustin Lynch Featuring Jelly Roll	25.076	+1.994	7065	417	2
4	4	21	COWGIRLS Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	Morgan Wallen Featuring ERNEST	24.611	-1.121	5818	-514	8
5	8	33	DIRT CHEAP CoJo/Warner Music Nashville/WMN	Cody Johnson	24.189	+2.383	7307	893	1
6	6	16	AIN'T NO LOVE IN OKLAHOMA Universal Studios/Atlantic/Seven Ridges/Columbia Nashville	Luke Combs	23.750	+0.670	6727	251	5
7	3	44	SHE'S SOMEBODY'S DAUGHTER (REIMAGINED) Patoka Sounds/Lyric Ridge	Drew Baldrige	23.470	-4.396	6765	-1469	4
8	7	51	YOUNG LOVE & SATURDAY NIGHTS RCA Nashville	Chris Young	22.646	+0.448	6567	219	7
9	10	21	LOVE YOU, MISS YOU, MEAN IT Row Crop/Capitol Nashville	Luke Bryan	19.080	+1.021	5715	321	9
10	13	10	POUR ME A DRINK Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	★★ Most Increased Audience ★★ Post Malone Featuring Blake Shelton	18.580	+2.842	5071	752	11
11	12	42	THIS IS MY DIRT Valory	Justin Moore	17.175	+0.541	5036	166	12
12	11	66	LOVE YOU AGAIN Chase Matthew/Warner Music Nashville/WMN	Chase Matthew	16.893	+0.206	5289	-36	10
13	14	23	AUSTIN VERSION III/Warner/WMN	Dasha	14.925	+0.189	4416	66	13
14	17	17	MILES ON IT Joytime Collective/RCA Nashville	Marshmello & Kane Brown	14.492	+1.917	4046	381	15
15	15	16	HANGTIGHT HONEY Broken Bow	Lainey Wilson	12.939	-0.593	4146	-34	14
16	16	32	ONE BAD HABIT McGraw/Big Machine	Tim McGraw	12.769	-0.027	3937	-29	17
17	18	12	I AM NOT OKAY Bailee & Buddy/BMG/Republic/Stoney Creek	Jelly Roll	12.704	+0.758	3942	175	16
18	19	43	GONNA LOVE YOU Stoney Creek	Parmalee	12.014	+0.825	3631	218	18
19	20	9	LIES LIES LIES Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	★★ Airpower ★★ Morgan Wallen	10.975	+0.717	3154	170	19
20	21	16	BEAUTIFUL AS YOU Fifty-One/Forty-Nine/Valory	Thomas Rhett	10.270	+0.503	3058	23	21
21	22	26	MESSED UP AS ME Hit Red/Capitol Nashville	Keith Urban	8.868	-0.228	3139	-75	20
22	23	30	BIGGER HOUSES Warner Music Nashville/WAR	Dan + Shay	7.921	+0.095	2577	-19	22
23	24	34	SOUNDS LIKE THE RADIO Leo33	Zach Top	7.617	+0.223	2498	-34	23
24	25	27	AMERICAN GIRL Tom Petty Legacy/Capitol Nashville/Valory	Dierks Bentley	6.278	+0.176	1990	51	26
25	27	24	DAMN GOOD DAY TO LEAVE Nashville Harbor	Riley Green	6.252	+0.347	2423	147	24
26	26	28	THINK I'M IN LOVE WITH YOU Sound/Mercury Nashville	Chris Stapleton	6.215	+0.287	1886	-17	27
27	29	14	WIND UP MISSIN' YOU Back Blocks/EMI Nashville	Tucker Wetmore	5.355	+0.671	1782	270	28
28	28	26	COWBOY SONGS RECORDS Nashville	George Birge	5.296	+0.049	2009	49	25
29	31	7	HIGH ROAD YellaBush/Columbia/RECORDS Nashville	Koe Wetzel & Jessie Murph	4.793	+1.165	1329	267	35
30	30	34	BOYS BACK HOME PIA/Curb/Columbia Nashville	Dylan Marlowe & Dylan Scott	4.749	+0.442	1743	69	29

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 © 2024, 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-bulletheaded) 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

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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	33	6	YOU LOOK LIKE YOU LOVE ME SAWGOD/Columbia/Nashville Harbor ★★ Breaker ★★ Ella Langley Featuring Riley Green		3.875	+0.774	1078	221	40
32	38	7	JUST TO SAY WE DID Blue Chair/Warner Music Nashville/WEA	Kenny Chesney	3.491	+0.758	1032	141	42
33	32	33	BREAKIN' IN BOOTS RECORDS/Columbia/RECORDS Nashville	Matt Stell	3.433	-0.003	1643	1	30
34	34	19	FRIENDS LIKE THAT Night Train/Broken Bow	John Morgan Featuring Jason Aldean	3.336	+0.283	1334	76	33
35	37	25	WHATCHA SEE IS WHATCHA GET Nashville Harbor	Chris Janson	3.089	+0.340	1389	67	31
36	36	44	FIND ANOTHER BAR Voyager/Red Street	Chris Lane	3.065	+0.166	1333	23	34
37	35	23	CALLED CRAZY Interscope/MCA Nashville	Kassi Ashton	2.876	-0.156	865	-17	46
38	39	25	THIS TOWN'S BEEN TOO GOOD TO US Curb	Dylan Scott	2.745	+0.071	1338	79	32
39	43	20	FOREVER TO ME Warner Music Nashville/WMN	Cole Swindell	2.705	+0.368	1055	95	41
40	42	17	WRANGLERS Vanner/Republic/Big Loud	Miranda Lambert	2.604	+0.238	1247	139	36
41	40	6	GUY FORTHAT Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	Post Malone Featuring Luke Combs	2.593	-0.050	885	49	45
42	41	22	LIFE WITH YOU Curb	Kelsey Hart	2.458	+0.056	1187	-17	37
43	47	6	I AIN'T SAYIN' MCA Nashville	Jordan Davis	2.236	+0.341	897	87	44
44	45	23	TIE UP Home Grown/Warner Music Nashville/WAR	Zac Brown Band	1.982	-0.004	1117	-24	39
45	49	9	COMING HOME Three Up Three Down/Columbia Nashville	Old Dominion	1.978	+0.125	812	61	49
46	46	30	I TRIED A RING ON Monument	Tigritily Gold	1.951	+0.030	1171	26	38
47	44	18	DRINKIN' BUDDIES Curb	Lee Brice, Nate Smith & Hailey Whitters	1.912	-0.116	719	11	53
48	50	5	WHISKEY DRINK Macon/Broken Bow	Jason Aldean	1.846	+0.031	800	30	50
49	48	12	FALL OF SUMMER Triple Tigers	Scotty McCreery	1.748	-0.115	854	-1	47
50	52	11	HOLY SMOKES Elektra/Warner Music Nashville/WEA	Bailey Zimmerman	1.654	+0.161	651	14	55
51	51	10	COWBOYS CRY TOO Black River	Kelsea Ballerini & Noah Kahan	1.585	-0.131	932	17	43
52	55	13	HOMETOWN HOME BMG/Galaxy Label Group	LOCASH	1.510	+0.132	824	29	48
53	58	2	AM I OKAY? Megan Moroney/Columbia/Columbia Nashville	Megan Moroney	1.500	+0.430	428	172	-
54	56	19	COUNTRY BACK Magnolia Music	Randy Houser	1.413	+0.061	792	31	51
55	53	5	TRUCK ON FIRE Big Machine	Carly Pearce	1.389	-0.068	616	-2	56
56	54	3	LOVE THE LEAVIN' Warner Music Nashville/WMN	Drew Parker	1.178	-0.216	403	-75	-
57	57	12	SIX FEET UNDER (CALEIGH'S SONG) Big Loud Rock/Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	HARDY	1.167	-0.062	655	-7	54
58	RE-ENTRY		OVER WHEN WE'RE SOBER Valory	Brantley Gilbert Featuring Ashley Cooke	1.154	+0.245	496	42	60
59	60	22	SINGLE AGAIN The Core/Universal Music Canada/Mercury Nashville	Josh Ross	1.037	+0.122	738	19	52
60	59	12	EVERYTHING I NEED 19/Wheelhouse	Chayce Beckham	0.901	-0.035	517	42	59

MOMENTS BY MOSER PHOTOGRAPHY



Jeannie Seely received the Jo Walker-Meador Lifetime Achievement Award on Aug. 27 during the SOURCE Hall of Fame Awards at the Musicians Hall of Fame and Museum. From left: Seely, Mark Wills, Brenda Lee and Mandy Barnett.

HAYLEY GJERTSEN



Wyatt Flores (center) received a plaque for his first RIAA-certified platinum single — presented Aug. 16 by OEG head of A&R Tyler Woodward and label founder Susan Owens — during a show in New Braunfels, Texas.

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Kassi Ashton took part in a WITL Lansing, Mich., Night Out concert on Aug. 20 at Lansing Brewing Company. From left: MCA Nashville director of Midwest promotion Donna Passuntino, Ashton, Townsquare/Lansing director of content Jonathan "J.R." Ruppel and WITL morning talent Kristen Matthews.

THE 'DIRT' ON ASHTON'S 10-YEAR WAIT

Nearly a decade ago, as a college senior, rising country singer **Kassi Ashton** signed a record deal with Universal Music Group Nashville (UMGN)/Interscope Records.

Now 30 — and following the success of her highest-charting single to date — the California, Mo., native will release her long-anticipated debut album, *Made From the Dirt*, on Sept. 20.

Singer-songwriter Ashton is a study in contrasts: a motorcycle enthusiast who designs and crafts many of her stage and red-carpet outfits from scratch (including for this year's Academy of Country Music Awards, where she was nominated for new female artist of the year). As a child, she competed in pageants mostly as a vessel for showcasing her music. Even then, her vocal prowess was apparent, thanks to influence from vocalists including **Adele**, **Aretha Franklin** and, later, the country-soul of **Chris Stapleton**. Ashton soon started writing original songs, enrolling at Nashville's Belmont University to study commercial voice and music business.

In 2016, as college graduation neared, Ashton signed a management and publishing deal with Nashville-based Creative Nation. By 2017, she scored a label deal with UMGN in partnership with Interscope. But the ensuing years were spent refining her sound and weathering setbacks, with none of her singles promoted at radio — and no debut album.

"I never felt like I should quit," she says. "When I signed, they wanted me to go straight to radio. I said no because I didn't have a song I wanted to sing for the rest of my life."

Her first full-length was also delayed by the pandemic in 2020, but in 2022, she finally issued her debut country radio single, "Dates in Pickup Trucks," followed by "Drive You Out of My Mind." The two songs built momentum, but this year's "Called Crazy" has resonated most, rising to No. 32 on *Billboard's* Country Airplay chart.

"It came so easy," she says. "I felt like I was finding a pillar."

Nearly a decade after inking her label deal, Ashton will finally release *Made From the Dirt*. She teamed with longtime collaborator **Luke Laird**, as well as **Oscar Charles**, to craft an eclectic mix of uptempo jams ("I Don't Wanna Dance"), grungy rock gems ("Son of a Gun") and a heartfelt tribute to her late grandmother ("Juanita").

"I couldn't have made this album at 23," Ashton says. "It would have been rushed and not steady with who I am as a person. I can't wait to see how what I've put energy, time and tears into is connecting." —*Jessica Nicholson*

RADIO & RECORDS®

Warner Music Nashville signed artist-writer **William Beckmann** to a recording deal. His first release under the new arrangement, "Not That Strong," was released Aug. 30 ... **Tenille Townes** announced Aug. 26 that she has parted ways with Sony Music Nashville ... Audacy will inaugurate a new Nashville

Sound Space at the Hard Rock Café on Sept. 5 with **Thomas Rhett** on hand for the ribbon-cutting. The facility will serve as the broadcast home for the chain's syndicated morning show, *Katie & Company* ... Audacy promoted **Ralph Cipolla** to vp of programming analytics and research from director of programming insights, RadioInk.com reported ... The Cowboy Broadcasting Network purchased **KRXT** Rockdale, Texas, from KRXT Inc. ... Beasley Media Group launched a locally focused news site, *AugustaToday.com*, on Aug. 28. Group vp of brand strategies **Tee Gentry** writes a regular travel feature, "Blue Highways," for the site ... Country Radio Broadcasters unveiled its board of directors for 2024-2025, with its leading officers — president **Kurt Johnson** (Townsquare Media), vp **John Shomby** (Country's Radio Coach) and secretary **Beverlee Brannigan** (Beverlee Brannigan LLC Creative Coaching) — all returning. New board members include **Ashley Morrison** (WFUS Tampa, Fla.), **Jordan Petit** (Opry Entertainment Group), **Greg Strassell** (Hubbard) and **Allison Warren** (Cumulus) ... **Eric Church** will deliver a full-band show on Sept. 30 for SiriusXM from his Nashville bar, Chief's. The concert will air on the Outsiders Radio channel.

'ROUND THE ROW

Singer-songwriter **Emmi Elliott** signed a publishing contract with Warner Chappell Nashville and Songs & Daughters ... Songwriter-producer **Logan Turner**, formerly with the Texas band **Bexar**, reached a music publishing agreement with Symphonic Music Publishing ... Reservoir acquired the publishing rights to the songwriting catalog of late Los Angeles writer-musician-arranger **Billy Strange**. The copyrights include three titles associated with **Elvis Presley**: "Memories," "A Little Less Conversation" and "Clean Up Your Own Back Yard" ... PLA Media added 17-year-old artist-writer **Birdie Nichols** as a PR client ... **John Cowan** and **Missy Raines** agreed to co-host the International Bluegrass Music Association Awards on Sept. 26 in Raleigh, N.C. ... **Tanya Tucker** received the promise award from breast cancer nonprofit Susan G. Komen during an Aug. 24 concert in Nashville ... Two **Eric Church** concert specials, *Eric Church: Live at Red Rocks* and *Eric Church: Live at Stagecoach*, will begin airing on PBS stations on Aug. 31 ... **Cody Johnson** announced the launch of a new line of self-branded Wrangler Western shirts on Aug. 29 ... Gibson introduced two limited-edition guitars, the Johnny Cash SJ-200 and Rosanne Cash J-185 ... **Nate Smith** will perform Sept. 9 at NoahBRAVE, a \$150-a-ticket benefit for the families of children with terminal brain cancer, at Nashville's Pancake Pantry ... **Trace Adkins** headlines *A Night of Songs & Stories* on Nov. 21 in Evansville, Ind., to raise money for Mattingly Charities, a youth foundation established by former New York Yankee **Don Mattingly**. 📍



The Store co-founders **Brad Paisley** and **Kimberly Williams-Paisley** announced a second outlet for the food-insecurity facility at Nashville's TriStar Centennial Medical Center on Aug. 28. From left: The Store CEO **Colleen Mayer**, **Williams-Paisley**, **Paisley** and TriStar Centennial president/CEO **Tom Ozburn**.

ON SALE
SEPTEMBER
28

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TOP LATIN POWER PLAYERS



On Sept. 28, *Billboard* will profile the most influential people in Latin music, from label executives, music publishers and management companies to radio and TV stations and live entertainment.

Join *Billboard* in congratulating this year's Latin Power Players.

TO ADVERTISE, CONTACT:

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ON SALE 9/28 | ISSUE CLOSE 9/17 | MATERIALS DUE 9/19

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RUMBAZO 2024

This issue is a celebration of Latin music, covering the latest trends in urban and regional Mexican music, as well as the stars who will headline Rumbazo, a music event taking place Sept. 13 and 14 at the Downtown Las Vegas Events Center during the celebratory Mexican Independence Day weekend.

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ISSUE DATE 9/14 | AD CLOSE 9/3 | MATERIALS DUE 9/5

CODA

REWINDING THE COUNTRY CHARTS

45 Years Ago Willie Nelson And Leon Russell Found No. 1 A Place To Dwell

In 1979, the two joined forces and topped Hot Country Songs covering Elvis Presley's iconic "Heartbreak Hotel"

On Sept. 1, 1979, **Willie Nelson** and **Leon Russell**'s version of **Elvis Presley**'s "Heartbreak Hotel" rented a room atop *Billboard*'s Hot Country Songs chart.

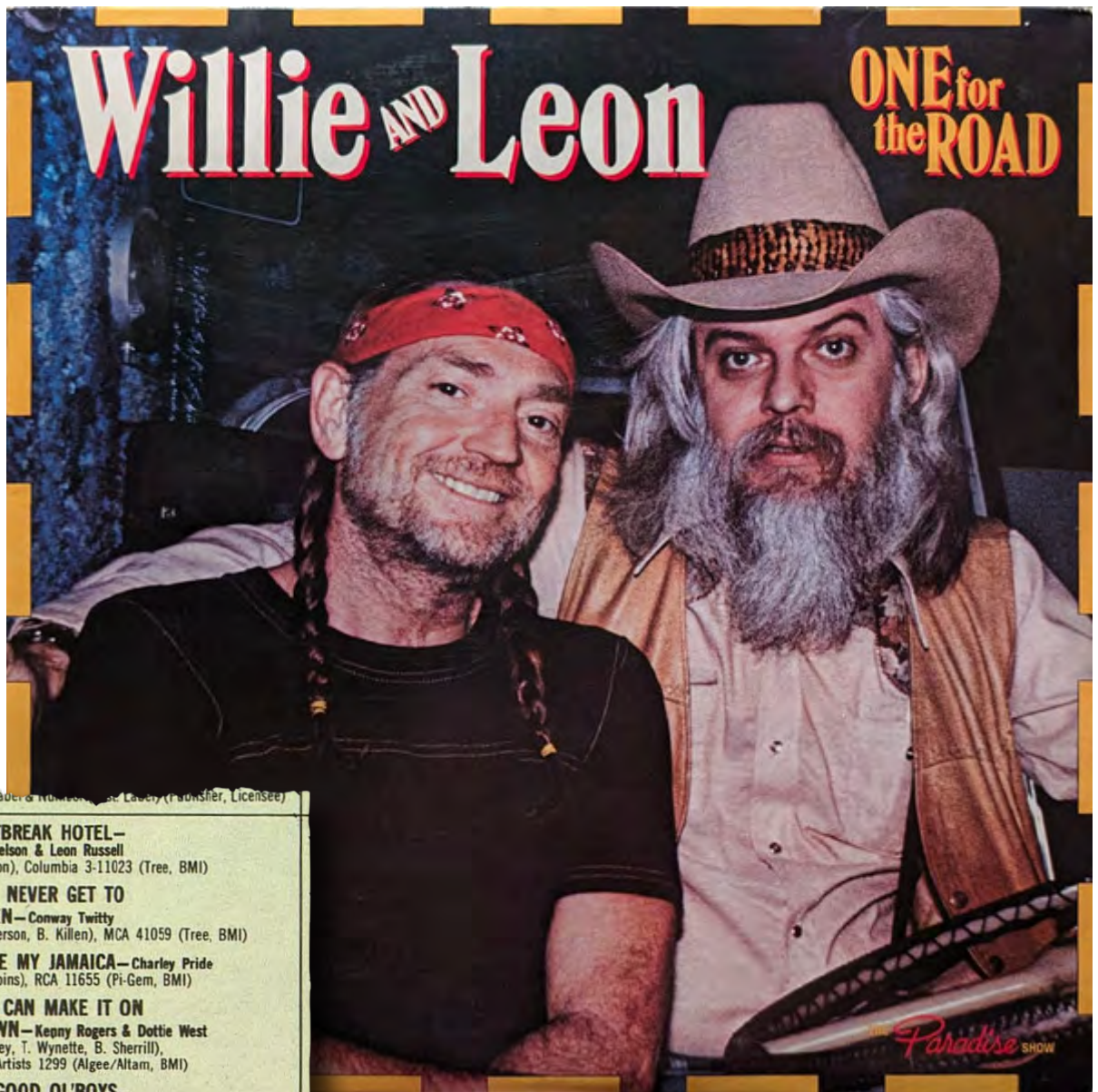
Presley's 1956 original, his first single on RCA Victor after leaving Memphis' Sun Records, crowned *Billboard*'s Top 100 chart for seven weeks. Nelson and Russell's take on the song—credited as written by **Mae Boren Axton**, **Tommy**

Durden and Presley—was released on the tandem's lone LP together, *One for the Road*.

With the remake, Nelson, now 91 years young, added the seventh of his 21 Hot Country Songs No. 1s. Russell, who died in Nashville in November 2016 at age 74, logged his only leader with the song. An accomplished pianist whose musical styles spanned numer-

ous genres, he is considered an inspiration to greats including **Eric Clapton**, **George Harrison** and **Elton John**. Russell and John collaborated on the critically acclaimed 2010 album *The Union*, and in 2011, John inducted Russell into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. Nelson joined the Rock Hall in 2023, after entering the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1993.

—JIM ASKER



COLUMBIA RECORDS

Rank	Weeks on Chart	Peak	Title	Artist	Label
2	9	1	HEARTBREAK HOTEL—	Willie Nelson & Leon Russell	(M. Axton), Columbia 3-11023 (Tree, BMI)
4	8	1	I MAY NEVER GET TO HEAVEN—	Conway Twitty	(B. Anderson, B. Killen), MCA 41059 (Tree, BMI)
8	8	1	YOU'RE MY JAMAICA—	Charley Pride	(K. Robbins), RCA 11655 (Pi-Gem, BMI)
5	9	1	TILL I CAN MAKE IT ON MY OWN—	Kenny Rogers & Dottie West	(C. Richey, T. Wynette, B. Sherrill), United Artists 1299 (Algee/Altam, BMI)
9	8	1	JUST GOOD OL'BOYS—	Moe Bandy & Joe Stampley	(A. Fleetwood), Columbia 3-11027 (Brandwood/Mullet, BMI)
6	1	10	THE DEVIL WENT DOWN		

The cover for Nelson (left) and Russell's 1979 album, *One for the Road*.