billboard Country Update

BILLBOARD.COM/NEWSLETTERS

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BILLBOARD COUNTRY UPDATE

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

JELLY ROLL



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Malone, Shelton Mix It Up In Top 10 >page 4

Kassi Ashton's 10-Year Nashville Sojourn >page 8

Country Coda: Willie Nelson's Leon Russell Collab >page 12 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.

TENPENNY

"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 ECOVID-19 forced creatives off the stage and into their houses, when 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.

AUTHORITATIVE INTELLIGENCE.
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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 sto-

ryline in the **The Charlie Daniels Band**'s Luciferian country tale, "The Devil Went Down to Georgia."

"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 repu-

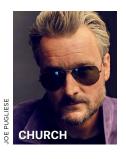
tations by stealing short-term gain while ignoring potential long-term consequences. It's a battle that plays out daily in politics, in finance, in barroom pickup lines and even in artistic decisions.

"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



DANIELS

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

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 dolook 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," DeWyze 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." •



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.

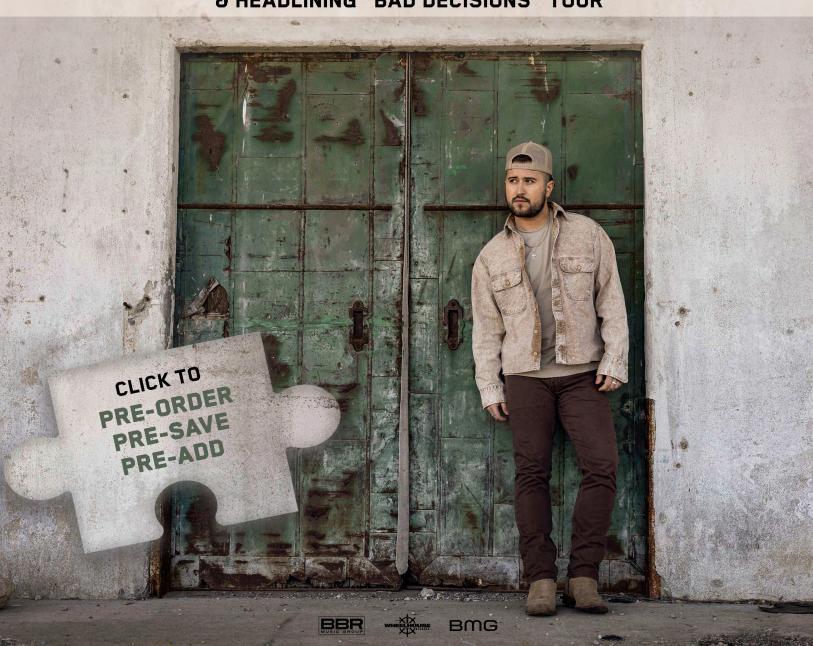


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billboard Country Airplay

AIRPLAY MONITORED BY

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.



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 MIILIONS)
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 I	Roll With Lainey Wilson	8.381
10	LAST NIGHT Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	Morgan Wallen	7.947

Regional Radio Report

TEXAS REGIONAL RADIO REPORT

WEEK ENDING AUGUST 29, 2024

THIS WEEK		WKS ON Chart	TITLE (Label) ARTIST	TW Spins	SPINS +/-	THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	WKS ON Chart	TITLE (Label) ARTIST	TW Spins	SPINS +/-
0	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
Ø	3	20	HEARTBROKE (Independent) Joey Green	1433	75	Ø	17	12	DRUNK SINCE DALLAS (Independent) Grant Gilbert	924	89
8	5	12	WHOLE LOTTA LUBBOCK (Independent) William Clark Green	1348	97	ß	15	16	WAKE UP LONELY (Independent) Caleb Young	923	39
4	7	13	SOME GIRLS DON'T CRY (Independent) Billie Jo Jones	1295	127	•	18	13	HEAVEN SHINES DOWN ON YOU (Independent) Sundance Head	906	90
6	8	17	BAD BOY GOOD MAN (Independent) Brandi Behlen	1243	102	15	14	22	SUNSHINE (Independent) Deryl Dodd	875	-16
6	6	15	OUTRUNTHE RAIN (Independent) James Lann	1241	56	10	19	13	LOST IN THE COUNTRY (LuckySky Music) Tori Martin	867	68
Ø	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	Œ	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
0	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

AIRPLAY MONITORED BY

		WKS		AUDIENCE (I	N MILLIONS)		PLAYS	
THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	ON CHART	TITLE Imprint/Label Artist	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
6	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 Baldridge	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
•	12	42	THIS IS MY DIRT Valory Justin Moore	17.175	+0.541	5036	166	12
Ø	11	66	LOVE YOU AGAIN Chase Matthew/Warner Music Nashville/WMN Chase Matthew	16.893	+0.206	5289	-36	10
ß	14	23	AUSTIN VERSION III/Warner/WMN Dasha	14.925	+0.189	4416	66	13
•	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
Ð	18	12	I AM NOT OKAY Bailee & Buddy/BMG/Republic/Stoney Creek Jelly Roll	12.704	+0.758	3942	175	16
⊕	19	43	GONNA LOVEYOU 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
2	23	30	BIGGER HOUSES Warner Music Nashville/WAR Dan + Shay	7.921	+0.095	2577	-19	22
3 3	24	34	SOUNDS LIKETHE RADIO Leo33 Zach Top	7.617	+0.223	2498	-34	23
2	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
②	29	14	WIND UP MISSIN' YOU Back Blocks/EMI Nashville Tucker Wetmore	5.355	+0.671	1782	270	28
23	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-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.

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billboard Country Airplay

AIRPLAY MONITORED BY

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THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	WKS ON CHART	TITLE Imprint/Label Artist	Artist THIS WEEK +/-			PLAYS THIS WEEK +/- RANK			
3	33	6	YOU LOOK LIKEYOU LOVE ME SAWGOD/Columbia/Nashville Harbor ** Breaker ** Ella Langley Featuring Riley Green	3.875	+0.774	1078	221	40		
€	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 LIKETHAT 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		
33	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		
33	39	25	THIS TOWN'S BEEN TOO GOOD TO US Curb Dylan Scott	2.745	+0.071	1338	79	32		
39	43	20	FOREVERTO 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		
4	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		
4 5	49	9	COMING HOME Three Up Three Down/Columbia Nashville Old Dominion	1.978	+0.125	812	61	49		
4 6	46	30	ITRIED A RING ON Monument Tigirlily 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		
4 3	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		
5 0	52	11	HOLY SMOKES Elektra/Warner Music Nashville/WEA Bailey Zimmerman	1.654	+0.161	651	14	55		
51	51	10	COWBOYS CRYTOO Black River Kelsea Ballerini & Noah Kahan	1.585	-0.131	932	17	43		
€	55	13	HOMETOWN HOME BMG/Galaxy Label Group LOCASH	1.510	+0.132	824	29	48		
3 €	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	LOVETHE 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		
5 3	RE-E	NTRY	OVER WHEN WE'RE SOBER Valory Brantley Gilbert Featuring Ashley Cooke	1.154	+0.245	496	42	60		
5 9	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		



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.



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.

2024

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NASHVILLE & NATIONAL TOM ROLAND tom.roland@billboard.com



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 Sirius XM 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 writermusician-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 cohost 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 Collen Mayer, Williams-Paisley, Paisley and TriStar Centennial president/CEO Tom Ozburn.

ON SALE
SEPTEMBER
28

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TOPLATIN 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.

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TITLE Publishing-Licensing Org. (Songwriter) Chart Position

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billboard



RUMBAZO

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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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.

album, One for the Road.

REWINDING

REWINDING THE COUNTRY CHARTS

5

DEVIL WENT DOWN

1

