

# Kenny Chesney

## *Cosmic Hallelujah*

When Kenny Chesney started the process for the follow-up to *The Big Revival*, he knew there was more to say. He'd had four No. 1s – the GRAMMY-nominated “American Kids,” the three-week chart-topper “Save It For a Rainy Day,” “Til It's Gone” and the girl-empowering “Wild Child,” featuring Grace Potter – and created an aggressive sonic template.

What he didn't expect was the force of creativity that seemingly defied every bit of conventional record making. But leave it to a man who got his first publishing and record deal with Acuff-Rose, the home of Hank Williams Sr., and Capricorn, signed by the legendary Phil Walden with an unlikely “Wizard of Oz” reinvention, “The Tin Man,” – to follow the muses.

“Noise,” a high-impact song decrying our rush-rush world and techno-overload, was written en route to a meeting, recorded two days later and released the following week to become Chesney's most-added first-week single. Then, “Setting The World on Fire,” his urgent rush-of-the-moment duet with P!NK, became available as the second single.

If that meant delaying his album, Chesney was happy to honor the song. In the pause, he went in to record a couple of songs that had arrived late and an old favorite he'd never quite hooked. When it all started coming together, he realized that as much as *Some Town Somewhere* spoke volumes about the location of the No Shoes Nation, *Cosmic Hallelujah* captured the essence of everything life is supposed to be.

“You have to trust the process,” the man with 28 No. 1s says. “Sure, you can cut 10 great songs and have hits with 'em, but I learned as a kid, writing songs with people like Whitey Shafer and Dean Dillon, creativity is more powerful than that. You can't just dial it up, but when it happens, you better make sure you protect it.”

Protect it he did. Recording between dates on his massive *Spread The Love Tour* – which included 14 stadium shows -- Chesney embraced the studio with the same white-hot energy that was electrifying crowds across the country. That buzz of excitement permeates the syncopated electric bluegrass of “Trip Around the Sun,” with its existential embrace of the good stuff, and the decidedly bottom-thumping, big-revelry “Bucket” with its brand new take on attitude adjustment and jettisoning worry, delivered with serrated guitar strokes, plenty of kick drum and word craft.

“To have that road momentum to take into the studio, that's something you can't recreate,” says the 8-time Entertainer of the Year. “That's a whole other kind of energy, and you rarely get to be rested enough to bring it to recording. When we got in there with these songs, I think it lifted everything up.”

Which isn't to say the songs that were already recorded were lacking.

"Setting the World on Fire," featuring P!NK, embodies everything about being alive in the moment. With a series of images and emotions, the pair captures the buzz of falling in love over a spare first verse that opens wide on the chorus – the reckless confession of all the crazy things love can make you do — sweeping the listener up in their euphoria.

"Rarely do songs capture being *in* the moment like this one does," Chesney says. "I knew I wanted someone whose voice holds fireworks and has a dusky quality to it, and there aren't very many people who can create that like P!NK. She really was the perfect person, 'cause I think she understands that moment we're singing about the same way I do."

Understanding the moment the same way is what has built the No Shoes Nation. From the very beginning, Chesney's songs dug beneath the surface into the marrow of lives that don't register in New York or Los Angeles and made them every bit as desirable: "Young," "I Go Back," "Who You'd Be Today" and "There Goes My Life" speak to the heart of anyone growing up beyond the glare of urban living.

It's why the jangly, easy connection of "Bar at the End of the World," the gate-bumpin' escapist "Winnebago" and the bulked-up shuffle "Some Town Somewhere" hail an image of a life that can't be found with fast cars or bottle service. But the friendship and good times are just as sweet – and easier to attain.

As the kid who went to Russia with his college bluegrass band enthuses on "Some Town Somewhere" with a strong sense of rapture, "Hey, Mexico's miles from here, but the Texaco's got a lot of beer..." and then goes on to hit the common truths, "We're all born to be free, we're all born to be great/ We're all looking for the Hollywood sign and trying to find the interstate..."

The guitar and piano-pumping "All The Pretty Girls" speaks more truth about the adolescent gender gap, desire and reality than a handful of S.E. Hinton novels or issues of *Teen Vogue*. Seeing the universe in the singular has always made Chesney's songs a place where people find their own nuanced lives.

By showing such exquisite reverence for the common, Chesney finds his own inspiration. Whether it's the elevating tribute "Coach," or the prayerful "Jesus & Elvis," which venerates places and people like those who run Lala's Little Nugget, respecting unspoken tradition is a big piece of who he is.

Respecting tradition and breaking ground are not mutually exclusive. Look to the lush, layered "Rich and Miserable" to find the essence of why artists like Kenny Chesney matter: they're willing to look at what we're brokered, the effect it has on us and suggest the antidote might be right where we are with just what we have.

"People get so caught up in chasing this idea of what they should have, getting ahead or needing this thing or the other. The reality I've found is when you look around, you've

probably got it pretty good. If you'd just appreciate where you are, you'd be amazed at how happy you can be."

If there's anything that drives the only country act on *Billboard's* Top Touring Acts of the Past 25 Years, it's that pursuit of unfettered joy. It's what pushes him to make his shows what has become a rite of summer for so many, and create albums that still tell those truths about how people live – as opposed to flashcards for Saturday night antics.

"Songs are powerful. They can change your energy, get inside your sadness, open up your joy in crazy ways. I grew up saved by songs – and I only want to make my records create that same kind of place for other people. Whether you're in the midst of it, remembering or looking for it, I want people to hear this music and go 'Yeah,' not because they recognize themselves, but because of how it feels."