

Chase Rice

“I think now is the beginning of it all.”

At the onset of 2020, Chase Rice was headed south through snowy mountain highways, winding his way home to his Tennessee farm. He was readying for the release of *The Album Part I*, his surprise seven-song set, followed by the four-song *The Album Part II*. It was an exciting time. But a beginning? Coming from a star who’s already earned Platinum songs and a No. 1 single – plus a record-breaking, Diamond-certified No. 1 as a songwriter – the claim is puzzling.

Until you hear the new music.

Singing sleek rhymes over heartland six strings and keys mixed with EDM-laced drama, this is the same gravelly-voiced Chase Rice fans first fell in love with years ago – but better. Freer. Unbeholden and uninhibited, somehow capable of evoking Chris LeDoux and *The Chronic*, campfire singalongs and stadium anthems, all at once. “If you just keep going and keep going, you eventually figure out what you want to say with your songs and how you want to say it,” Rice says. “It’s crazy to say, but yeah. I think this is the beginning of my entire career.”

Now, on the heels of chart-climbing single “Drinkin’ Beer. Talkin’ God. Amen.” featuring old friends Florida Georgia Line, comes the final installment in the project with an all-encompassing finale: *The Album*. With the 11-song set featuring all of *The Album Part I* and *The Album Part II* along with several new songs, Rice isn’t just continuing the momentum he’s built—he’s kicking it up a notch.

The story behind the FGL collaboration (one of the four new songs on *The Album*) is defined by poetic kismet and real-world bonds. Rice first climbed charts as a co-writer of the Diamond-certified monster hit “Cruise,” the historic 24-week No. 1 that perched atop the *Billboard* Hot Country Chart longer than any other song in the chart’s then-69-year history. But the three musicians’ story together begins much earlier. Rice grew up with Florida Georgia Line’s Brian Kelley in Daytona Beach, Florida. Time went by and Rice’s family moved away to North Carolina, but he found Kelley again a few years later and the two remained close as they each discovered a love for music.

“I wrote my first song about my dad, when he passed away,” Rice remembers. “Brian helped me finish it, and I knew right then that I loved writing songs.” Soon after, Rice moved to Nashville and into a house with Kelley and Tyler Hubbard, who would go on to form Florida Georgia Line together. The three spent nights gathered around campfires, writing and singing together. The rest, as they say, is history.

In 2014, Rice broke through as an artist himself: *Ignite the Night* yielded Top 5 singles “Ready, Set, Roll” and “Gonna Wanna Tonight,” which he followed in 2017 with the acclaimed *Lambs & Lions* before ultimately earning his first No. 1 single as an artist, 2019’s Double-Platinum certified, two-week chart-topper “Eyes On You.”

“I felt like we should have been in arenas three years go,” Rice says. “I still believe that’s where it was headed.” But that belief in himself and willingness to walk away from a label that no longer fit delayed the prospect of a stadium tour. Four years later, Rice and his music have only benefitted

from the extra time. “I think, *Whoa, that didn’t happen how I planned it at all,*” he says. “But I wouldn’t change it.”

Embracing the unexpected has emerged as something of a mantra for Rice, whose life thus far reads like far-flung adventures of a modern-day Hemingway. After spending most of his childhood on a farm in Fairview, N.C., he played football at the University of North Carolina. A linebacker many expected to reach the NFL, Rice had to abandon those dreams after a devastating injury. “I wasn’t the most gifted dude on the team, but when that happens, in order to play – in order to be one of the best – it’s all about how hard you work,” Chase says. “It’s the same with music.”

Rice’s father encouraged him to pick up the guitar, and he did – first as a comfort, not a career. He joined Hendrick Motorsports’ NASCAR pit crew and won two championships with his team before the unconventional beckoned yet again: Rice competed on *Survivor: Nicaragua* and walked away with second place. Throughout all of the globetrotting and time in oily trenches, the only constant was music. So when his time in Central America was up, Rice packed and made his aforementioned move to Nashville, determined to put the poetry and melodies increasingly filling up his head to the test.

His latest releases are the most triumphant reflections of Rice’s distinct blend of worldly and American rural experience yet: an exploration of sounds and moods with authentic country roots and bold pop wings. The sexiness and fun fans have come to expect from Rice is still there. He has a way of combining playfulness or even sadness with commitment: A strong vein of being someone else’s rock in a variety of ways continues to run through Rice’s writing. “That’s what life’s about, really,” he says. “I’ve had breakups over the last few years, but I don’t post about my personal life on social media. You’ll just hear about it in my songs. That’s the only place where I’ll let it out.”

Delving into *The Album*’s tracks reveals the breadth of Rice’s talent. *Part I* opener “American Nights” plants a flag in eclectic new territory as over claps, instrumental waves and anchoring piano, Rice tells individual American stories in a celebration of diversity.

Platinum-certified Top 10 single “Lonely if You Are” kicks off with plaintive solo acoustic guitar before launching into a promise to “love the lonely right out of you” while hard-driving “Everywhere” captures the inescapability of fresh heartbreak and nostalgic “In The Car” offers a sweet and sultry ode to young love.

Breathlessly happy and punctuated by percussive crashes and background vocals, “Best Night Ever” rolls through a vivid picture of the perfect night. Rice points to the track as a favorite. “It seems so elementary—‘the best night ever,’ but that’s what that night was,” he says. “I was on my farm, and the story of the song happened.”

Layered over gorgeous guitar, “Messy” is an acknowledgement and a vow, quiet and strong. “Everybody wants *The Notebook*,” Rice says. “They think that was perfection. But that’s not what that story was about at all. Those two were messed up – they went through ups and downs. ‘Messy’ is about real life. That perfection you want isn’t real.” He then points to moving *Part I* closer “Forever To Go” as one of his proudest moments on the record and a highlight for other early listeners as well. A celebration of love found and cherished, the song is also a standout vocal performance from Rice, whose gritty tenor conveys warmth and steely determination.

With *Part II*, Rice continued to build on the dynamic catalog by leaning into a vulnerable space of personal inspiration. “You” opens the four-song set in emphatic fashion, building in intensity from spoken word elements to a singalong chorus as a haunting female backing vocal gives the track an added layer of interest. “It’s literally about the girl I was dating at the time and trying to find the happiness that she was giving me in all this other stuff, but at the end of the day *you* are the only one that can give that to me... she was the only one that could make me feel the way that I felt.”

Rice cites “Break. Up. Drunk.” as one of the most unique songs he’s ever put out thanks to its distinctive sonic qualities, leaning on claps and quirky instrumentation to spin the relatable tale of an inevitable breakup into an up-tempo celebration of the heartbreaking moment. “Down Home Runs Deep,” the third song on the project, offers a pleasant juxtaposition with the opening tracks by taking Rice home to the mountains of North Carolina, harkening back to his traditional country influences as he croons about the familiar truths of growing up in a small town.

A late addition to the project, the uplifting “Belong” is a timely and reassuring message which Rice added during the early stages of the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. “‘Belong’ might be the most meaningful song that I’ve ever put out,” he notes of the track that seems destined for this moment in time. “My favorite line in the song is ‘where we’re going we don’t know, but we’re going there together,’ and that’s the truth, especially for these times right now.”

Rounding out the project are *The Album*’s four new tracks, bookending the year-long process Rice designed to give fans new music in a more digestible fashion. “As artists, we pour so much of ourselves into every single song,” he explains, “and we always hope that fans can connect with all of them, but they sometimes don’t get the chance when a project is 12, 15 songs long. By releasing less music more often, I wanted to try to give each song its own moment to shine.”

Spanning an extensive array of influences and musical styles, the final additions are emblematic of the wide-ranging musicality that has always been on display throughout Rice’s career. “The Nights” sees him acknowledge the difficulty of moving on, toggling between singing and speaking to emphasize his most vulnerable moments, while “Bedroom” is a sultry midtempo ode to romance and “If I Didn’t Have You” recognizes the way our loved ones push us to be the best versions of ourselves.

The final track on the project, “Drinkin’ Beer. Talkin’ God. Amen.,” was written on the back of a tour bus, just months before the world changed. For Rice, the song has become a personal anchor that chooses gratitude and happiness in a time of extreme uncertainty. “We actually wrote this one right before the pandemic, which is crazy because it’s almost like God was intervening in the song just to say, ‘Hey y’all, get ready. You’re gonna have a lot of time to sit around a fire, drink some beer and hang out with me,’” Rice says.

Ultimately, Rice hopes every listener enjoys each song for exactly what it is. Proud of his distinct path but focused most on what’s next, he is enjoying the unique gift of growing artistically while still connecting with the fans who have been there from the beginning. “Now I know what I want to say. Now I know how I want to say it. This music is by far the best music I’ve ever made,” Rice says. “Now’s our time. It’s about to get real fun.”