

Alan Jackson

Angels and Alcohol

For more than 25 years Alan Jackson's music has provided a soundtrack for American life. Whether someone is plowing a Kansas field or toiling away in a factory in an urban metropolis, Jackson's songs have chronicled the hopes, dreams and values of everyday people. Hits like "Remember When," "Drive" and "Where Were You (When the World Stopped Turning)" have become an enduring part of America's musical landscape, but Jackson's restless creative spirit won't let him sit on his considerable laurels.

With *Angels and Alcohol*, Jackson's first studio album of new music in three years, he continues to deliver the kind of insightful and thoroughly engaging songs that have long been the foundation of his successful career. From the pensive title track to the up-tempo first single, "Jim and Jack and Hank," Jackson takes the listener on an emotional journey. "I've always got my eyes and ears open for ideas, melodies and things," Jackson says. "I keep a running list of good hooks and titles, and if I have a melody that I come up with now, I just put it on my phone so I won't forget. If I get inspired by something, I'll sit down and write a whole song right away, but most of the time I just collect ideas and hooks and melodies and eventually I'll get around to writing it."

Jackson's observational skills have served him well throughout his 25-year career. The Newnan, Georgia native has sold nearly 60 million albums and released more than 60 singles with 50 landing in the top ten and 35 soaring all the way to No. 1. A member of the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame and the Grand Ole Opry, Jackson has won more than 150 industry awards, including 18 Academy of Country Music Awards, 16 Country Music Association Awards, two Grammys and ASCAP's Founders and Golden Note Awards. He also received the first-ever ASCAP Heritage Award in 2014 having earned the title of most performed country music songwriter-artist of ASCAP's first 100 years.

Among all the accolades he's earned, Jackson admits that being recognized for his songwriting means the most to him. "If I had to pick something, I'd rather them remember me for songwriting," he says of his legacy. "I've always been proud of that and I feel that's the most important part of the business. I'd like to think that my songwriting made a difference. I've had so many people tell me that my songs are the reason they moved to Nashville. I've heard that so many times and it makes me feel good that I've inspired somebody."

Angels and Alcohol comes 25 years after the release of Jackson's landmark debut album *Here in the Real World*. Since then he's released 22 albums, including two

Christmas collections, two gospel albums, three Greatest Hits packages and his highly acclaimed *The Bluegrass Album*, which included eight original songs. His commitment to the craft of songwriting continues as Jackson penned seven of the 10 songs on *Angels and Alcohol*. The lead single, “Jim and Jack and Hank” is an up-tempo break-up song with a clever lyric and infectious melody. “The girl leaves guy and this time he’s not going to be heartbroken. He says, ‘Just go out the door and take all your junk and everything. I don’t need anything. I got all I need. I got my friends Jim, Jack and Hank--- Jim Beam, Jack Daniels and Hank Williams, Sr. or Jr. or both. My mama won’t like this song I know,” Jackson admits with a grin, “but it’s a fun way of looking at that guy losing his girl and acting like he didn’t care.”

A track sure to win Mama Jackson’s approval is the opening cut “You Can Always Come Home,” penned for his three daughters. “Ali, my middle daughter, moved out to California last fall and that’s when I wrote it. It reminded me of when I moved to Nashville and didn’t know anybody. I’d call my folks at home. My mama and daddy were supportive even though they were worried about me coming up here. My daddy said, ‘You can always come home. If it doesn’t work out, you can always come home.’ I’ve always remembered that so it reminded me of Ali and that’s where that one came from.”

“You Never Know” is a buoyant country number that serves as a reminder of life’s unexpected gifts. Jackson admits the first verse draws on his memory of meeting Denise and falling in love. “That verse about the stringy blonde hair and 20-inch waist, I was thinking about her when I first met her,” he says. “‘You Never Know’ is kind of a rockabilly thing. I always liked that early George Jones rockabilly, those Carl Perkins and Jerry Lee Lewis kind of melodies. That’s what this one reminded me of. It’s a fun song about how you never know when love is going to grab a hold of you.”

“Angels and Alcohol” is a cautionary tale about the dangers of addiction and the impact it can have on relationships. “I’ve had that hook laying around for a while,” he shares. “I don’t know where I got ‘Angels and Alcohol.’ At first, I thought it sounded like an album title more than anything and I just had it laying there. One day, I sat down and tried to write it and it just came out. It’s about alcohol abuse and how it effects your whole life and relationships and dealing with your own problems. It’s just hard to do anything when that has an affect on you.”

Angels and Alcohol was produced by Keith Stegall, who has helmed every one of Jackson’s albums with the exception of 2006’s *Like Red on a Rose*, which was produced by Alison Krauss. Together they have crafted a stunning collection teaming with stone country toe-tappers and heart-tugging ballads. Adam and Shannon Wright contribute “The One You’re Waiting On,” a barroom treatise on a woman looking for love. Troy Jones and Greg Becker penned “When God Paints,”

a beautiful ballad that gets a tender reading from Jackson's rich, evocative voice. "Flaws" is a lively number about imperfections. "That song is a kind of a silly little swing thing," Jackson shares. "It's fun."

In a day and age when country music has become an interesting cornucopia of styles and influences, Jackson's brilliance lies in his consistency. Fans have always counted on him to deliver the kind of meat and potatoes country music that has enriched their lives and soothed their hard-working souls. "[During] the whole 25 years, it was about keeping it country and I've tried to do that," Jackson says. "I just wanted to make this album and for people to say, 'That's what he's done. He's kept it country.' You could probably play this next to my first album and there wouldn't be a lot of difference in song content or production. My voice was a lot higher back then. My voice has gotten deeper with age, but other than that there probably isn't much difference, and I'm proud of that."

Over the course of 25 years, Alan Jackson has kept it country and along the way he's earned the respect of his peers across all genres. He is in the elite company of Paul McCartney and John Lennon among songwriters who've written more than 20 songs that have hit No. 1. The soft-spoken Georgian is also one of the best-selling artists since the inception of SoundScan, ranking among Eminem and Metallica.

"My wife, Denise, and I still sit down and look back and think: 'What in the world? How did all this happen?'" Jackson says humbly marveling at his success. "From where we came from to come up here and have all this happen, she thinks this is divinely orchestrated. I've seen people have one or two hits and disappear, and if they are lucky, their career would last five years and that's what I was expecting. Now we are here 25 years later and I'm still able to go out and play if I want to and sell a few records. It's amazing."

Amazing! Yes. And well earned through a lot of long miles on the road and many quiet nights alone with a pen and a guitar. Alan Jackson personifies the working man's musician, a hard-working troubadour from humble roots who has risen to the top of his field. Though he might describe himself as "a singer of simple songs," Alan Jackson is so much more. He's a gentle, intelligent soul who documents the world around him and shares those observations through country music. The first 25 years have indeed been amazing, and if *Angels and Alcohol* is any indication, there's so much more to come.