

JOSH ROSS

In life, love and country music, things aren't always cut and dried. Just ask UMG Nashville/Universal Music Canada artist Josh Ross.

An emerging hit maker with more than 300 million career streams, the Platinum-certified chart-topper "Trouble" and the 2023 trophy for CCMA Breakthrough Artist of the Year behind him, the Canadian born rising star has become one of Nashville's most promising new singer-songwriter-performers, on an unconventional path of his own design.

Pairing a dark, mellow blast of modern country rock with a warm vocal rasp, heart-on-his-sleeve writing and addictive hooks that respect no borders – genre or otherwise – his new *Complicated* EP helps introduce a next-generation talent, who's anything but basic.

"For me, things can kind of go all different directions," Ross says. "Whether it's healthy or not, I'm a complicated person, and the music is all different, too. It's not straight traditional, or even rock or pop – it's complicated, and I'm not afraid to let it stand out. ... But that's just me."

Already standing out, his stateside career is now ready to boom – just five short years after arriving in Nashville. Hailed as an Artist to Watch by Spotify, Amazon Music, Pandora, *MusicRow*, the Grand Ole Opry and more, Ross has toured alongside hard-rocking superstars like Nickelback, Brantley Gilbert and Bailey Zimmerman, headlined his own sold-out run, and will take a clear step forward this summer by joining Luke Bryan's Mind of a Country Boy Tour. But even as his complicated-country style takes hold, the story behind it is far from simple.

Take his childhood in Burlington, Ontario, a Great Lakes town about an hour from U.S./Canadian border, right on the edge of suburban Toronto. An avid outdoorsman and athlete, Ross says his home is far more country than folks think, with some of the best fishing, hunting and hiking in the world just a short drive away. Likewise, he fully embraced the hard-hitting edge of bands like Guns N' Roses and Metallica as a kid, but ended up more interested in Steve Earle – the ahead-of-his-time outlaw who fused country, rock and song craft into '80s hits like "Copperhead Road," "Guitar Town" and more.

After injuries forced Ross to give up football at Ontario's Western University, his dedication shifted to music, singing karaoke in local bars and learning guitar chords on YouTube. He'd always kept a secret notebook full of semi-lyrical emotional sketches, he says, and by slowly fusing his influences together, his own fiercely independent, against-the-grain sound emerged.

By 2016 music was more important than anything else, and after finishing his degree, Ross headed to Nashville in 2019. Technically a Canadian visitor, he wasn't allowed to work, and instead scraped by on savings and odd jobs – even sleeping in his car to free up cash.

"I used to lie to my parents and tell 'em I needed money to help pay for rent, but really I used it to record music," he admits. "I definitely learned a lot those first couple years. I think it elevated me."

Living lean as his songwriting progressed, Ross signed with Universal Music Canada and dropped a series of singles like "On a Different Night," which eventually went Platinum back home. But things

changed forever with “First Taste of Gone.” Now a Platinum-certified Top 5 hit at Canadian country radio, the tortured ballad of broken hearts was different because it was the truth. And Ross knew it.

“I started to realize that I needed to write from the heart, even if makes me uncomfortable,” he explains. “That was the first time I left a songwriting room like, ‘This is me and this is what I need to say. This is what I *should* be saying.’”

Newly empowered, Ross followed up with the confessional “Trouble” in 2023, rising to #1 in Canada and gathering over 70 million global streams before he teamed up with UMG Nashville and the label launched it as his debut U.S. single. A shadowy, emotional mix of minor chords and his distinct vocal, Ross co-wrote the track with Mason Thornley, inspired by his early days in Nashville burning the candle at both ends.

Seeing the writing on the wall, the song was like a call for help from a guy at a confusing crossroads – both living out his dreams and headed down a dark road. A duality which proved all too relatable.

“For me, I would not have picked any other song to be the first identifying song for me,” Ross says. “It’s the most honest song I had released up until now, and watching what it does for other people? Some of the stories I hear are heartbreaking, but it’s really nice to feel like your music helps heal.”

After helping Ross earn his CCMA Breakthrough Artist of the Year honor, the tune now leads a *Complicated* EP that never shies from the difficult truth. Produced by Matt Geroux, the set was recorded in hands-on-style, with Ross co-writing seven of eight tracks, deeply invested in each note. Power chords and thundering drums meet steel guitars and the melodies of heartland pop, as Ross’ rich vocal rasp explores a season of life that wasn’t always pretty.

True to life tracks like “Single Again” find the rising star taking a romantic shot. Ross co-wrote the song with Joe Fox and Brad Remple about running into an old crush and offering to sweep her off her feet, pairing sonic edge with a shot of optimism that is soon to be a chart-climbing single.

Elsewhere, the title track “Complicated” combines beats and wide-open vocals with a neon-lit tale of good things going to waste – an anthem Ross says reminds him of “The Weeknd meets country pop,” and a great example of his multi-faceted approach.

Others like the emotional ballad “Truck Girl” capture the sinking desperation of watching your relationship break down for good, and while “Tell Me A Lie” stands as a slow groove about holding on to what’s already gone (the first outside cut Ross has ever recorded), the weary “She Don’t Smoke” calls out the lies of a toxic relationship – one that’s just too hard to quit.

Meanwhile, “Burn Back” is a roots-pop banger that aims to rekindle an old flame. With “Matching Tattoos,” Ross finishes on a reflective note. Hinting back to the honesty on “First Taste of Gone,” it’s a revealing piano ballad with a deep-cutting vocal, laced with real-life details of road trip to Key West, and the complicated memory of what could have been.

Like puzzle pieces, each track helps show the nuanced artist and performer Ross is, and where he’s headed. It might not be a simple straight line, but he likes it that way.

“I always like to say the songs are where I’m at in my life, and I think this project is like that,” Ross says. “I want to keep people on their toes.”