



LUKE BRYAN

Listen to Luke Bryan talk, and the natural twang in his voice tells you he's from as deep into the rural South as a young man can be. Listen to Luke Bryan sing, and the true-as-dirt details tells you he writes about who he is and what he knows.

This Capitol Records Nashville artist is a straight-up, down-home country boy, and his music makes that as clear as a sunny day on his family's Georgia peanut farm.

"Even my friends in Nashville laugh sometimes at how country I am," says the strapping singer-songwriter in his good-natured drawl. "I've lived in Nashville now for more than four years, but I'm still adjusting to it because I can't do the things I've done my whole life. I go stir crazy, because I can't just walk out my door and go fishing or hunting or do something outdoors."

He grew up in Leesburg, Georgia—"It's 100 miles north of the Florida border, 100 miles East of the Alabama border and in the middle of nowhere," Luke says. The town didn't get its first traffic light until two years ago, after he had left. Back home, he'd helped his father with his peanut and fertilizer businesses while playing sports and enjoying the great outdoors.

But everyone in Leesburg knew Luke loved to sing. He can remember his mother urging him to belt out George Strait songs over and over while she drove him into town to shop. By age 14, his parents bought him an Alvarez guitar. By 15, he'd become so good at entertaining his family that his father would take him down to a nearby club, Skinner's, where he shared guitar licks and lead vocals with other local country singers.

"Country music is all I've ever listened to and all I know," Luke says. "I could name a hundred influences like—Conway Twitty, Alan Jackson, George Strait, Hank Williams Jr."

At age 16, two local songwriters who'd enjoyed some success providing tunes for Nashville artists invited him to join their twice-a-week writing sessions at a local church. By that time, Luke led his own band, playing at Skinner's and various community events.

Encouraged by everyone who heard him play, Luke planned to move to Nashville after high-school graduation. Supported by his family, he was loading his car for the move when tragedy struck. His older brother Chris, Luke's biggest supporter and one of his best friends, was killed in an auto accident the day Luke was to leave town.

"That shut down all plans to move," Luke says. "The only thing on my mind was being with my family."

He continued to devote himself to music, finding escape and emotional release in its songs. He poured his feelings into his songwriting, and after enrolling in Georgia Southern University, Luke and his band would perform nearly every weekend on campus or at nearby clubs or parties. He eventually recorded an album of 10 songs, nine of which he'd written.

Despite everyone's encouragement, he stubbornly refused to reconsider moving to Tennessee. After graduation, he went to work for his father's agriculture business. Luke loved the work, but a year into it, his father took him for a drive. "Look, your heart is in your music," his father told him. "It's what you were meant to do. You either quit this job and move to Nashville, or I'm going to fire you."

Luke accepted the challenge. He moved to Nashville on Sept. 1, 2001. Within two months, he'd signed a publishing deal with a company owned by the famed songwriter Roger Murrah. Luke spent time honing his material, building up a catalog of songs that were undeniable—and built wholly around his own personality and down-home point of view. When Capitol Records heard his new songs, they signed him on the spot. "It was wonderful. All of my dreams and wishes came together right then and there in that room."

"All told, I'm glad I waited a little while before moving to Nashville," he says. "Not only am a better writer and singer with a lot more performing experience, but I've also lived a lot more. I know what it feels like to hurt, to fall in love, to have your heart broken, and to miss someone. I've also learned what a country audience likes and what songs of mine they respond to the most. I'm ready."

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