



HUNTER HAYES

The Country Music Association's choice as the best New Artist of 2012 earned his trophy because of his intense, single-minded dedication to his music.

Hunter Hayes works at his craft virtually every waking hour. In his world, there are no days off. There are no hobbies or outside interests. Everything is focused on musical self-improvement.

"With me, it's always going to be music," he states. "That's the one thing I know. That is my thing. That is my place. I make music because it's the only way I can breathe. This is how I want to spend the rest of my life."

His laser-like focus has resulted in an album that is the talk of the country-music community. He wrote or co-wrote all of the songs on Hunter Hayes. He co-produced it. He sings all the vocals, and he plays all of the 30-some instruments heard on the record.

The barn-burning "Storm Warning" became the collection's debut Gold Single. His gripping ballad "Wanted" soared to No. 1 and is quickly nearing Double Platinum status, lilting, groove-soaked "Somebody's Heartbreak" has become the album's third major hit – becoming a Top 30 hit in only two weeks and was most added week of release.

Whether mournful on a ballad like "Rainy Season" or passionately upbeat? on a tempo tune such as "Love Makes Me," his performances on Hunter Hayes are consistently engaging. The airy "If You Told Me To," bluesy and aggressive "More Than I Should," softly persuasive "What You Gonna Do" and lightly wry "Everybody's Got Somebody But Me" showcase various aspects of the gifted tunesmith.

The album's textures range from the stately, thoughtful "Cry with You" to the upbeat yet philosophical "Faith to Fall Back On" or the sadly resigned "All You Ever." Although Hunter Hayes is only 21 years old, these are the songs of a proverbial "old soul."

Despite his youth, he already has a lifetime of musical experience. The Louisiana native began picking up various instruments when he was only two years old. At age four, he joined his first band. He took his accordion on stage and sang "Jambalaya" with Hank Williams Jr. that year, too. At age six, he was cast in the Robert Duvall

film The Apostle. The actor gave Hayes his first guitar. Hunter recorded his first album when he was nine and his second at the age of 10.

"Being an only child absolutely helped," he says of his extraordinarily youthful development. "I credit a lot to that. It gave me more time to be alone and spend more time with the art.

"I won't say I grew up faster, but I definitely got into what I wanted to do quicker because I had to. Music was all I had. And my parents did everything they could to support me. They learned a business they knew nothing about, just so that I could make music. I was surrounded by positive energy all the time."

Hunter Hayes spent his early teenage years playing shows and making two more albums. That is also when he began to develop as a songwriter.

"At school, I was a quiet kid. I was really shy. My safe zone was music. In writing music, I had my friend, the one thing that would never let me down. Writing songs was like me keeping a journal. I really took it seriously when I realized how powerful of a tool it was and how much I needed it.

"I spent a lot of time in my little studio that I built at our house. I spent so much time there that I neglected going out or hanging out. I skipped all the parties. I skipped the prom every year because it always fell on a date when I had a gig to play.

"I voluntarily skipped out on a lot. I was working on song demos. That was the one thing that was going really well. I was going to give every minute to it that I possibly could."

During his high-school years, his parents began taking him on trips to Nashville. Gradually, a team of supportive entertainment-industry insiders began to form around the youngster in Music City. He found interest from a manager, a song publisher, a record label and a producer during those trips. When his mother found out about a correspondence course that her son could take to complete his senior year, the family moved to Nashville in 2008.

"I made a promise to myself that as soon as I finished that course, I was going to write at least a song a week," Hayes recalls. "In fact, that first week, I wrote a song every day. As soon as I finished that course, I was in the song-publishing office at least once a week, writing with somebody."

Songs About Nothing, an independent record he played all the instruments on himself, was an example he used with Atlantic Records and producer Dann Huff that he could "do it all" on his debut major-label effort.

"Songs About Nothing was kind of my sales pitch to say, 'I know it's a leap of faith, but this proves that it can be done. This proves that

technologically, it's possible. Time-wise, it's feasible. And creatively, it might actually be a good idea.'

"I was asking a major label to give me a budget to make a record by myself, with Dann Huff. Dann even took a little while to warm up to the idea. But to his credit, and to everyone's credit, everybody was open-minded, positive about it and optimistic. I think everybody's mindset was, 'Why not try it? Let's see if it works.'

"We went in and did four songs. I played them 'Storm Warning,' and they went, 'We like this. It's got a cool sound. We should just keep doing it this way.' And so that's what we did."

When "Storm Warning" appeared as the debut Hunter Hayes single, Taylor Swift chose him as her opening act. So did Rascal Flatts, to whom Hayes gave his song "Play."

Since the release of Hunter Hayes, the singer-songwriter has embarked on a blitzkrieg of television appearances. He has sung on The Late Show with David Letterman, Good Morning America, Late Night with Jimmy Fallon, The Talk, E! News and The Ellen DeGeneres Show. One highlight was his appearance on the ABC-TV special The CMA Music Festival: Country's Night to Rock, performing "Wanted" surrounded by 50,000 fans.

"It was nerve wracking, but when I was singing and the people around me were singing my song back to me, that was one of those moments. I was like, 'This is, apparently, working.' Then when 'Wanted' went to No. 1, that was another one. Getting announced as the opening act on the Carrie Underwood tour was definitely a big moment for me. I sold out my first theater show this year. That was a big deal to me, too."

Along the way, he also picked up a Teen Choice Award as the Male Country Artist of the Year, earned a No. 1 video with "Wanted," won a BMI songwriting award for "Storm Warning" and was a nominee at both the Academy of Country Music Awards and the CMT Music Awards. He was also chosen to sing the National Anthem at a New Orleans Saints game. Now comes Hunter Hayes Live, an EP that captures his style as an on-stage entertainer.

"There's an energy that happens live. That's where I'm most myself. There is nothing as honest as my live performance. That is what I live for every day.

"When I get on stage, that's my home. That's my element, and I'm not shy anymore. That's where I'm comfortable. Getting to play live every night, that's what I've always dreamed about.

"I'm blessed beyond belief."

