

The true measure of an artist lies beyond the milestones and the hardware. Joe Nichols, of course, has plenty of both. But to create a true legacy, an artist requires something more—authenticity. Joe Nichols established that he possessed this intangible quality from the moment his debut singles were released -- back to back #1 hits that got the attention of music fans and critics alike. Even legends like George Jones and Merle Haggard have given Joe their public seal of approval, adding real luster to accomplishments that reflect the respect he has earned across the board:

--New artist awards from the Country Music Association, Billboard, Radio & Records, Music Row magazine and the Academy of Country Music, which jump-started his incredible career;

--Four Grammy nominations, a CMA Album of the Year nomination, and a New York Times Best-Albums-of-the-Year nod;

--Multiple RIAA platinum and gold albums and singles;

--And a stream of hits, including chart-toppers like "The Impossible," "Brokenheartsville," "Tequila Makes Her Clothes Fall Off," and "Gimmie That Girl," and Top Ten smashes like "If Nobody Believed In You," "What's A Guy Gotta Do," "Size Matters," and "I'll Wait For You," that made all the rest possible.

All those accomplishments are fired by the passion for excellence Joe brings to what he does, and it's a passion the artist brings in spades to each album he does.

"Yes, this is about commercial success," he says, "but if you want to make something that lasts, it's about art too. On every album, we're looking for hit singles, but every time out I want to satisfy the artistic part of my soul too."

He grew up with his bank-teller mother, Robin, but spent time with his dad Mike, a long-haul trucker who played classic country at the local VFW. Riding with his dad over the road and watching him play on weekends instilled in Joe a love of Haggard, Jones, and Marty Robbins, among others. At 15, he determined to follow in his father's footsteps, and at 21, he was in Nashville, working any number of day jobs and singing at a BBQ and beer spot called Rippy's on Lower Broadway.

In 2001, two of the city's music legends, Tony Brown and Tim DuBois, chose Joe as their flagship artist on Universal South Records. By the next year, he was on top of the country singles charts, and "The Impossible" and "Brokenheartsville" amounted to a one-two debut that earned him Grammy nominations and a host of awards and also established him as one of the genre's most promising young voices. Tours with Alan Jackson and Toby Keith allowed him to prove himself as a riveting live performer, and soon the aforementioned legends were weighing in on Joe's place as their heir apparent.

"It's a wonderful thing," says Joe, "for the legends, the guys who are my heroes, to give me any kind of props. For them to say, 'This guy's got something we like' makes me feel great, like I've done something important. I have always tried to pick the best songs I could find; songs the listener could appreciate and maybe relate to."

To Joe, country songs are little slices of everyday life—the good and the bad, the lighthearted and the sorrowful. Through the years, he established himself as one of country music's best judges of material.

In addition to his hits, his albums are loaded with strong material--he recorded "Who Are You When I'm Not Looking" long before Blake Shelton turned it into a smash. In fact, he says, "The one thing I see in looking at the greatest hits album is that it's incomplete. There's so much more I want to do and so much more I have done. There are a lot of songs that were never released as singles that mean a lot to me, a lot of really cool stuff that never got its due. Moving forward, I want to make sure the best stuff, the best moments I have, people are able to hear."

It is something his fans are looking forward to as well, and Joe is working to extend his legacy. Along the way, his movie star looks and at-ease-with-the-world personality have led him into new realms. He caught the eye of Broadway producers and recently hosted the ACM Honors show at the historic Ryman Auditorium. The wide-ranging nature of his appeal led to a few of tours of Australia, and his appreciation for the nation's service men and women took him to the Middle East.

"One of the things I have learned not only from this business, but from life in general is that you put in the time to do good work," Joe says. "I am one of the luckiest guys in the world because I love what I do. I love country music, and I don't think there will ever come a day when I won't be able to say that. Sometimes the business part of music isn't fun, but music will never be something I don't love and enjoy."