

TRACE ADKINS
Proud To Be Here

In the fifteen years since his platinum debut, Trace Adkins has released ten studio albums, three greatest hits packages, and thirty chart singles. He has also racked up four Grammy nominations and five ACM and CMT awards. Accomplishments like that – along with sales in the tens of millions – explain the respect Adkins has earned from Country fans and the industry alike.

But there's more. In recent years, Trace has made his mark as a TV and film actor, a voiceover artist, an author, a social commentator, a participant on NBC's *Celebrity Apprentice* — and even the inspiration for a series of comic books.

Along the way, Trace has endured his share of well-publicized tribulations, and the release of his latest album – *Proud To Be Here* – was marked by the same loss (and luck) that have shadowed Trace all his life. In June of 2011, as the finishing touches were being made to the album, the Nashville-area home Adkins shared with his wife and three of his five daughters was destroyed by fire. True to form, Trace thought first of his family's safety, steered the outpouring of fan support toward the Red Cross...then got back to work.

Adkins' strength, focus and passion for fully lived life infuse every bit of his new project. *Proud To Be Here* is the perfect distillation of Trace's art, displaying once again his ability to pour emotional truth into his music, whether it is of the tender or the rowdy variety. The project celebrates committed love in songs like "Million Dollar View," "That's What You Get," and "Always Gonna Be That Way," the joys of the simple life in "Days Like This" and "Poor Folks," the lighter side in "It's A Woman Thang" and "Love Buzz," and life's highest priorities in "It's Who You Know."

"There's so much on this record that's autobiographical," says the man with the soul-stirring baritone. "I draw from the best writers in town, and time after time they capture things I've experienced."

The CD's title track is a case in point.

"Chris Wallin, Aaron Barker and Ira Dean wrote that song for me," he says. "I've been close to death several times in my life, and they know me well enough to know what I've carried away from that."

Perhaps nowhere, though, do life and art come together as poignantly as they do with the project's first single, "Just Fishin'." The ode to father-daughter togetherness captures Trace's own approach to fatherhood—he taught his daughters to fish—and the video, filmed at the family's farm, where the family moved after the fire, features his youngest, Trinity.

"I think the reason she was so comfortable in the video," he says, "is because it's her place. It has been all her life. All of these people with the cameras and equipment were coming for a play day at her farm and that's the way we approached it."

In addition to the ten songs on the regular CD, fans wanting more can purchase a 14-song deluxe edition including four more tracks—two penned by Trace—or a 16-song package including those four plus two live cuts available at Target stores. The additional songs include Trace's "Semper Fi," dedicated to the Marine Corps, and "If I Was a Woman," a hilarious duet with buddy Blake Shelton, who teamed with Trace for the chart-topping "Hillbilly Bone."

For all but the first single, which was produced by Michael Knox, Trace worked with co-producers Mark Wright and Kenny Beard.

"Kenny was tireless in finding songs and in forcing me to put my nose to the grindstone, which resulted in me writing more than I would have otherwise," he says. "And once we were in the studio, he's just so much fun to work with because he loves the process and it's contagious. This was the first time I got to work with Mark in the studio, and I really liked his level of participation. He's on the musicians' side of the glass, putting himself in the center of the room, and I think that helps cement a feeling of teamwork."

The album is the latest in a career that continues to soar. With "Just Fishin'," Trace adds to a collection of hits that includes modern classics like "(This Ain't) No Thinkin' Thing," "Then They Do," "Hot Mama," "Songs About Me," "Honky Tonk Badonkadonk," "Ladies Love Country Boys" and "You're Gonna Miss This." It extends a journey that began in his hometown of Sarepta, Louisiana, and led through college football, the offshore oil fields of the Gulf of Mexico, the region's honky-tonks and finally to Nashville, where he was signed while playing in a small club in a working-class neighborhood.

His stardom, which includes membership in the Grand Ole Opry, is of the multi-media variety. He has received the fan-voted Top Video of the Year award three times on GAC, "Honky Tonk Badonkadonk" was voted #2 Video of the Decade by CMT, and Trace has been voted "Country's Sexiest Man" by the readers of Country Weekly. He has turned his entertainingly articulated views on a variety of current topics into a seat on any number of TV talk shows, and into a well-received book, *A Personal Stand: Observations and Opinions from a Freethinking Roughneck*. He has narrated any number of TV documentaries and has been a commercial spokesman for products ranging from Kentucky Fried Chicken to BC Headache Powder. The comic book character he inspired, McBain, was featured in four well-received editions.

Trace has appeared in many TV shows, including "King of the Hill" and "My Name Is Earl," and in movies ranging from 2008's "An American Carol" to 2011's "The Lincoln Lawyer." He has performed often for military personnel, including two tours through the Middle East with the USO, which has given him its Merit Award. He has taken part in an "Extreme Makeover:

Home Edition” episode that rebuilt a home for a Dallas SWAT team member badly injured in a shooting, and he has performed in honor of those who died on United Airlines' Flight 93 on 9/11. Trace raised three-quarters of a million dollars for the Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Network and is a spokesman for the Wounded Warrior Project. His charitable endeavors earned him the 2010 Artist Humanitarian Award from Country Radio Broadcasters.

Still, he knows where he is planted.

"There are times when my schedule can't accommodate both music and the rest of what I do," he says. "Would I ever focus more on that and walk away from what brought me to the dance? No. I've always chosen to stay with what I do best, and I think that's the smartest thing I can do."

His ever-growing legion of fans would surely concur.

--Rob Simbeck