

NO STRINGS ATTACHED

Country music megastar Brad Paisley isn't afraid of a little adventure that pushes him beyond his comfort zone. And his new music proves it.

By Tara Titcombe



Though he's best known as one of country music's leading men and one heckuva guitar player, Brad Paisley is also a philanthropist, author, and world traveler. Paisley has used it all as fuel for his new album, *Wheelhouse*, which he describes as "essentially the product of eleven months of free thinking." Getting adventurous, and a little uncomfortable, is a theme that runs throughout Paisley's life and his new recording — especially its first hit single, "Southern Comfort Zone."

PHOTOS (FROM LEFT) BY BEN ENOS AND JIM SHEA

It's a song about leaving the comforts of home to see and experience the world beyond one's prevailing boundaries. *I miss my Tennessee home / I can see the ways that I've grown / I can't see this world unless I go / Outside my Southern comfort zone*, sings Paisley.

The song's companion video follows the singer as he covers 10,000 miles across eight countries in eight days. "We had the whole video planned in Nashville for filming," he says. "We learned that the weather wasn't going to be great, but we had to do something because we only had one day to film before I was going to be traveling around Europe, and it was like, 'Well, duh.' So we decided just to have a camera come and follow me."

Paisley is shown in the video literally running around the streets of Europe. "Probably one of the craziest days was waking up in Norway and shooting something by the water," he says. "Then I got on the plane and landed in Paris around noon. We filmed around Paris then waited for the evening to film the Eiffel

Paisley laughs as he sums up his day: "I woke up in Norway, spent the afternoon in Paris, and ended up in Dublin."

Tower all lit up. Then I jumped on the plane to Dublin and went straight to a pub where we filmed." Paisley laughs as he sums up his day: "I woke up in Norway, spent the afternoon in Paris, and ended up in Dublin."

It's those travels and experiences that strongly influence his new music. "One of my favorite Mark Twain quotes, and one that really led me to this place and to this record, is 'Travel is fatal to prejudice and bigotry and narrow-mindedness,'" explains the singer. And an open mind is something he kept while making *Wheelhouse*.

"It's all about leaving your comfort zone," Paisley says of the album title. "It's like, what is my wheelhouse? You know, the baseball expression,

sort of what is in your strike zone, your wheelhouse." That's a common strand woven through the entire album — from the songs to the production.

After releasing nine albums, *Wheelhouse* is the first one produced by Paisley. He admits that pushing the boundaries can be a little nerve-racking. "I was a lot more nervous during the process because it felt like such a daunting task for me to produce it," he explains. "I've had an active role in previous albums but I always sort of felt like it was a process where I delegated a lot. Before the [recording] process even begins, producers do a lot of the grunt work. Then comes the moment when you finally start to cut a song, but before that there's an incredible amount of organization. I'm lucky to

have had a lot of people help me out."

Producing wasn't the only tough task for Paisley. "Not only did I set out to make something different, but I said I really wanted this to be unlike anything I'd ever done," he says. "It was really important to me that the entire process was stretching outside of a comfort zone or moving away from the norm. That was the rule for everyone involved — that we not pay attention to any walls and stretch beyond the limits."

So, what exactly do no limits sound like? "We have a lot of different sounds, from the cello to

hand claps to pots and pans," Paisley says. "The entire band dove in head first. We'd start to work on a song and they'd come in with ideas, so we'd start experimenting at like two in the morning and just go with it. In fact, a lot of what you'll hear was sung at two a.m."

From pots and pans to guest artists, the album is filled with surprises. "Every song has a little twist that you don't see coming," Paisley says. "There's a song that I do with Mat Kearney, and right at the moment you'd expect my guitar to come in, Mat comes in and starts rapping. It hits you so much stronger than any guitar solo."

While the guest-artist list is impressive, featuring



PHOTOS BY BEN ENDS (2) AND JIM SHEA (GIRAFFE)



“It was really important to me that the entire process was stretching outside of a comfort zone or moving away from the norm.”

Charlie Daniels, LL Cool J, Dierks Bentley, and others, Paisley stresses the importance of his band. “The one thing about this album is that other than the guest artists, the only thing you hear is the seven people who you see with me on stage.”

Currently, Paisley and his band are preparing to hit the road in May for their summer tour. The schedule calls for 29 shows in the U.S. and Canada, followed by more stops this fall and then a European leg. “It’s actually a lot harder in Europe than America,” Paisley explains, “because here you have the bus and you have all of your stuff right there.” In Europe, it’s one plane after another.

Sometimes you do need a small comfort zone, especially on the road. It’s also imperative to have a little fun along the way. From putting smelly cheese on Darius

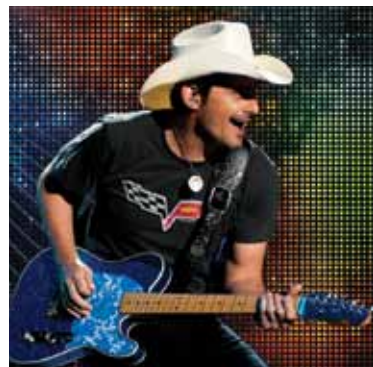
Rucker’s microphone to playing a Doodlebops video during The Band Perry’s set, Paisley’s a known prankster. He and his band even make some fun while on stage. “We have parts in the set where we improvise and goof around,” he laughs.

Overall, though, this tour is an opportunity for Paisley to present the new album — and all he’s learned along the way — to his fans. But there’s one fan in particular he’d like to share it with. “Thinking back to the guy who I was in my late twenties, as a new artist who just had my first album, it’d be interesting to see what that version of myself would think about this,” he says. “If you lay this album out for him, that kid would be shocked at how I got to this point. He’d have to know that he’s going to have experiences in life that would lead him to this. The closest way that I can get to see that, as a way to know what that would be like, would be to see it in my fans . . . because a lot of these people have come with me on this journey.”

And what an impressive journey it has been so far. With three Grammy Awards, 14 Academy of Country Music Awards, 14 Country Music Association Awards, and ten studio albums that have resulted in 21 number-one hits, Brad Paisley proves that amazing things can happen when you get a little adventurous and discover what lies outside of your comfort zone. ✦

Tara Titcombe is a Phoenix-based writer.

PORTRAIT BY JIM SHEA



ENTER THE BRAD PAISLEY WHEELS UP TO WHEELHOUSE SWEEPSTAKES

US Airways is giving one lucky passenger and a guest the ultimate summer trip. See Brad Paisley on his “Beat This Summer” tour and go backstage after the show for a personal meet and greet. For complete details and to enter this sweepstakes visit seebradwithus.com by April 30, 2013.



Wheelhouse
Available April 9th

Not only can you join Brad on tour, but you can also win other cool prizes such as an autographed guitar and Brad’s *Wheelhouse* album.

Scan QR code
below to enter



“Wheels Up To Wheelhouse” sweepstakes is open to US residents 18+ of the 48 contiguous US only. No purchase necessary to play or win a prize.