



BLAKE SHELTON

RELOADED: 20 #1 HITS

AVAILABLE OCTOBER 23

FOR YOUR **CMA VOTING CONSIDERATION**

#Your
of Voice
Choice

MALE VOCALIST OF THE YEAR

MUSICAL EVENT OF THE YEAR: "LONELY TONIGHT" FEATURING ASHLEY MONROE



Where Have All The Chart Monsters Gone?

Debating Country's 40+ No. 1s Per Year

Last year there were 42. The year before, 44. With 50 charts in a year and so many songs reaching No. 1, one label executive admits, "We've created a one-and-done culture in radio and records." In fact, the last time a song spent more than two weeks atop the Country Aircheck/Mediabase chart was more than four years ago.

For many in radio, the notion that the top song rotates almost every week is nonsensical. "When you look at other formats, when a song goes to No. 1 you know it was a hit," says one major market PD who asked not to be identified. "In Country, it may not have been. It might have been just a No. 1."

WGH/Norfolk PD Mark McKay says, "I miss the days of a song being No. 1 for six or eight weeks. 'Live Like You Were Dying' couldn't happen now." With a 10-week run at No. 1, Tim McGraw's 2004 song holds the modern-era record for weeks at the top.

As improbable as that feat seems in today's climate, it illustrates just how much the airplay landscape has shifted in the last decade. The notion that it is a problem which must be solved is not universally accepted, however. In fact, there is an argument to be made that a wide distribution of No. 1s is actually one of Country's greatest strengths.

PUSH IT REAL GOOD

First, some background. The last three-week chart-topper was Blake Shelton's "Honey Bee" in July 2011. The last four-week No. 1 was Miranda Lambert's "The House That Built Me" in 2010. Kenny Chesney's "Don't Blink" enjoyed six weeks at the pinnacle in 2007. And McGraw held for 10 in 2004. Since then ...

"Labels are growing, the number of releases is growing and everyone is looking for a slot," says BBR Music Group SVP/Promotion **Carson James**, who worked McGraw's benchmark. "We can't wait for records to go up and out so we can open one up to at least get something started."

So the churn continues. As one anonymous PD admits, "We have songs that research like a multi-week No. 1, but there is way too much music for any one station to play or expose properly."

McKay notes, "Just as the audience is getting to know a single, it's hitting No. 1. An hour later, I get a Play MPE notification about the next single, but the audience is nowhere near done with the one that's on the air."

A programmer who asked not to be named says, "The big elephant in the room is labels telling us it's 'push week.' I'll tell [promotion execs], 'I'm just waiting for you to tell me what my rotations are going to be.' Radio's problem is when you open the door and play along once, they're on you like piranhas."

McKay adds, "I'll have conversations with my record



If anyone would be shepherding multi-week No. 1s, Allen is a likely candidate with arguably the format's biggest star in Luke Bryan. But he doesn't point to any Machiavellian chart jockeying in his building. "As far as Capitol goes, it was always made clear from [CEO] Mike Dungan on down that we never tear down our own artists. If a song is there, we don't tell people to stop playing it so we can achieve another end. The best example of that is 'Need You Now,' which had Luke's 'Do I' behind it. In any

ing how songs performed on the Country, Top 40 and AC charts. Rosin noted that while Country No. 1s were in the forties (as high as 48 in 1994), Top 40 and AC typically ranged between 10 and 20 chart-toppers each year. His slides also noted that the most consecutive weeks for a No. 1 song was in general two and never more than four in Country, but the other two formats ranged from five or six to as high as 12 and even 17.

"It was a perfect storm in '99 with Larry," says Cox Country Format Leader and KCYY/San Antonio PD **Jeff**

“When you look at other formats, when a song goes to No. 1 you know it was a hit. In Country, it may not have been. It might have been just a No. 1.”

friends asking, 'Who is supposed to be landing at No. 1 this week?' It's so coordinated, at what point does the audience have anything to do with it?"

Suggestions that each week's No. 1 is already basically mapped out through the end of the year begs another question: Does country's close-knit community extend beyond the radio and records relationship to the label-to-label level?

LABEL RELATIONS

A telling question from a radio exec: "How many No. 1 battles do you see in this format? Not many."

James says it's a fair point. "In some ways we over-communicate with each other as record labels and everyone does it. 'I'm targeting this week.' We line it up." Capitol VP/Promotion **Shane Allen** agrees, but only to a point. "Nashville is by and large a close community of people who work well together, but there is a competitive spirit," he says. "If we end up going for the same week, the race is on."

other week of that year, 'Do I' would have been at No. 1. But it had to wait for the last chart of the year because 'Need You Now' was so strong."

What happens at the top of the chart is invariably influenced by what's going on below. "We're so conditioned to a slow moving chart, programmers understand it could take 20-plus weeks just to get a song going," Allen says. "Corporate initiatives change the dynamic and PDs are more patient in realizing a flat week isn't a sign that a record is over."

James agrees. "Our job is to get on the chart first, then move it up," he says. "Back in the days of multi-week No. 1s, songs were falling apart in the 20s. Sometimes that's where it starts to happen for songs now."

ROSIN REVISITED

The annual quantity of No. 1s fell precipitously in 1999 and has slowly crept back up (see sidebar page 4). One contributing factor was a presentation by Edison Research's Larry Rosin at CRS that year compar-

Garrison. "Mutt Lange got into the format and Shania's second album came out. Top 40 got into Country. Faith had a monster hit. Mediabase came online.

"Larry got [Country] to spin records more," he continues. "In 1992 [late KKBQ/Houston PD] Dene Hallam and I were one of the first to spin a country record 60 times. Now they're spinning 80-90 times. The average used to be 35 for heavy; now it's 60."

Whatever factors were in play, later that same year (1999) Lonestar's "Amazed" spent nine weeks atop the airplay chart. Working records in that environment came to include considerations for multiple weeks at No. 1. "Most of the time it was about how a song looked going into the top 10," James says. "Is it going in like a lamb or a lion? 'Live Like You Were Dying' went to the top six weeks before I predicted. It tested so fast and it was a perfect storm - he was at the peak of his career, it was the first single from a new album everyone wanted to hear and everyone knew what he'd been through with his father passing. It's a different playing field now. You have to be pragmatic and realistic."

Where Have All The Chart Monsters Gone?

IMPACT WEAK?

That more practical approach and its resultant “paper No. 1s,” as one PD calls them, may have unintended consequences. “It is potentially a disservice to the listener if they’re not always hearing the best music on the radio,” another programmer says. “Depending on how you program, you might be putting something into power because it’s ‘their week’ when the song might not be ready. Conversely, a song that might be ready, you’re holding off on because you’re wondering if you can keep it in power long enough to support the No. 1 push.”

McKay points out, “For people who have a total commute time of 30-45 minutes a day, they might hear a power song once a week. So just as it’s hitting the tipping point, the follow-up comes in. [Moving on to the new song] is a bad business decision.”

Not to mention potential long-term effects. “How many of these songs are we going to be playing in gold?” McKay asks. “It’s not a knock on the songs – the audience just didn’t get to know them. It’s especially true with superstars, whose records move so fast.”

Back to Luke Bryan, whose songs move as quickly as anyone’s. He hasn’t had a six-week No. 1, but he did have a record six No. 1s from his last album. “Having the ability to expose more music is never a bad thing,” Allen says. “Luke is fortunately at a point where a 13-week No. 1 and out is still getting significant airplay while another song is cycling in. The more music you can expose from a superstar, the better. And if you can’t get the new single on because the PD still has the last one in power, that’s a good problem to have.”

Allen also contends that the peak position itself is one of a group. “If a song is of the ilk to even be in the top five, it has to be something the audience wants to hear to some degree,” he says. “Whether or not the one-week shot at No. 1 is the best reflection of that song is a completely different question.”

Speaking of songs in the top rotation, Garrison noticed another related phenomenon this year. “For the first time in I don’t know how long, I’ve had five heavies who are relatively unknown artists,” he says. “We’ve launched more artists this year than I’ve ever seen.”

INCONVENIENT TRUTH

While the chart churn strikes many as problematic, the inconvenient truth is that country music and Country radio have arguably never been hotter. In fact, if you were to overlay some representation of country’s popularity with the last 25 years of chart data at right, the argument could be made that lots of No. 1s that are inclusive of lots of artists help the format rather than hurt it.

Considering Country has nowhere else to turn to find developing artists (as Top 40 and AC do), perhaps frequent No. 1s and exposure for more artists creates a diversity that was missing in the relatively fallow early 2000s of massive but predominately AC-leaning hits.

“There’s a hunger for country as a whole right now,” Allen says. “Companies are flipping to the format in the biggest cities, and in a song-driven format consumers are ready for a lot of new music. I have conversations all the time with programmers who don’t have room for all the songs they want to play.”

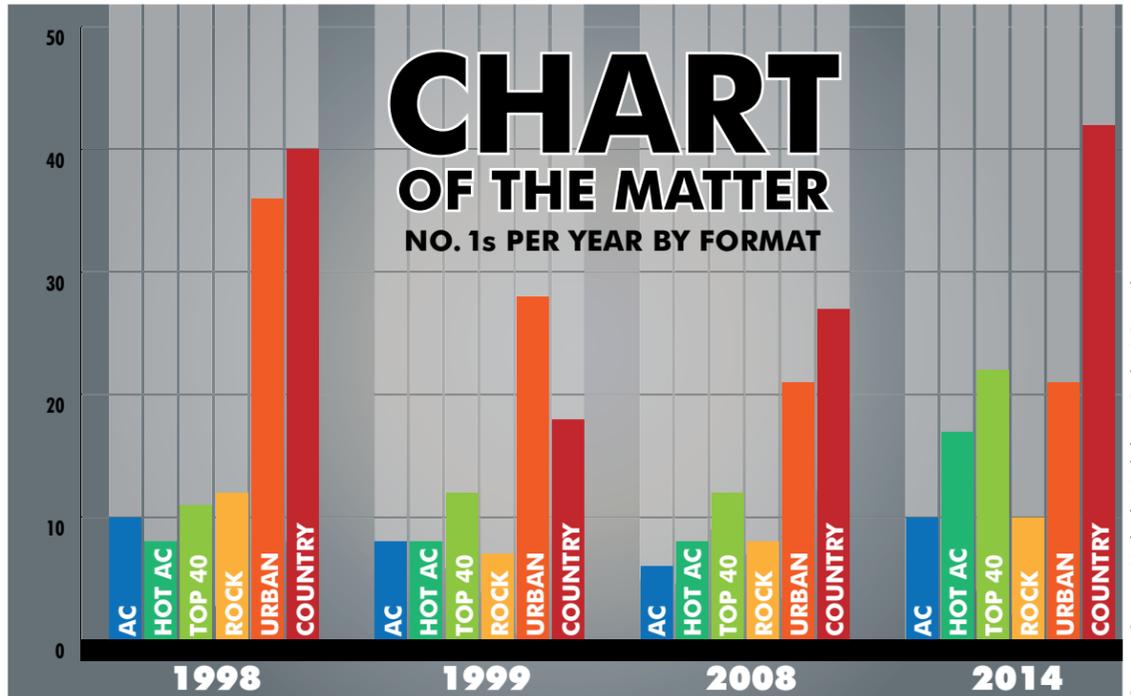
“We’ve gotten the best music we’ve had in a long time in the last 20 months,” Garrison agrees. “In some ways, we’re just moving through the biggest stars/hits as fast as we can.”

To Garrison’s early point, this year’s launches may be tomorrow’s headliners. “To have the opportunity to expose so many artists so quickly – this gold rush may be creating the superstars of tomorrow,” Allen says. “That’s a lot of diversity and a great thing in the long term.”

TO DO LIST

Close working relationships and rapid No. 1 turnover may be to country’s benefit, as long as radio doesn’t let that supersede audience preference. “I go back to the line in *Jerry Maguire*. It’s not show friends, it’s show business,” McKay says. “The artist or promotion person might be a great friend to the station, but if a song is going to hurt us, we have to be careful.”

“Every station no matter what the chart says has to make the best decision for their market,” Garrison concludes. “Play the big songs, do what the audience loves and control your own radio station.” **CAC**



Source: Country Aircheck, Mediabase, Radio & Records.

CLIMB WAVE

Artists, labels and PDs aren’t the only ones paying attention. Nashville’s creative community is dialed in as well ... for obvious reasons. “No doubt, everyone in the loop wants to go to No. 1,” says BMG Exec. VP **Kos Weaver**. “Having a No. 1 song is a very important marker for not only an artist, but a songwriter, promotion department, a label, a publisher. They create a certain amount of press that isn’t there for a No. 2 song.”

PJM/Songs Partner **Pat Higdon** says even though multi-week No. 1s would be great, what’s on his mind is, “Are we getting enough spins to make enough money over the cumulative life of a record? Sometimes those records that hang in for 40 weeks and only go up for one make a lot of money because they are being spun a lot. Those spins add up to performance dollars. If you get No. 1s that were pushed up real quick and don’t stay around, you’re not getting that.”

Higdon, who’s been in the music industry since the mid-’70s, has had a hand in many multi-week No. 1s, including Faith Hill’s “Breathe,” co-written by Higdon’s then-Universal Music Publishing writer **Stephanie Bentley**, who’s now with Fru Fru Music. “Breathe” topped the Country chart for four weeks in 2000 and was a 16-week AC No. 1.

“I’ve had many cuts since then,” says Bentley, “but none that have quite done that. It has continued to be a blessing.”

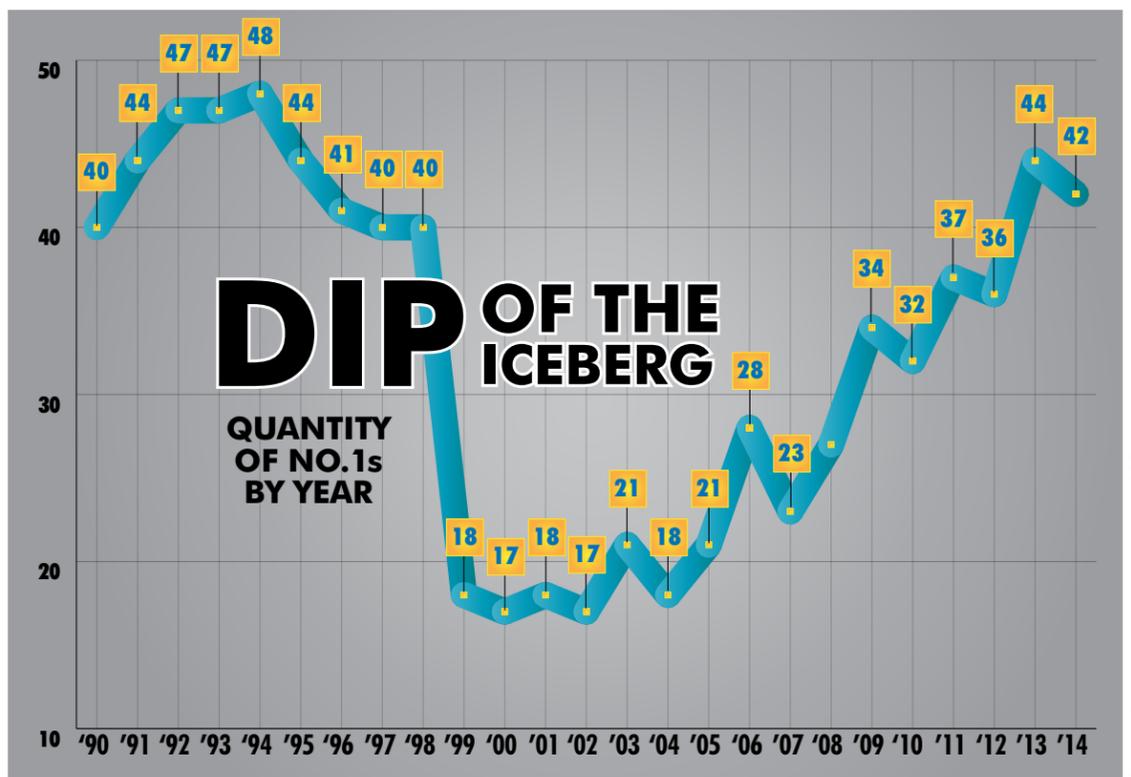
When she’s in the writing room Bentley says chart position isn’t at the forefront, but ... “We do talk about these things because it’s our business. It’s what feeds my babies, pays for my house and puts food on the table.”

Big Machine Music writer **Jonathan Singleton**’s most recent No. 1 was Tyler Farr’s “A Guy Walks Into A Bar,” which spent more than 40 weeks on the chart. His “Red Light” (David Nail) did 48 on its way to No. 1. “You get paid more the longer they’re on the chart,” he says. “But you’re not getting paid much if you’re sitting at 50 for four months.”

As for how the current chart churn affects artists, Singleton guesses it depends on whether you’re new or a superstar. “Keith Urban and those guys have to have five or six singles lined up for a record. Some of the other guys, they get one or maybe two because it takes so long for them to move up the charts. And by that time, that record feels old.”

“As songwriters, I don’t know if we have any answers,” adds Singleton. “We’re just trying to figure out what the next thing is.”

Part of figuring it out has Weaver talking to labels and managers during a chart run. And a promotion team’s batting average may be discussed when it comes time to pitch songs. “Friends in promotion will ask me from time to time, ‘How’s the community feeling about our efforts?’” Weaver says. “They care about what we think [and] it’s definitely something that gets talked about. These individuals can do great things with our songs, so it’s a consideration when you’re talking about where you’re going with your music.”



Source: Country Aircheck, Mediabase, R&R

Volume 10, Issue 3, September 2015

COUNTRY AIRCHECK

914 18th Avenue, South
Nashville, TN 37212
615-320-1450

Publisher/CEO
Lon Helton
lon@countryaircheck.com

VP/GM
Chuck Aly
chuck@countryaircheck.com

VP/Sales & Marketing
April Johnson
april@countryaircheck.com

Managing Editor
Wendy Newcomer
wendy@countryaircheck.com

Radio Editor
Russ Penuell
russ@countryaircheck.com

Associate Radio Editor
Jess Wright
jess@countryaircheck.com

Manager/Graphics & Administration
Kelley Hampton
kelley@countryaircheck.com

Coordinator/Graphics & Circulation
Shelby Farrer
shelby@countryaircheck.com

Art Direction
Jerry Holthouse
jerry@countryaircheck.com

#1 **Billboard** COUNTRY ALBUM DEBUT

AARON WATSON

GETAWAY TRUCK

"Watson is that rare kind of artist, like Macklemore, who builds up enough notoriety as an independent entity that the public is forced to take notice"

theguardian

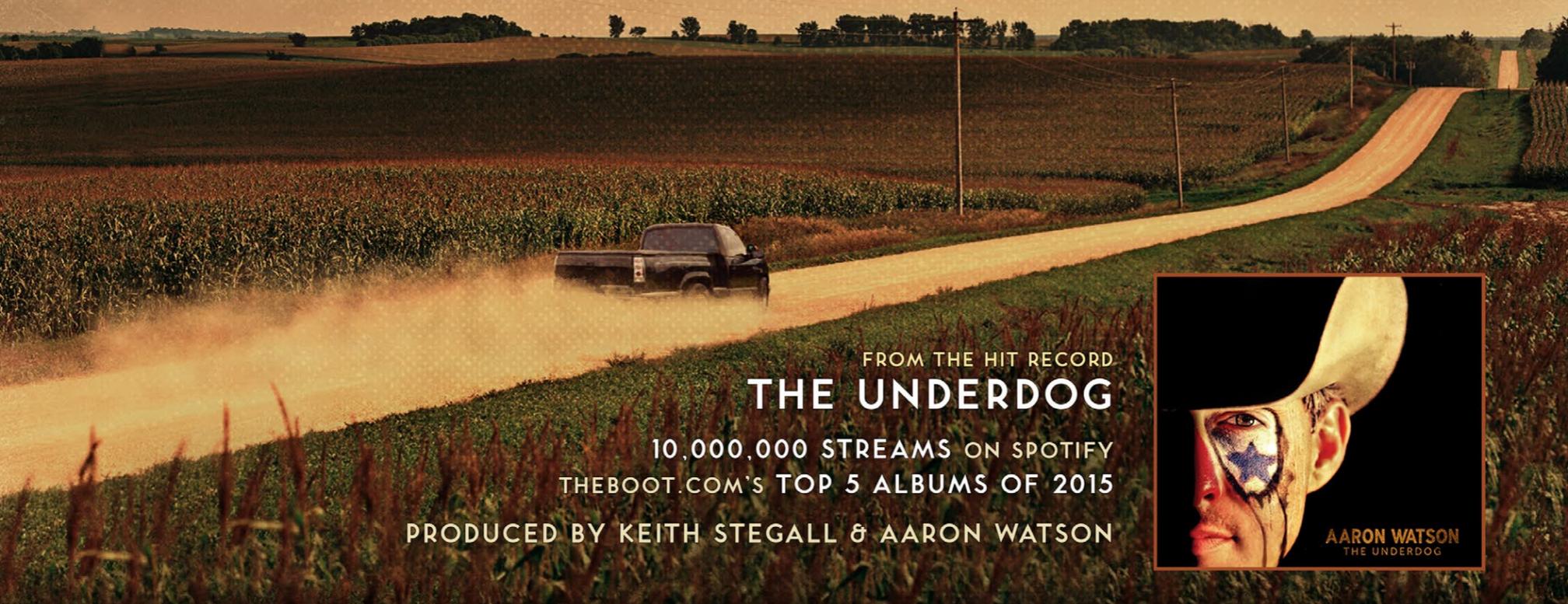
"A proud country traditionalist"
The New York Times

"If you take a chance on one new artist this year, make it Watson."

TASTE OF COUNTRY

"Aaron Watson puts bite back into traditional country"

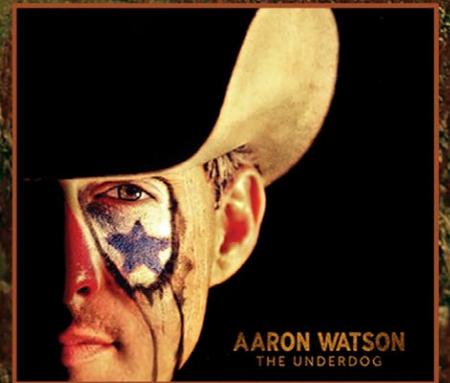
Rolling Stone COUNTRY



FROM THE HIT RECORD
THE UNDERDOG

10,000,000 STREAMS ON SPOTIFY
THEBOOT.COM'S TOP 5 ALBUMS OF 2015

PRODUCED BY KEITH STEGALL & AARON WATSON



140 HEADLINE DATES / 36 STATES / 150,000 HARD TICKETS



SALT LAKE CITY, UT



BOISE, ID



CORONA, CA



PHOENIX, AZ



SIOUX FALLS, SD



NASHVILLE, TN



WASHINGTON, DC



AUSTIN, TX

AARONWATSON.COM

@AaronWatsonMusic
319,500 likes

@Aaron_Watson
80,000 followers

@Aaron_Watson
92,000 followers

@Aaron Watson
67,000 fans

PAMELA J. NEWMAN / VP Promotion & Artist Development / 615 356-0535 / PamelaJNewman@ThirtyTigers.com

DENISE ROBERTS / National Director of Promotion / 818 679-5479 / DeniseRoberts@ThirtyTigers.com

KEN RUSH / Regional Director of Promotion / 214 616-3047 / Ken@ThirtyTigers.com



WARNER MUSIC

PRESENTS THE BREAK

MICHAEL RAY

THE ONLY SOLO MALE WITH A
#1 DEBUT SINGLE IN 2015

“KISS YOU IN THE MORNING” SET
THE HIGHEST ONE WEEK SPIN
TOTAL IN MEDIABASE HISTORY

FEATURED ON ABC'S
GOOD MORNING AMERICA,
NIGHTLINE AND USA TODAY'S
“ON THE VERGE”

JOINING THE FALL 2015 KIP
MOORE “WILD ONES” TOUR

NEW SINGLE
“REAL MEN LOVE JESUS”
FROM THE SELF-TITLED
DEBUT ALBUM
IMPACTING NOW

ARTIST DEVELOP

IC NASHVILLE

OUT ARTISTS OF 2015



**CHRIS
JANSON**

**“BUY ME A BOAT”
THE 2015 SONG OF THE SUMMER!**

RIAA CERTIFIED GOLD SINGLE

**TOP 10 SELLING
SONG OF THE YEAR**

**110 GRAND OLE OPRY
PERFORMANCES**

**JOINING THE 2015
LUKE BRYAN
“FARM TOUR”**

**DEBUT
FULL LENGTH
STUDIO ALBUM
AVAILABLE
OCTOBER 30**



MENT IS THE KEY

DALLAS SMITH

KIDS WITH CARS

The first single from his
forthcoming debut album

Produced by Joey Moi



JAMES OTTO

SOMEWHERE TONIGHT

The new single from the voice that brought you
"JUST GOT STARTED LOVING YOU" and
the co-writer of "IN COLOR."

