

Blake Shelton Brings His Authentic Country Sound to Water Festival



Blake Shelton's profile has never been higher. His star turn on "Clash of the Choirs," the smash NBC miniseries, brought both his musical mastery and his offbeat wit, which fans usually only glimpse through songs like "Ol' Red" and "Some Beach" to a rapt nationwide audience. "I tell you," he says, "flying up to New York City to film was a lot easier than flying back home as far as being stopped at the airport and people wanting to shake your hand and wanting pictures, and I guess that's just the power of television."

One of the interesting dichotomies in Blake's life is the space between the skewed and fun-loving personality millions fell in love with during "Clash of the Choirs" and songs that display a serious side.

"Maybe I just get all of that stuff out of my system through music," he says, "because I'm pretty much a happy guy. I'm probably not the most lovable guy in the world either, but for whatever reason I'm able to channel that through my music and it works."

The channeling he has done with his latest single, "Home," (originally recorded by Michael Buble) gives fans another chance to appreciate the romantic side that is such a key part of "Pure BS," Shelton's new album whose key word, musically at least, is "pure."

Traditional-minded but produced with a contemporary edge, "Pure BS" perfectly showcases Shelton as a powerful and expressive vocalist while also showing off his impressive songwriting skills on three of the tracks.

To get that "pure" sound, Shelton pushed himself harder than ever before as a singer and as a writer and stepped out of his comfort zone in the studio to work with some first rate producers who pushed him even more. The end result, Shelton believes, is his best album to date, and one that has already spawned the hit singles "Don't Make Me" and "The More I Drink."

In addition to his longtime collaborator, Bobby Braddock, Shelton worked with producers Brent Rowan and Paul Worley on his new CD, an experience that proved to be fruitful. In the end, Braddock and Rowan each produced four of the album's tracks, and Worley helmed three. But the finished CD reveals that all three producers shared the same vision.

That vision sprang from the "Barn & Grill" album, which featured Shelton's hit remake of Conway Twitty's "Goodbye Time." When that song became a single, the artist says people frequently told him "I didn't know you could sing like that." Those comments inspired him to "showcase what I can do vocally a little more" on "Pure BS."

While he says the "hard times, broken heart, drinking songs" are still where he's vocally the most comfortable, Shelton and his producers also looked for songs that, he says, "pushed me to sing better and to see how far my range could go."

Shelton's new producers pushed him to "try new things and see what's still inside me that I haven't tapped into yet." And sure enough, he says, "I did find more of myself that I didn't know was there. I had to dig down deeper and be uncomfortable again with somebody that I didn't know that well in the studio and feel like I had something to prove to that person. I didn't really know what would happen when I went in the studio with them, but man, I couldn't be more thrilled with the stuff we made together."

For Shelton, 2006 was a time of personal and professional changes. He and his wife

amicably divorced and Shelton moved back to his home state of Oklahoma, declaring Nashville a place where he “could never get totally comfortable. It’s just way too big for me.” On the professional side, Shelton joined forces with veteran manager Narvel Blackstock, who also handles the career of Reba McEntire, and his son, Brandon Blackstock.

After a difficult year, Shelton can relate to every song on “Pure BS,” saying they’re all “pretty much where I am as a person right now. It’s not that bad of a place. I’ve been through some tough times but . . . I feel good right now. I want to sing about a lot of those things I’ve gone through and a lot of those emotions. That’s what’s going to help me come through a better person on the other side.”

As an artist, Shelton has shown steady growth and momentum since his impressive 2001 debut, which earned him the title of Radio & Records magazine’s breakthrough country artist that year. His hits run the gamut from the sweet sentiments of “Austin,” and “The Baby” through Shelton’s powerful take on “Goodbye Time” and on to the hilarious “Some Beach” and the wildly original prison break story song, “Ol’ Red.”

The collection of songs on “Pure BS” is equally diverse, ranging from “She Can’t Get That” – a cheating song with a twist – to the funny “The More I Drink,” in which alcohol turns the song’s character into “the world’s greatest lover and a dancing machine.” Among the album’s other standout tracks are a remake of the edgy Chris Knight/Craig Wiseman song “It Ain’t Easy Being Me,” and the sing-along anthem “The Last Country Song,” which features guest vocals from two of Shelton’s all-time heroes, John Anderson and George Jones. Shelton and Braddock wrote “The Last Country Song” with Michael Kosser. The lyrics, while largely about farmland giving way to development, also reference Anderson’s classic song “Swingin’” and Jones’ signature song “He Stopped Loving Her Today.”

“What I love about that song is the statement it makes not only about America, but about country music, about how what a lot of us have gotten comfortable with and used to and love about country music is going away,” Shelton says of the track. “It’s changing, and whether it’s for better or for worse there’s no stopping it.”

As his success has grown, Blake has been consistent in giving back. He is looking forward to hosting this year’s third annual Raindance charity event, a concert and festival that includes team roping and an archery competition and raises money for Oklahoma disaster victims. This year’s event has moved from Blake’s hometown of Ada to Oklahoma City, and it promises to add richly to the hundreds of thousands of dollars raised so far for victims of flooding, ice storms and wildfires, among other disasters.

Despite all his professional achievements, Shelton has a unique vision for what will ultimately define his success as an artist.

“I will never stop looking for that next level of my career and how to get there, but not for the reasons that a lot of people want to get there,” he says. “I’m not chasing a dollar and I’m not trying to be the king of the mountain. I want to be that guy who, when some old guy is driving down a back road somewhere 20 years from now, he still has one of my old CDs that he’s been listening to all that time. I want to make those albums that [last] forever that people never throw away. When they break it they go buy another one because I sing songs that they really relate to and my music means something to them. That’s what I’m chasing.”

Blake Shelton will perform a Concert in the Park at the 53rd Annual Beaufort County Water Festival on Saturday, July 12th. The opening act will be the Chuck Courtenay Band. The concert begins at 8pm and tickets are \$25. For more information, visit www.bftwaterfestival.com