

Collin Raye *Scars* bio

Collin Raye has always been a great storyteller and he's built a multi-platinum career bringing interesting characters to life. Who can forget the struggling alcoholic in "Little Rock" or the devoted couple celebrated in "Love, Me?" On his new album *Scars*, Raye is once again wrapping his distinctive voice around a compelling collection of tunes, but this time in addition to writing nearly every song on the 14-track set, Raye has also embarked on a new musical direction and has enlisted Miranda Lambert, Vince Gill and the Black Keys Dan Auerbach to join the journey.

"I'd thought about doing an Americana record for years because, to me, Americana means no rules," Raye says. "Americana is kind of country, kind of bluegrass, kind of folk, kind of R&B. It's anything you want it to be. I thought how fun would that be to make a record knowing that cut number one can sound totally different than cut number two and cut number three, number four, etc. And that's exactly what I set out to do."

Working with producer David "Fergie" Ferguson (Johnny Cash, John Prine, Sturgill Simpson), *Scars* is Raye's first album of all new music in over a decade. It's a bold musical manifesto that sees the veteran hitmaker delivering an eclectic set filled with memorable stories and engaging melodic textures. "Fergie and I talked about it and I said, 'I want it to be just really different. I want there to be songs on there that sound like Collin Raye and what you might expect, but I want there to be stuff that no one would expect as well,'" Raye says. "The more we talked about it, he said, 'I really don't want to cut anything that you didn't write.' And I was like, 'Wow! Really?'"

As a result, Raye wrote or co-wrote 12 of the 14 tracks on *Scars*. There are only two outside cuts and they came from the pen of his brother Scotty Wray (the original spelling of the family surname). "Most of the stuff I wrote was new, written just for this record, and for that reason, I'm extremely proud of it because it's very personal to me," says the 10-time Male Vocalist of the Year nominee (ACM and CMA). "Instead of just being the singer of someone else's words, I'm the singer of my own words. I've always liked writing, but I was never prolific. I was never one of those guys who wrote two or three times a week. If you look at my Sony albums, I would always have one or two cuts on there, but I never wrote half or more of an album so this was a definite turn for me. I had to really work for this, roll my sleeves up and prove to myself that I'm a good writer. I'm really happy with it. This was such a fun record to make and I've never felt so creative on any album."

That is saying a lot considering Raye has already amassed an impressive body of work. Since signing with Epic Records in 1990, Raye has placed more than 30 singles on the chart, including such No. 1 hits as “Love, Me, In This Life,” “My Kind of Girl” and “I Can Still Feel You.” His debut album, *All I Can Be*, was the first of four consecutive albums released by Raye to achieve platinum certification in the United States signifying sales of one million copies each. “Little Red Rodeo,” “That’s My Story,” “I Think About You,” “One Boy, One Girl” and “Not That Different” are among the hits that have kept him busy on the road until this year’s pandemic sidelined the country touring business.

With *Scars*, Raye takes the next step on his musical journey, accompanied by Auerbach, who lends his signature guitar licks throughout the project. One of the most poignant songs on the album, “Dancing Alone in the Street,” was inspired by a homeless man Raye saw many years ago. “That may be the one I’m the most proud of and that’s a new song,” he shares. “I’ve always wanted to write a song like ‘Dreaming My Dreams With You,’ the song Waylon did. I just think that’s the best country song I’ve ever heard and I actually cut that on my third album. I love that song and I thought, ‘Man, if I could just write a song like that, a waltz with a melody like that.’ So I found this melody in my head and said, ‘That’s beautiful. I think I’ve got a good melody, what am I going to write about?’”

The lyric came to him as he thought back to the days when he and his brother had moved from Texas to Oregon. “I was living in Portland. I was probably about 22-years-old. My brother and I moved up there because an old friend of my mom’s booked us for a month and we were just hungry to play anywhere. We played there a month and then another club offered us a gig and we wound living in Portland for five years,” Raye recalls. “One night I was coming home from the club, probably about 2:30 in the morning, and traffic was stopped. Everybody was just sitting there and I can see that there’s this older man clearly really drunk and he’s just in the middle of the street dancing. No one honked. Everybody just let him do his thing and waited until he moved on. A few minutes later he drifted back over to the sidewalk and traffic resumed, but as I was sitting there watching him I thought, ‘I wonder what his story is?’

“That image just stuck in my head,” Raye continues. “It was a very long time ago and I never forgot that. So I had that melody I decided to write about that guy. I made up his story as something I felt like was a reasonable possibility— that he’d lost the love of his life, the drinking got a hold of him and took over and now he’s just waiting to die. It’s a very sad song, but I’ve always loved when writers tell stories like that, if they got the idea from

something that really happened or something that they've witnessed. The ironic thing is that would have been 1982ish and I didn't write the song until 2019. The memory lasted and provided the inspiration."

The album's title track was written by Raye's brother Scotty and Tony Ramey and features a guest appearance by Lambert. "He's been with her since she was 17-years-old. He was her original band. It was just him," Raye says of his brother, who retired from touring last year due to heart problems. Lambert was familiar with "Scars" because she had performed the song live over the years and when Scotty asked if she'd be interested in recording it with Collin, she said "Absolutely."

"That was a real blessing and it's not just because she's Miranda Lambert and she's such a superstar, but she's a really great singer, and she loves the song," Raye says. "She already knew the song so well that I bet we spent far more time in the studio laughing and cutting up than she spent in the vocal booth. I bet she wasn't in there 10 minutes and she was done. It just turned out perfect. She's just a great artist and I just felt like that kind of really anointed the album having her on it."

Though Wray and Ramey wrote the song years ago, Raye says the times we're living in make the lyric even more poignant. "I think because of the times we're in I think that song is going to have some impact. A lot of things have happened to me in my life. Nobody gets out of here scar free. You're going to have stuff that's going to go bad. Losing Haley was number one," he says of his eldest granddaughter dying at nine-years-old from a rare neurological condition. "Over the years, the stress you live through, the ups and downs, the worry and tragedy takes a toll on you and you are scarred. This was a really good time in my life to be the singer of this song. I'm a good purveyor of this song because I've lived through a lot of things. Here I am and I'm proud of it. Most people can relate to that."

One of the most autobiographical songs on the album is "Rock 'n' Roll Bone," which Raye penned solo. "That's about mine and Scotty's musical journey," he says. "We started out as little kids in DeQueen, Arkansas listening to nothing but Buck Owens, early Merle Haggard, Johnny Cash, Jim Reeves and Johnny Horton when we were five or six-years-old. Scotty could play guitar and by the time he was six, he could play lead guitar. He was a prodigy. Country music was the first music I loved, but then I went to see a Foghat concert when I was 13-years-old and it changed my whole life. I saw the Eagles, Fleetwood Mac, Deep Purple, Bob Seger, anybody that came through we saved up whatever money we could scrounge up. It put that passion in me, and if you look at my career, I've always been considered a very animated live performer. I put on a show like I did was because I'd

seen the greats doing it. I've got a rock and roll bone that served me really, really well. I'm kind of known as a ballad guy because I've had so many hit ballads, but no one has ever complained, 'Oh, I went to see Collin Raye, but the show was real sleepy.' That's never been the case because I grew up watching the greats. I love 'Rock 'n' Roll Bone. It's very autobiographical and it's a tribute to my brother too."

There are a couple other family members who share writing credits on the album. Raye's daughter Brittany joined her dad, Michael Curtis and Troy Powers to co-write the cinematic "Never Going Back There Again" and Raye's son, Jacob, co-wrote the Beatlesque "Chasing Renee." "When Jacob was probably 15 or 16-years-old, he had this dear friend named Renee. He liked her in that way and she didn't like him in that way," Raye recalls. "She wasn't going to have any part of it, but he was so persistent. So he wrote a poem and he called it 'Chasing Renee.' I read it and I just cracked up. I thought, 'Buddy I think we could write a song out of this.' I hope people will understand that we're not promoting stalking. It's a tongue-in-cheek song. It's just so kooky. I wanted it on this record because it's a moment you don't expect. And Jacob is so proud that this song made the album. He played it for Renee and she cracked up."

Another of Raye's favorite songs on the album is the western swing-flavored "Rodeo Girl," featuring Vince Gill. "The very first single I ever released was 'All I Can Be Is A Sweet Memory.' It went to No. 22 on the chart and the video went to No. 1 on CMT. That's what got us off and running and Vince sang on that song," he says. "He's an Eagle now. He tours with the Eagles and still if you ask him for a favor like that, he's glad to do it. He's a good dude. It was a full circle moment. Here we are again 30 years later and he's singing with me again."

The album concludes with "Mama Sure Could Sing," which Raye wrote and sings with his brother Scotty. "Mama really was a great singer. She was a professional singer and worked with Buck Owens a little bit and played Vegas. She was a gorgeous lady and I'm not just saying that because she was my mom. Pictures back it up. She had movie star looks and she was a really great country singer," Raye says proudly. "Scotty had the idea for 'Mama Sure Could Sing' and we approached it like a Ralph Stanley bluegrass kind of treatment. Scotty does that so well. I just felt like it was such a sweet, somber testament to her and it should be the last thing on the record. I love that the fact that the last thing you hear is me and Scotty singing together a cappella."

Raye is grateful to the staff at BFD/Audium Nashville for encouraging him to make the kind of album he's always wanted to make. "I didn't think I'd

ever get an assignment like this where a record label basically said, ‘Do whatever you want and we’ll promote it and put it out,’” he says. “I never thought I’d get to do a record this personal. I feel it’s the best record I ever made.”