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## JASON ISBELL ON 'THE NASHVILLE SOUND' AND COUNTRY MUSIC'S RESPONSIBILITY "I'M HOPING I'M SPEAKING TO MORE THAN ONE GENERATION"

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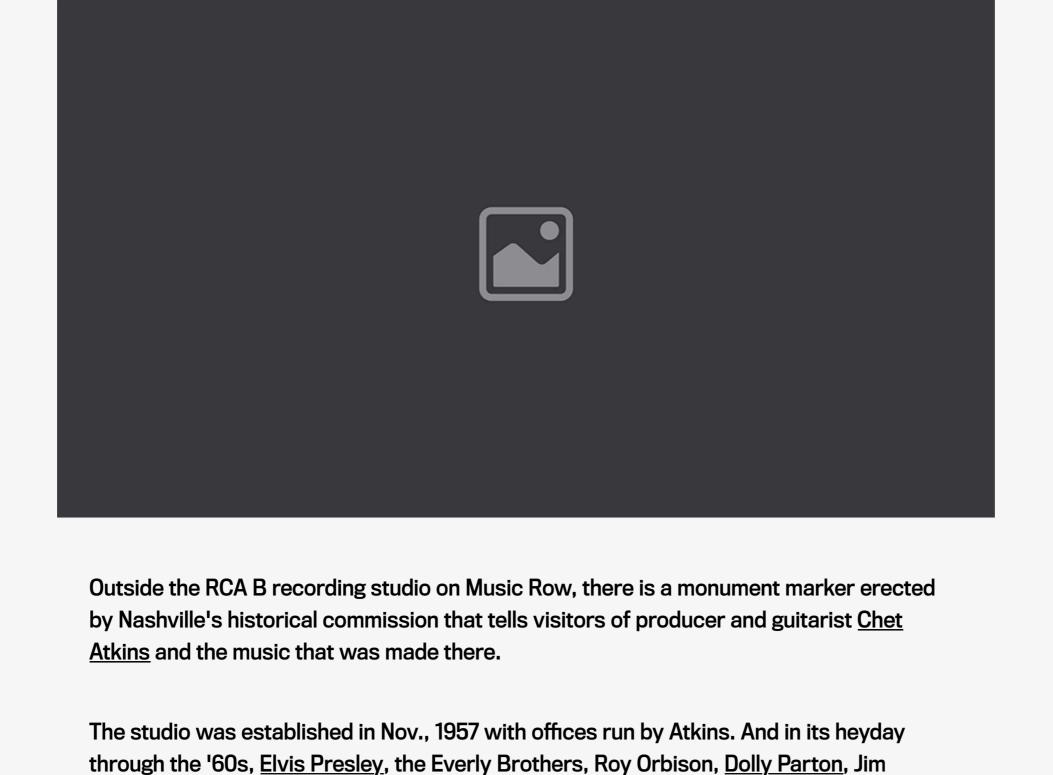
By Lauren Tingle

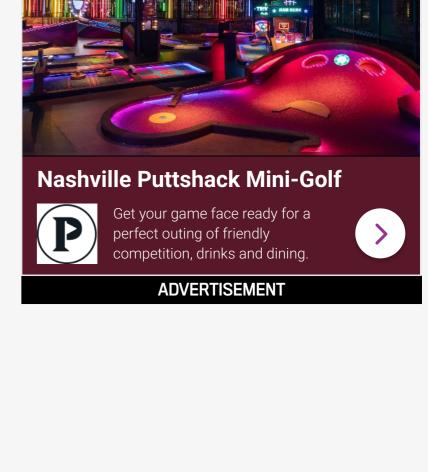


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At the time, the Nashville Sound was a new form of popular music that had a middle of the road sound that would preserve the country aesthetic but that would also appeal to a

Reeves and many others recorded there, establishing the site as ground zero for the

broader audience that knew no experience of rural life. It was a moment reading that same monument marker when Jason Isbell felt the initial spark of inspiration for the title of his latest album with the 400 Unit.

'Recorded at the home of the Nashville Sound,' on the backs of all the albums that came out in those days, I thought, 'That means something different to me now.' And if it means something different to me, then we might as well say it means something different. So, I'm going to sort of take ownership of that. And try maybe to explain at least to my listeners

that there's a lot more going on here than meets the eye."

ago or two years ago or three years ago.

"I like things that open themselves up to multiple layers of meaning," Isbell said over the

phone during our CMT.com interview while on a break from cutting his yard. "And seeing,

Isbell and the 400 Unit's Nashville Sound was recorded over two weeks at the larger RCA A studio, which was opened next door in 1964 following Studio B's success. The 10-song collection's producer, Dave Cobb, is the current producer in residence at RCA A where he recorded the Southern Family compilation, Chris Stapleton's Grammy-winning Traveller and Stapleton's From A Room double album.

"I think that definitely what Dave Cobb is doing at that studio, and before that at Sound

Emporium and his house, is definitely reinventing what people see of country music. With

Chris' success, you can't deny that country music sounds different now than it did a year

"I'm not really trying to draw a line," Isbell added. "I'm just seeing the lines that are already there, and trying to say, 'Hey, everybody. Do you see this, too?'" Isbell also mentioned other musicians who are contributing to a current reinvention of the Nashville Sound, listing the Black Keys, Paramore and Jack White as just a few of the acts who are active in today's local music community.

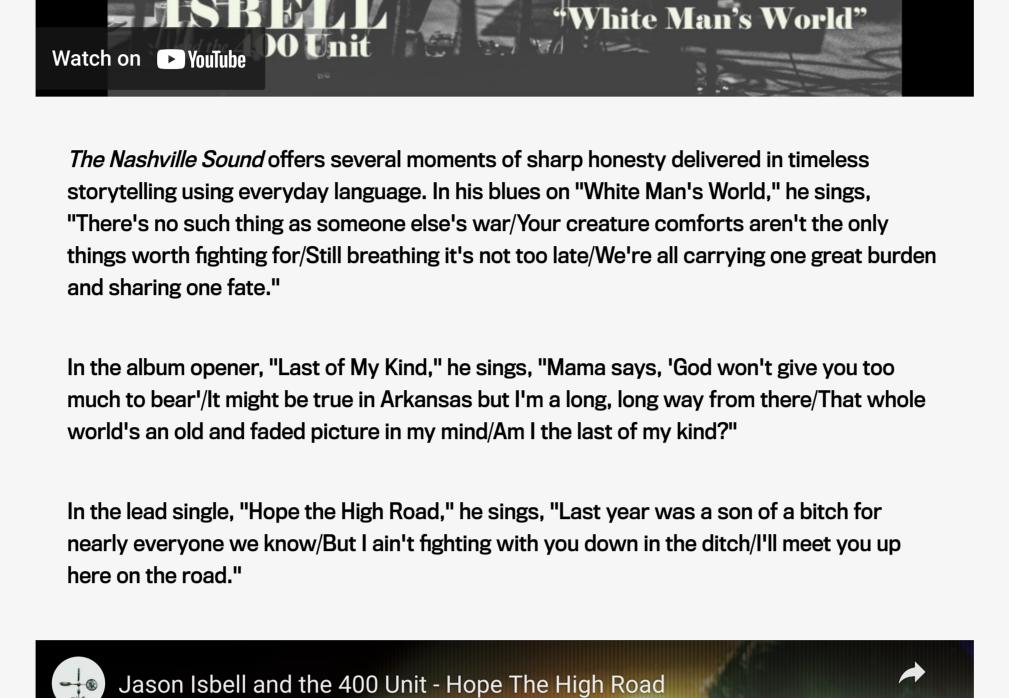
"There's all kinds of music that's coming out of Nashville now that doesn't have anything

to do with what's become traditionally popular country music," Isbell said. "I like seeing

the blend of all these things. I like seeing all the genres merge and move and I like to see

people moving in a direction of musical and creative honesty."

Jason Isbell and the 400 Unit - White Man's World



BUT WHEREVER YOU ARE I HOPE

EADS YOU

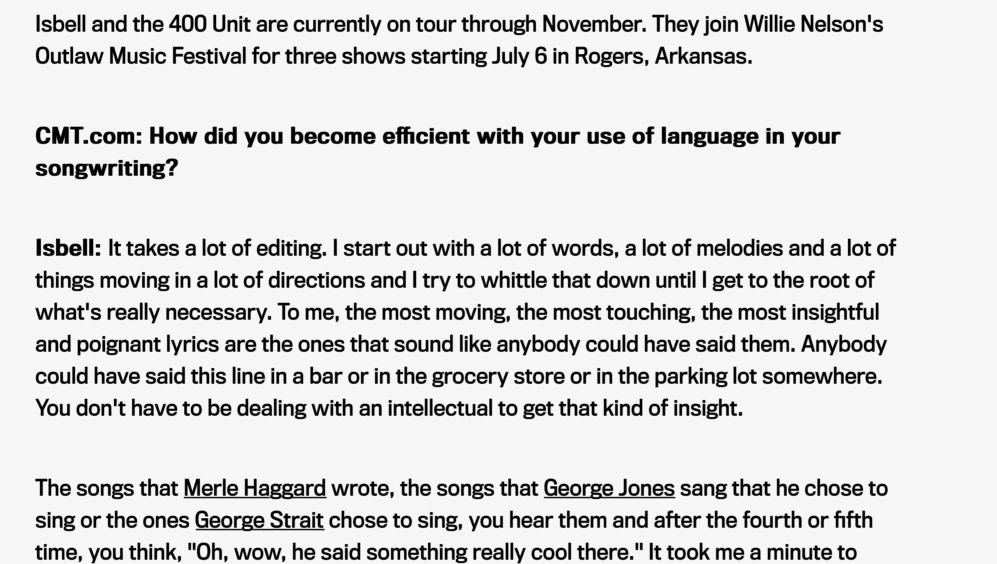
That's really to me what matters.

your style of music?

songs to them on a regular basis.

What inspired you to write, "The Last of My Kind?"

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realize what it was they were singing about and it just sounds like a normal sentence.

Country music is about to lose a lot of legends who made the genre what it is.

Well, "The Last of My Kind" really deals with a part of me that is afraid still of the size of

fans. I held very tightly to the things that I knew -- family, friends and those very intimate

connections that you develop with the people in your community. And I was taught that

you should be wary of big cities and the bustle of the world outside your door. And to a

to unlearn and I had to overcome when I started traveling through the world.

certain extent, there's some truth to it but for the most part, that was something that I had

the world. I grew up in a really small rural place in Alabama like a lot of country music

I realized to make a connection with people, you're going to have to stop being afraid of them. So that song, "The Last of My Kind," probably has 10 or 15 percent me in there. And the rest of it built around people that I know and people I've grown up around who just don't feel like they belong in the world because the world is moving too fast for them. I feel like today's country radio sometimes neglects huge audiences who follow

performers like you and Chris, who truly come from the rural experience. Do

Yeah, as we get more popular, I see different types of people because when it started out,

I was looking at lot of folks who were very in touch with independent music and audiences

had triple A radio stations and non-commercial radio stations. As things have grown, I see

means a lot to me to not only be writing songs about these folks but also be singing those

I'm happy about that. I feel like that could be done on a bigger scale if the people in charge

of making radio country music cared something other than the bottom line. But I realized a

long time ago, that's a business — just like selling cheeseburgers is a business. And

That's bad behavior because they know that once we get through that, once we get

ashes of that, people like Sturgill Simpson, Brandy Clark and people who are out there

touring hard and working hard and building their audience from city to city, I think we'll

They do, and they're bloody. And the thing is right there at the end before things get

through the period where that big system is really fully collapsed, then we'll see out of the

financially because they know they have to have something stick.

have more of a broader use of the airwaves maybe.

Revolutions in music take time.

better, they get so bad at the end.

together.

That's for sure.

you?

records still. That's for sure.

In this line of work, no one retires.

No. We don't get to retire. We either die or we keep on going.

were a lot bigger in bigger cities where people had independent record stores and they

a lot more people who grew up in towns like I grew up in and that's great because it

you feel like your audience has grown because of a fan demand for more of

they're going to keep going by that formula as long as it works and, thankfully, we're getting to a point where the formula isn't working anymore. There's not enough money behind it. They can't go and put \$500,000 behind every radio single. But that behavior is actually getting worse for a little while because they're very conservative with the type of music they put forward and the kind of music they support

the world in a different light? Through my relationship with [wife Amanda Shires], that process started really moving forward a lot faster. I started realizing a lot of things that I had been ignorant of before and how the world is just not the same place for a woman as it is for a man. The doors aren't all open. And a lot of things that have always been readily available to me haven't always been available to my wife because she is a woman.

audience that's listening for whatever reason, and try to rile them up, too, and try to get

them off their asses and maybe we can all attempt to make things a little bit more equal

I mean, compared to most people in the world, for all intents and purposes, my daughter

circumstances as she has, she's not going to have it easy at all. So, first of all, it's all a

matter of perspective, but I would like for her to have the same opportunities as a man.

Do you hope your music inspires your fans to be the generation that when

to the same shows together and they can all enjoy the same records together.

That's the big reason why Chris Stapleton is having the success that he's having is

because I can listen to that music. My daughter can listen to it, my dad, my stepmom, my

will have it pretty easy. But compared to a boy child who grew up in the same

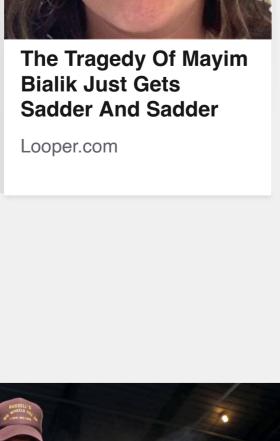
future generations of people remember them, they say, "They don't make people like that anymore?" I'm hoping I'm speaking to more than one generation, and I think that's really the duty of country music. Sometimes I don't call myself a country singer, because it's a loaded term these days. But I'm certainly a country person, and I think the real beauty that's still there with country music is that dads, moms, daughters, sons and grandparents, they can all go

Oh, yeah, definitely. I think my wife is not nearly as commercially successful as I am, and I think a lot of that has to do with the fact that she's a woman. I really do. We're not as bad as the movie motion picture industry right now, but all the entertainment business still has a long way to go. But I do think that time will show her work to be a very valuable work. I

know I'll never ever get tired of it. If I'm alive in 40 or 50 years, I'll be listening to her

wonderful if Leonard Cohen could live forever?" Are the feelings mutual for

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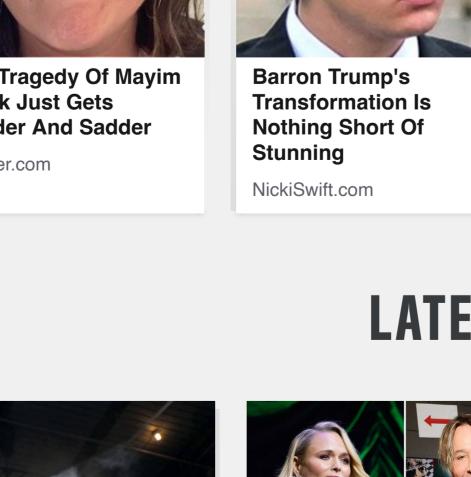
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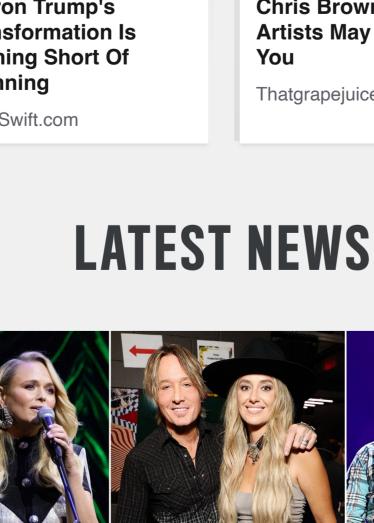
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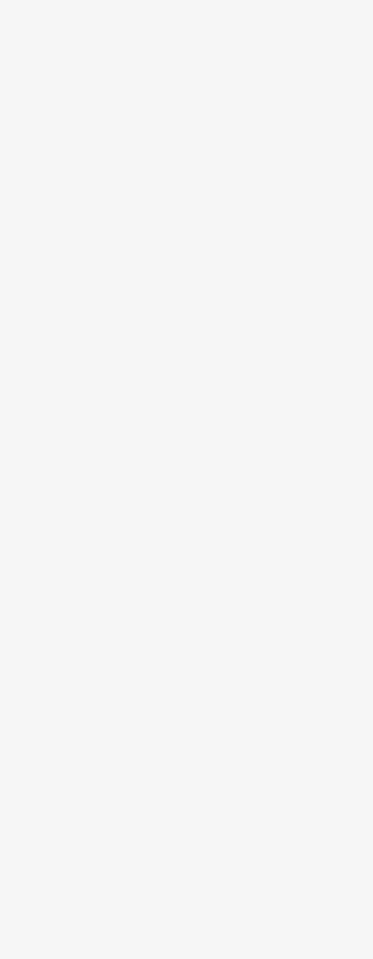






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Talk about "White Man's World," and how does raising a daughter make you see When you have a daughter, certainly, it lights the fire under you. You try to do whatever you can to change that. And hopefully use the privilege I was born with to take the

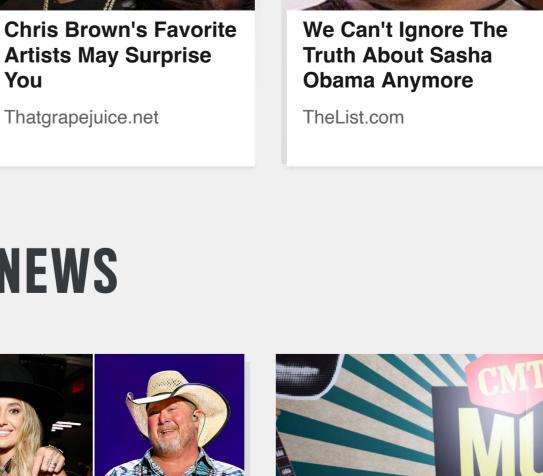
mom, my stepdad, all those people can enjoy that same record. I hope we're speaking to more than one particular age group. But I think it's just compassion really. All I'm trying to do by telling my story and by making up stories with combinations of other people, is just trying to get people to be a little bit more empathetic and a little bit more compassionate through trying to explain myself to myself and to the rest of the world. We interviewed Amanda for My Piece of Land last summer and one of the last questions I asked was if we're lucky enough to be a live in 30 years, who you think we'll be listening to and she said, "Well, of course we're going to be listening to Amanda Shires and Jason Isbell." And she said, "Wouldn't it be

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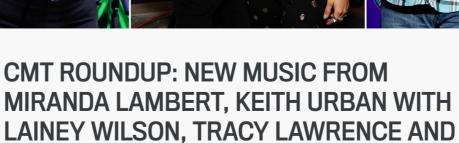
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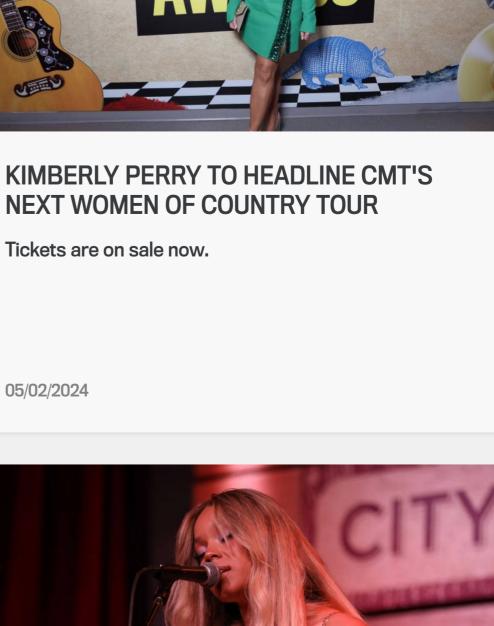


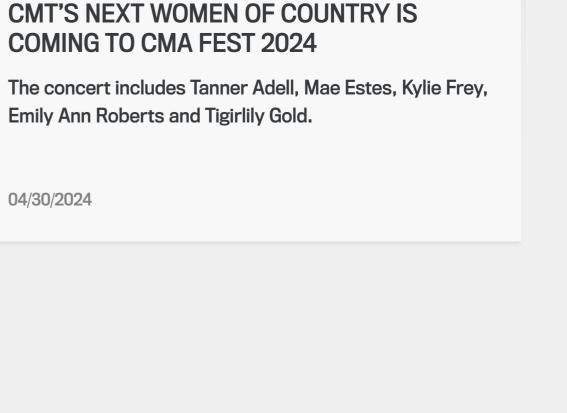
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