

RASCAL FLATTS

Unstoppable

If any act embodies the place to which country music has evolved in the new century, it is Rascal Flatts. Since their inception a decade ago in 1999, the trio has helped change the face of popular music. Their trademark sound--Gary LeVox's powerfully emotive lead vocals coupled with the soaring harmonies of Jay DeMarcus and Joe Don Rooney, set amid world-class arrangements and production, have made the band the standard bearers for cutting-edge country. Drawing on Nashville's best tunesmiths and their own enviable songwriting skills, they have released, in songs like "These Days," "Bless The Broken Road," "What Hurts The Most" and "Take Me There," some of the most important and successful music to come out of Nashville in recent years. Along the way, they have placed 11 #1 singles and 20 Top Tens, seen every one of their studio albums go multi-platinum, have become the most awarded vocal group in country music history with total sales at 20 million. In 2009, Flatts broke Alabama's streak of ACM Vocal Group of The Year wins when they took home the trophy for the 7th consecutive time.

Now, with *Unstoppable*, Gary, Joe Don and Jay release their most powerful and accessible album to date, taking their career and country music another large step forward. It debuted at #1 on the Nielsen Soundscan Top 200 and Country charts with 351,000 units sold, making it the top selling CD across all genres of music. It also marked Rascal Flatts' fourth consecutive studio album opening atop the Top 200 chart, more than any other country artist in the history of Soundscan. This also establishes Rascal Flatts fourth consecutive debut at the top of the Nielsen Soundscan Country Top 75 sales chart. With 351,000 units sold, *Unstoppable* is also the biggest country release of 2009 and the biggest country first week sales since Taylor Swift's *Fearless* in November 2008. The chart-topping sales also qualify it as the third biggest unit debut of 2009 for all genres, behind only U2's *No Line On The Horizon* and Susan Boyles *I Dreamed A Dream*. *Unstoppable* has now sold one million copies.

Produced by Dann Huff and Rascal Flatts, the record applies the group's formidable talents to a spectrum of songs that range from the pure drama of "Forever," which deals, as the group has so often in the past, with the pain of a broken relationship, to the pure fun of "Summer Nights," a romp through a world of coolers and bikinis guaranteed to be a concert favorite. The trio is as proud of the project as they've ever been.

"This is the best group of songs we've ever had," says Joe Don, and given the band's storied history, that is no small statement. Their deliberate approach is much of the reason.

"We started early on this record," says Jay, "so we could take the time to cut when we wanted to cut. We set out from the beginning to track when we got songs we believed in. That allowed us to take a deep breath now and then and take our time, and the great thing is every song means something very deeply to us."

That conviction is evident in every vocal.

"Songs like 'Why,' which deals with a very important and sensitive topic," says Gary, "put me in a place vocally where I've never been. Overall, these were songs I could pour all of myself into."

There is perhaps no male singer on the current country scene who can wring more from songs of loss and heartache than Gary, and *Unstoppable* gives him several opportunities to do just that. "Holdin' On" and "Close" both tell stories of people clinging to the remnants of lost love, while "Once" paints a portrait of loss that takes full advantage of his vocal prowess. All three agree, though, that *Unstoppable's* first single, "Here Comes Goodbye," covers the territory as well as it's been covered.

"It's one of the most powerful songs we've ever put out there," says Jay.

Along with first-rate song selection and the band's own contributions--Jay was co-writer on "Close" and the title track, which celebrates the sheer power of love, while Gary contributed "Summer Nights" and "Things That Matter," a look at moments with lasting importance--*Unstoppable* is notable for Rascal Flatts' continuing dedication to studio excellence.

"I think Dann and [engineer] Justin [Niebank] just get better and better with time," says Joe Don, "and they really pushed us to raise our game. This is the best sound we've ever had."

That excellence was reflected in Jay's bass playing and Joe Don's guitar work, as well as in their harmony vocals.

"Take a song like 'Summer Nights,'" says Gary. "Joe Don really stepped out and played some great guitar. Vocally, too, the track was good, but when Joe Don played that guitar riff and then he and Jay laid down their vocals, they really took the song to a better place. It upped the ante on it."

"Dann is such a great guitar player and producer," adds Joe Don. "He's totally got his thumb on country music right now, and he does inspire us to be better. We stretched a lot on this album, bringing in all our influences."

"Every song is special," says Jay. "It was a just a true joy to make. We've always tried to progress and grow as artists and I think this totally displays that."

They have made such growth their mission since their beginnings in 1999, following a conversation between Jay and Joe Don, who were band mates working with Chely Wright.

"Man," said Jay, "you've got to come hear my cousin Gary sing." Jay and Gary had begun attracting a following at the Fiddle and Steel Guitar Bar in Nashville's Printers Alley.

"Somewhere around the 13th of January in 1999," Joe Don says, "Jay called me and said, 'Dude, our guitar player can't make it. Any way you could come sit in with us?' I said, 'Hell, yeah,' grabbed my guitar and amp and made it to the club by 8."

All three were blown away by their collective sound, and they began playing as a trio, up to seven hours a night. Soon label executives had caught the buzz and were dropping by to see them. They cut some demos and by late that year they had been signed to Lyric Street. That began a string of hits that made the band one of country's most successful acts. Songs like "Prayin' For Daylight," "Mayberry," "Fast Cars and Freedom," "My Wish" and "Stand," and albums like *Melt*, *Feels Like Today*, *Me And My Gang* and *Still Feels Good* took them into the music world's stratosphere.

Along the way, their "Bless The Broken Road" was Grammy nominated for Country Song of the Year and Vocal Performance, became 2006's top-selling physical and digital artist in all genres, scored four #1 country albums and three #1 overall, and hit the Top 10 Billboard pop singles chart twice, among many other milestones.

"There's never been a method to our madness," says Joe Don. "We just cut the best songs we can, and through the years we get better at what we do."

They continue to carry the country banner into arenas and stadiums, humbled by how far their star has risen with a profound impact on the concert stage. In good economic times and bad, their tours have been marked by sellouts and venue attendance records, as their state-of-the-art production, high energy approach and hit-filled set list thrill audiences year in and year out.

"As a kid, you stand in front of your mirror and only dream about being able to sell out arenas and stadiums," says Gary. "And to be able to play a place like Wrigley Field and sell it out, you can't even dream that big. The feeling is awesome."

"We know how difficult it can be for people to lay down money to go to a concert," says Jay, "and I thank them profusely from the stage every night. Our main focus will always be to give them every penny's worth of entertainment value we can."

Their approach grows out of their own histories as music fans.

"When I saw Garth Brooks years ago," says Joe Don, "it was like I had an epiphany.....I knew at that moment that I wanted to do the very same thing, be the same kind of entertainer he was and now I'm in that same position and I want the people who come to our shows to know that about me every night when I take the stage."

The three are committed family men who take seriously their role in the community. They are known for their charitable efforts, which have included raising millions of dollars for charities including the Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt and for their work on the celebrity cabinet board of the American Red Cross.

At the core, though, is the three-way friendship and musical partnership dedicated to making records they would want to listen to and putting on shows they would want to attend. It is that approach that has brought so much pleasure to so many fans and given them such an enviable position in the musical world.

"It's just beyond measure," says Gary. "We get to touch people's lives through music. There's no greater gift in the world and we love it today more than when we got the record deal in '99. We're planning to be around for a long time."

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