



Chris Cagle ***ANYWHERE BUT HERE***

If Chris Cagle were nothing more than a man who lives life at full-speed, taking corners on two wheels, he would still be one of country music's more interesting characters. There aren't many in the industry who can put passion and energy on stage or on record the way he can. But a man doesn't go gold with his first two albums and produce seven hits—including four Top Tens—on nothing more than bravado. Chris's secret weapon lies in his ability to rope the whirlwind, to capture its motion and emotion with his pen and his voice. It is, as Wordsworth said, where emotion is recalled in tranquility that poetry is created, and it is there that Chris's untamed spirit becomes art.

The two sides of Cagle's compelling psyche come together beautifully on his third album, ***Anywhere But Here***, a collection that crystallizes the promise of the first two and takes him another big step forward. Its first single, "Miss Me Baby," is four minutes of raw drama sung with a nuanced intensity that announces Chris's growing maturity as a vocalist. It also represents the eighth time he has hit the Top 40 with a song he has written or co-written.

The album captures a renewed Chris, back from vocal rest and a period of intense introspection, reflecting on the complex emotions to be found in living a modern life in the spotlight. He knew early in the recording process that he and co-producer Rob Wright had found something special.

"I had gone back to the studio where I did my first album," he says. "Same musicians, same engineer, everything. We were doing 'Miss Me Baby' and I thought, 'Oh, my gosh, we really do have something.' It was like the first time I heard 'Laredo' after we mixed it and I thought, 'I've got a shot.'"

Chris is convinced that his long period of enforced vocal rest—something his restless spirit found nearly intolerable at the time—have left him in a better place vocally.

"The one thing that has changed with this record over the last two," he says, "is the dynamic of the vocal. I'm not just singing hard at everything. I've been learning, listening to people like Conway Twitty, and there were times recording things when I'd think, 'Yeah, that's natural. That's what you want.'"

That new sense of control comes through in songs like "Maria," a sultry and powerful look at passionate love, "I Was Made For You" and "You Still Do That To Me," songs that celebrate lasting love, and "Anywhere But Here," where every note catalogs the lyric's pain.

On the rowdier side, there is "Hey Y'all," a flat-out rocker about the joys of outdoor partying, "Might Wanna Think About It," which finds the tough-minded Texan staking out his territory in the modern-day battles over rights and obligations, and "Wanted Dead Or Alive," a fresh reading of the '80s-era Bon Jovi classic. There is also "Wal-Mart Parking Lot," a quintessential small-town tale of coming of age at this generation's equivalent of the town square. The song helps anchor an album's worth of real life sung by one of the country artists most able to turn reality into memorable music.

(over)

"I've got a lot of high hopes for this record," he says. "I tried to make music that was better without necessarily making it different because I love the music that I've made in the past."

The strengths apparent in *Anywhere But Here* were as hard-won as they are impressive. They follow a period in which Chris's hard-charging approach to singing and life nearly robbed him of the vocal instrument at the core of his success. Early in 2004, he was ordered by his doctor to undertake a long period of vocal rest, something that completely reordered his existence. Unable to sing, uninspired when it came to writing, he volunteered his time and muscle at a nearby horse farm and took a good hard look at himself, his life, and his career.

"In my business," he says, "losing your vocal chords is a potentially career-ending condition, and I had to face the fact that there were things I was doing that were contributing to it. That's the sort of admission that can change you if you'll allow it. I had to decide things like whether I wanted to sing more than I wanted a cigarette."

The upshot was a Chris Cagle newly rededicated to his craft and to a healthy outlook on life, reining in some of his bad habits and pouring himself into this new project, which he sees as offering something special to his fans.

"The album," he says, "shows where I've been and where I was when I went in to make it, both in heart and mind. I hope those are places where people have been or where they are, and I'm hoping it can help lift people out of the bad places and make the most of the good ones."

Using music to deal with life is something Chris has been doing since his boyhood. He grew up in tough circumstances outside Houston, and one method of dealing with hard times would stay with him.

"When things got bad around the house," he says, "I'd put on my headphones and I was at least able to get away from it for a while. Music was my refuge."

He sang in school talent shows and played around the house, singing Bible-based lyrics to the tunes of rock hits to avoid making waves in a Southern Baptist household.

He toughened himself physically in high school so he could play football, but it was music that recaptured his attention in college. Attending the University of Texas-Arlington, he skipped his finance courses to audit music classes, and performed at night in nearby clubs. At 19, he left Texas to pursue music full-time.

He hit Nashville in 1994, waiting tables and tending bar while working to improve himself as a songwriter. One big break came when he met the legendary Harlan Howard, who was so impressed with Chris's songwriting progress that he became the first to publish one of his songs. Chris then landed a publishing deal and had songs recorded by David Kersh.

A woman he met while waiting tables led him to Virgin Records head Scott Hendricks, who was taken with his energy and songwriting skills and signed him to a label deal. Fans were just as taken, and the hits came fast and steadily--"Laredo," "My Love Goes On And On," "I Breathe In, I Breathe Out," "What A Beautiful Day" and "Chicks Dig It."

He toured and recorded at a frantic pace until that recent wake-up call. Now, refocused and rejuvenated, armed with a high-octane new CD, he is back on stages across the country, bringing fans everywhere the kind of high-energy country music for which he's become synonymous.