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Joe Nichols

With the aptly titled Old Things New, the award-winning, Grammy-nominated singer once again balances artistry with accessibility, applying his distinctive baritone to new songs that define country music for modern times. It's the perfect follow-up to his acclaimed 2007 album, Real Things, which landed Nichols on a multitude of best-of-the-year lists, including those published by the New York Times, Miami Herald, Dallas Morning News, Associated Press, CMT.com and many others.

Old Things New is the sound of a singer who has come to know exactly who he is—and what he does best. "I feel like I'm in a really cool position," Nichols says. "I've found my place by moving deeper into the kind of music I love, which are songs that draw on the traditional side. A lot of country music at the moment is real aggressive and hard. I love that music, but it's not what I do. I've found my niche by doing something outside of what everyone else is doing." What Nichols does is zero in on his strengths: He gives weight to the heart-stirring message of "Believers" and fills the title song, about timeless and enduring qualities, and the unforgettable "An Old Friend of Mine," about a man giving up the bottle, with the genuine emotion of a man singing about what he knows. Elsewhere, Nichols shows his wide range, from the swing-with-a-smile "Cheaper Than a Shrink" to the jazzy, romantic "This Bed's Too Big," and from the modern upbeat rhythm of "Give Me That Girl" to the lonesome blues of "It's Me I'm Worried About." All together, the album reveals the talents of a wholly distinctive singer who has accumulated the experience to convey the emotion, or the fun, of each story he has to tell. "I think this album is full of great songs that would sound great on the radio," Nichols says. "But I'm at a place in my career where it's not just about hits, but about who I am as an artist. It's about the work as a whole and what it says about me. I wanted this record to represent the best of who Joe Nichols is, and I'm really proud of what we've done."

This new clarity, Nichols admits, comes from the Arkansas native achieving an inner peace that, in the past, he's struggled to find. "I'm happier and more settled than I've ever been, and that sets me up to be clearer about the man I want to be and the artist I want to be," Nichols explains. "When I've made mistakes, it's because I felt insecure and second-guessed myself. When I've been true to who I am, and when I've given it everything I've got, that's when I've done my best—and found the most acceptance." Indeed, as with many new stars, Nichols encountered some personal difficulties as his schedule grew busier and the stakes higher. Musically, he repeatedly found success by carving out an individual style that clung to a personal aesthetic rather than fitting into the ever-evolving and expanding sounds of modern country music. With time, just as he found his way as a singer, he began to realize he needed to center himself as a person, too. He married Heather Singleton, who he had known since both were 18 years old, and he took steps toward a healthier outlook on life. Today, Nichols proudly says he has found a sense of peace that has him feeling happier and more focused than ever.

From the start, with 2002's breakthrough Universal South debut, Man with a Memory, Nichols established himself as a solid neo-traditionalist who could balance message songs with aching ballads and breezy, playful tunes that evoke a sly smile. Number One hits like "The Impossible" and "Brokenheartsville" introduced the singer's expressive baritone and the subtle way he could express wisdom and humor as well as pain and pleasure. Nichols' powerful introduction certainly drew the attention of his peers and of country fans: His first year out, he won the Country Music Association's Horizon Award, the Academy of Country Music's Top New Male Vocalist and CMT's Breakthrough Music Video of the Year.

Over the next three critically acclaimed albums—Revelation, III and Real Things—Nichols secured his spot as a rock-solid traditionalist who could master lighthearted swing, blue ballads and message songs with effortless aplomb and gather #1 hits along the way (to date, Nichols has accumulated three #1 and seven Top 10 hits). Whether grinning his way through "Tequila Makes Her Clothes Fall Off" or "What's a Guy Gotta Do," or instilling weight and emotion into "I'll Wait for You" or "If Nobody Believed in You," Nichols always sounded convincingly real and believable.

Like forebears George Strait and Alan Jackson, Nichols manages to forge a variety of earthy, bedrock country styles into a distinctive sound all his own, all the while sounding as laid-back and natural as the friendly guy next door—OK, make that the extraordinarily charismatic, goodlooking guy next door. He not only drew the praise of critics and fans of old-school country music, but he gathered a wide array of fans across the board who love his authenticity and genuine talent.

Only four albums in, he's already received four Grammy Award nominations.

One fan, Nickelback singer Chad Kroeger, started covering a Nichols hit during the superstar band's concerts. "I haven't been able to get this song out of my mind," Kroeger said of "Tequila Makes Her Clothes Fall Off," in front of one sold-out arena. "I love this song."

On *Old Things New*, Nichols' new sense of self-confidence helped Nichols assert his opinions more openly in the studio. In the past, he says, he was content to let others make decisions and focus on singing. But he was involved in all facets of *Old Things New*, a commitment welcomed by co-producers Brent Rowan and Mark Wright. "Not only do I feel I know what I'm good at now, but I also know what I'm not as good at," the humble singer says. "I've always tried to stay open to new ideas and to taking on challenges and stretching. That's how you learn. With this album, more than ever, I feel like I play to my strengths." Indeed, Nichols points out, the tendency in country is to follow trends and pay close attention to what works for other artists. "If one artist sells five million albums, the tendency is for other artists to say, 'Maybe I should do a little of that, too,'" Nichols says. "That can be tough to resist. But something inside me tells me to stay true to who I am and to stay on my own path. I truly believe that, if I do that, there's something different, something better, for me down the road."