

Sept 17 Friday Randy Rogers

Randy Rogers Band's last project debuted as the most-downloaded country album on iTunes, plenty of the industry "insiders" on Music Row were left scratching their heads: Who are these guys?

The Nashville elite may not have known about the five-piece band, but much of America already did. Rolling Stone magazine ranked them alongside such artists as U2 and the Stones in its list of Top 10 Must-See Artists in the summer of 2007. They earned \$2.5 million—a staggering total for a still-developing act—on the tour circuit in a single year. Willie Nelson, the Eagles, Gary Allan and Dierks Bentley all picked them as opening acts for their concerts. And more than 2,200 people showed up and bought the band's album at an appearance at Warehouse Music. The fans' exuberance was shared by USA Today, which praised the band for having "loads of grit, swagger and heart."

The Randy Rogers Band built its audience by combining forces: It's a dynamic live act centered around songs that fit the rowdy, party vibe of the concert circuit, but their songs also say something.

That's particularly true in the new album, *The Randy Rogers Band*, in which a dozen persuasive tracks give the listener plenty of reasons to want to down a celebratory brewski. But the songs also maintain a depth that makes them powerful and provocative even beyond their edgy arrangements and tough-guy sound.

Invariably, the songs are about people making choices and dealing with the consequences they bring. That's the case in the opening "Wicked Ways," in which a string of wild endeavors leaves an out-of-control adult in need of redemption. It's true in "When The Circus Leaves Town," where a performer comes to terms with the emotional crash that accompanies the conclusion of a pumped-up show. It's even a tenet in "One Woman," a ballad that finds a former playboy recognizing his old choices and behaviors were a shallow pursuit next to the promise and solidity that stand before him.

"These songs are definitely true, and they're relatable to many different life situations that I've either gone through in the past or will go through in the future," Rogers, the lead singer and primary songwriter, says. "I just tried to create believable characters and relatable characters. I hear from fans that we really have helped them in real-life situations when they've applied the songs to their everyday life. That's what I strive for in the songs that I write."

"We're not old, but we are getting a little bit more mature," bass player Jon Richardson asserts, drawing laughter from the rest of the band. "We're trying to be more mature, anyway. And that's something that we can write about a little more naturally now instead of 'Here's a song about how much fun I had' or 'Here's a song about a girl.' That's probably just a natural progression of our own lives being reflected in our songs."

Indeed, the Randy Rogers Band is confronting the same questions about relationships and identity that face many of the college students and young adults that form the centerpiece of the group's audience. The balancing act between work, home and recreation is a difficult one—even tougher for an ensemble that spends more than 200 days annually on the road.

"All the guys, except for Jon, are married or soon to be married," guitarist Geoffrey Hill observes. "Les [drummer] and I both have kids. So sometimes it feels like you've really gotta struggle to fit all that into your life, I guess, but it's kinda part of the game. I always said that I play music for free, and I get paid to leave the family behind and go on the road."

That requires a constant rededication to the group, a commitment the five members have repeatedly made since the current lineup coalesced in 2003.