



The Barbour County Fair

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**Hot new rising
country star**

CANAAN SMITH

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Ask anyone what makes country music unique, and they'll likely answer it's the storytelling. For generations country artists have illuminated the human condition in songs that share life's tragedies and triumphs while exploring love, loss and the full range of life experiences. It's a noble calling and one that Canaan Smith passionately embraces on his Mercury Nashville debut album *Bronco*. As a result, listeners are passionately embracing Canaan's talent. Rolling Stone raves, "if you haven't heard of Canaan Smith yet, chances are you will be hearing quite a bit of him...overall, we feel the singer-songwriter is one of the sharper artists to keep an eye on." With wisdom beyond his young years, Smith has emerged as one of Nashville's most compelling storytellers. Whether painting a steamy portrait of a burgeoning relationship in the hit single "Love You Like That" or honoring the memory of his brother in the powerful title track, Smith knows how to draw listeners into his world. "*Bronco*" is a prime example. When he was only 11, Smith lost his 16-year-old brother in a car accident. "It was important to me that I write that story," he says of the song he co-wrote with Scooter Carusoe. "I always wanted to write something that would honor my brother, but I didn't know it would be in the form of his car. I had no idea the Ford Bronco that he drove would stick with me all of these years, but it has. When I think about him, that's the first thing I see." And he's learned that even the most personal experiences can strike a universal chord with an audience. "At first it was hard for me to sing, I would tear up in the middle of a show trying to sing it," he says of "*Bronco*." "Then I realized it's not just my story. Every night the room is full of people that have been through loss. It's actually pretty cool to transition from it just being my story to hopefully being a story that people can find hope in, and a little peace. That's what I tell them. Before the song I say, 'Now if you've gone through loss, if you've gone through something like this, maybe for the next three and a half minutes you'll find a little bit of peace. I hope this song will do for you what it has for me.'" Smith has seen firsthand the impact his music has on fans as he's toured extensively with Dierks Bentley, Brantley Gilbert and Dan and Shay. "Love You Like That" has proven to be a fan favorite as it hit #1 on the radio charts in the Summer of 2015 and continues to garner extensive airplay and has become one of the best-selling singles of 2015, selling more than 750,000 tracks. "We started thinking about cool metaphors like the flow of the Mississippi," Smith says recalling his co-writing session with Brett and Jim Beavers. "That river moves pretty damn slow, and we thought that'd be a sexy line to talk about loving somebody that slowly. It was one of those moments where you're going for it, reaching, digging as deep as we could for metaphors and at the end of the day we had no idea this would be a hit single. You just never know, but it definitely felt special in the moment." Canaan is rapidly climbing the charts again with his follow up to his first #1, the party anthem "Hole In A Bottle". "That song sets the tone with the fans every night. It lets them know we are there to tear it up right along with them." Smith's gifts as a storyteller have earned the respect of his peers and his songs have been recorded by Love & Theft, Cole Swindell, Florida Georgia Line and Jason Aldean, among others. Love & Theft took "Runaway" to the top ten on the charts and Aldean puts his unique stamp on "Black Tears," a song Smith co-wrote with Florida Georgia Line's Tyler Hubbard. "Whenever I show up to write a song, it could be either for me or somebody else," he says. "I feel like 95% of the songs that I'm writing on a daily basis I can see myself doing, but obviously I'm not going to have 100 songs on an album, so I have no problem pitching them to other artists." A native of Williamsburg, Virginia, Smith grew up listening to a variety of music from George Strait to Rage Against the Machine. He knew early on that he wanted to make music for a living. "It's just what I love. I can't see myself doing anything else," he says. "My dad was a rock singer. He was in a band and I would go to his rehearsals and shows, and I just saw a life that I wanted in music. It's what God put me here to do." Possessing a smooth, evocative voice, Smith could have pursued success in any genre of music, but was always drawn to country. "It's all about the stories," Smith says. "You can listen to a country song and it will raise the hair on your arms. I'm a people person and I love being able to connect with people so it makes the most sense for me to be able to tell my stories and connect with people via country music. I want them to find a piece of themselves in the music. I want them to be moved by it. I want it to hurt. I want it to celebrate. I want them to feel like they can take on the world." Smith began pursuing his musical dream at an early age. He was only in the sixth grade when he formed a band with his two best friends and they remained together through their senior year of high school, writing, recording and performing. And long before anyone had ever heard of Kickstarter, Smith and his band raised money to record their first album by selling advance copies to their friends at school. "We played music and wrote our own songs for six years. I really got a crash course at a young age in what it means to be in a band and to be a traveling act. Our parents would drive us around until we could drive ourselves. I'm so thankful that I got to do that because you learn to hone your craft. It was great

finding a sense of community that encourages you to do what you are passionate about and can do it with you; to have that at a young age was great." He eventually moved to Nashville and enrolled at Belmont University while honing his performing skills playing in clubs around Music City. His hard work paid off when he landed a publishing deal followed by a record deal with Mercury Nashville. His debut album spotlights Smith's versatility as a performer as well as his zest for life. As a once reluctant reality show contestant, the young artist has traveled to Dubai, Japan, Vietnam and Cambodia. His songwriting is informed by his adventurous spirit and keen observational skills, but it's his willingness to be vulnerable in sharing his trials as openly as his triumphs that makes him so relatable. Though the album has its share of poignant, thought-provoking songs, there are also rowdy, in-your-face anthems that celebrate life's lighter moments. Working with producers Brett Beavers, Jimmy Robbins and Ryan Tyndell, Smith has crafted a well-rounded album that takes the listener on a riveting emotional ride. "American Muscle," penned by Smith, Tyndell, Beavers and Dan Couch, is an edgy number with a kick ass lyric and infectious groove. "I just the love the message from start to finish," Smith says of the song which celebrates the working man, fast cars and rockin' music. "I've seen the way the crowd goes nuts when they hear it. When we play it on stage we feel high as a kite just because it's such a high-energy song. It has so much power behind it." Another stand out track is "Mad Love." "I love that song so much," Smith enthuses. "I've heard people say, 'Man I've got mad respect for you' or 'Man, I've got mad respect for this or that.' And I started thinking that'd be pretty cool to write a song that talks about mad love for somebody, and not just meaning that you love them to pieces, but that you love them so much that they make you mad. They rub you wrong sometimes. They push your buttons. It makes me think of Johnny Cash and June Carter Cash; they had a real fire for each other. If anybody had mad love it was them." Whether chronicling a complex relationship, celebrating the power of hard work or exploring the loss of a loved one, Canaan Smith has a gift for telling stories. He is carrying on Country Music's most beloved tradition and adding to the narrative that has become the soundtrack of American life. "I made a promise to myself, no matter how far we go musically, or what boundaries we push, to just tell stories and be honest in the lyrics, and to get to the root of Country Music," Smith states. "The songs that have resonated with people the most are just the ones that tell true, honest stories that people can relate to. There's a place for songs about hot girls and all that stuff, and I have a few of those too, but as we push farther and farther, I always want to check myself and make sure that what I'm doing is rooted in truth and honesty. I think that is what will last."



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