

KENNY CHESNEY

by Tamela Meredith Partridge
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Kenny Chesney has spent the past seven years building his country music career the old-fashioned way - one fan, one hit and one platinum record at a time.

"It has been a slow build," Chesney said. "All along I've just tried to learn everything I can and take small, itty-bitty steps, no matter what they were, just knowing that one day I'd be able to look back and see I've covered a lot of ground. And it's worked, especially in the past couple of years. We've really established a fan base, and it's continuing to grow."

Chesney, 32, will be increasing his Indiana fan base while performing at the Little Nashville Opry on Saturday, November 4 at 6 p.m. and 9:30 p.m. Tickets are \$21 and available at the Little Nashville Opry ticket office or by calling 812-988-2235.

The Luttrell, Tennessee vocalist, songwriter and guitarist has garnered nine Top Ten singles, including the three Billboard No.1 hits, "She's Got It All," "How Forever Feels" and "You Had Me From Hello."

"I just look for songs that people can sink their teeth into," Chesney said. "One very important side of the creative process is looking for those things that people are going to be able to live with and remember."

Initially graduating from East Tennessee State University with a degree in Advertising, Chesney moved to Nashville in '91 and began paying his dues by songwriting, singing and playing guitar at various clubs and honky tonks.



"Music is about people's emotions," Chesney said. "Being able to sing about their emotions and see them enjoy and relate to that is a big inspiration for me in itself."

Landing a songwriting contract with Acuff-Rose publishing in '92 led to Chesney being discovered at a songwriter's showcase and eventually receiving a recording contract in '93.

"My music has a lot of diversity to it," Chesney said, "but I think my songs, hopefully, are relatable. When I am looking for a song, I put myself in the place of the fans out there. I am constantly asking myself, 'Ok, if I am out there, what is going to turn them on?' I think that everybody wants to hear a love song, everybody wants to hear a sad song and everybody wants to hear a fun song. I just think your songs have to be relatable, in some way. And if they are not, then you are missing the boat. So, I am constantly, almost to a fault, editing myself a lot with the songs."

One of the high points of Chesney's career was being invited to participate in the prestigious George Strait Tour.

"As you can imagine, being a part of the George Strait tour was just incredible," Chesney said. "I have been lucky enough to tour with George for the past couple of years and I talked to him a lot. George Strait is an inspiration and it was just so much fun to be a part of the tour, to get to know George and his wife, his family and everybody else who was on the tour. They treated us great, and it was just something out of this world."

Today, the ACM Top New Male Vocalist is celebrating his successful career longevity with the recent release of sixth album, "Greatest Hits" and it's first single, "I Lost It."

"I have different songs I have recorded over the years that mean different things to me," Chesney said. "'When I Close My Eyes' is a very special song because it was my first No. 1 record. 'How Forever Feels' is very special because it was a six-week No. 1 record. And 'You Had Me From Hello' was not my first No. 1 record, but it was my first No. 1 record as a songwriter. So, I have different songs that mean different things to me and they are equally as special. That is what is so great about this 'Greatest Hits' album. Every song has a memory and something that means something to me."

Even though Chesney's career was often a slow and steady upward climb on the road to country music stardom, he found the journey itself to be quite rewarding.

"I'm very thankful for the path that my career has taken," Chesney said. "I've learned something new at every level and there's a lot to learn about having a career as an artist. I wouldn't trade where I am at right now or where I'm going with anybody in Nashville."