

Alan Jackson: Small-Town Southern Man

Alan Jackson has built his successful career by writing and singing songs about his humble Southern roots.

Born in Newnan, Georgia, on October 27, 1958, Jackson grew up with four older sisters. His mother was a homemaker and his father was an auto mechanic who loved country music. When he was eighteen, Jackson married his high school sweetheart, Denise, and the couple moved to Nashville in 1985 so he could pursue a music career.

Throughout the 1990s, Jackson raced to the top of the charts, mostly with songs he wrote or co-wrote. Two fun, clever songs helped turn him into a superstar: “Don’t Rock the Jukebox,” his salute to traditional country, and “Chattahoochee,” about his teenage years hanging out at the Chattahoochee River.

“As far as the modern era goes, I don’t think there’s a more perfect traditional country singer or writer,” says fellow country artist Joe Nichols. “To be able to connect ... to the common man and write song after song about just regular things, regular life, and have success, I think he’s one of the best.”

After the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001, Jackson was moved to write “Where Were You (When the World Stopped Turning).” He debuted it on the 2001 CMA Awards, and Americans rallied around the song’s message of healing. It also showed another side of Jackson’s artistry.

“I like the sad ones better—always have,” Jackson says. “They have a lot of emotion and as a writer, they’re easier to write. I’ve always included them on albums, and I think they’ve been a part of country music forever—and should always be. I



know people out there have a hard enough time, and they like to hear fast songs and something fun to make them forget about anything. But I’ve had a lot of people that appreciate a heartache song that sounds like what they just went through. It makes them feel like there’s somebody else out there.”

Jackson returned to his roots for many more hits, including 2002’s “Drive (for Daddy Gene).” His three daughters starred in the music video, bringing the family connection full circle. In 2007 and 2008, slice-of-life songs like “Small Town Southern Man,” “Good Time” and “Country Boy” attracted a new generation of fans. Jackson was inducted into the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame in 2011.

Sources: CMT.com, *The Encyclopedia of Country Music*, Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame

LISTEN:

“Chasin’ That Neon Rainbow”

“Chattahoochee”

“Drive (for Daddy Gene)”

“Small Town Southern Man”

“Where Were You (When the World Stopped Turning)”