

## Kacey Musgraves: Inspired by Small-town Roots

By the time she started taking guitar lessons at age twelve, Kacey Musgraves had already been singing in public for four years. But her guitar teacher challenged her to do more than play and sing.

“He saw that I dabbled in writing a bit and really pushed me to work on that,” Musgraves said. “So instead of technical stuff, my assignment was to go home and try to write a song. I fell in love with it.”

Now an award-winning recording artist, Musgraves has made her mark in country music as much with her writing as with her singing. Her wit and love of clever wordplay have endeared her to fans as well as songwriting greats such as John Prine and Country Music Hall of Fame member Loretta Lynn, two of Musgraves’s musical heroes.

Born on August 21, 1988, in the east Texas town of Sulphur Springs, Musgraves grew up in nearby Golden, a town with fewer than two hundred residents. At age eight, she learned to yodel, dressed up in fringed cowgirl outfits, and began performing classic country songs at amateur shows around the area. Her guitar teacher John DeFoore—who also taught Miranda Lambert, another country star from east Texas—set Musgraves on a journey to discover her own country music identity.

“When I first started writing my own songs, they were pretty bad,” she said. “I hadn’t found my own voice yet. But it made me appreciate the creative process, and it made me better. I learned not to be scared to just throw an idea out there.”

At age eighteen, she struck out for Austin, a hotbed of live music, and earned a spot on the television singing competition *Nashville Star*, placing seventh. In 2008, she moved to Nashville, where she decided to put her efforts into songwriting, and was hired as a staff songwriter by a publishing company. But as she wrote for other artists, she thought about her own performing career. “I developed a real passion for the construction of songs and probably wrote a couple hundred during that time, putting aside the ones that felt the most like me,” she said.

She became part of a tight circle of talented songwriters, including Shane McAnally and Luke Laird, both of whom eventually joined Musgraves in co-producing her Grammy-winning 2013 debut album *Same Trailer Different Park*. Musgraves followed that album with *Pageant Material* and *A Very Kacey Christmas*.



On her latest album, 2018’s *Golden Hour*, Musgraves took creative risks, incorporating other styles of music, such as pop and disco, into her country sound. The album won four Grammys and the Country Music Association’s Album of the Year award. “I revere the roots of this beautifully historic genre to my core,” she tweeted after the CMA Awards. “It’s been embedded in me since childhood. . . Preserving those elements while having the courage and freedom to infuse other influences is everything to me.”

Musgraves is known for using her small-town upbringing as inspiration for songs. “If a song’s message resonates with me,” she said, “that’s really all that matters. I find that if you always keep things really honest and conversational, we’re all humans going through the same things, and there are going to be people out there who are definitely going to relate. That’s why I love country music. It integrates into all parts of life, even the weird ones.”

Sources: *American Songwriter*, [kaceymusgraves.com](http://kaceymusgraves.com), *The New York Times*, *Spin*, [twitter.com](https://twitter.com/kaceygraves)

### LISTEN:

“Dandelion”                      “Somebody to Love”  
“Good Ol’ Boys Club”        “Undermine” (performed by Hayden Panettiere)  
“My House”