



VOICES IN THE HALL: KANE BROWN

EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

PETER COOPER Welcome to Voices in the Hall, presented by the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum. I'm Peter Cooper. My guest today: Kane Brown.

KANE BROWN I don't feel like an outcast, like I feel accepted now. But I'm still the one that, if you put me in a line with every country singer here you're going to look at me first.

I feel like if you're a musician and you're a writer on your songs, you just feel like they're all your babies. So you can't really pick one out.

The people that I need is my fans, the people I work with, and country radio. I don't really feel like I really need anybody else. I don't need anybody else's approval.

PETER COOPER It's Voices in the Hall, with Kane Brown.

"Lose It" - Kane Brown (Experiment / Sony)

PETER COOPER "Lose It," by Kane Brown. Kane was raised in and around the Chattanooga area, and he's among the biggest stars in contemporary country music. But he didn't get there the typical way.

Kane has fans who seldom pay attention to the country world. He's notched Number One Country radio hits including "Lose It," and including "What Ifs" and "Heaven" and "Good As You." He grew up on country music, but forges onward with a sound that crosses genre lines and with an image that stretches beyond many people's notion of country. He's bi-racial, he's heavily tattooed, and he's heavily talented. And it was an eventful early afternoon when Kane and his crew descended on Alan Stoker and me at the audio lair at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum.

Kane thank you for being with us here on Voices in the Hall. I think the first time I heard somebody really bragging on you, it was Randy Travis and his wife Mary. And they just kept going on and on. What does it mean to have the respect and admiration of somebody who's a genuine hero in this music?

KANE BROWN It feels awesome. I remember the first time I met Randy Travis I was in a radio studio singing his song "Three Wooden Crosses" and he came up behind me and surprised me. It was the first time I ever met him. And ever since then he's had my back. And you know they say they look at me like a son. So it's cool. I've never really had a dad. So it's cool to have that guy there. Just always somebody I can run to.

And his wife is amazing. I mean their relationship alone is just inspiring. I remember last year we were here at the Country Music Hall of Fame, and he don't have trouble standing up but they want support beside him.



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And his wife told him to you know if he needed any help just lean on the reporter, and he was like, "No." And then lean on me if he needed any help, and he's like, "No, I want you here beside me." So that was just really touching to me. And they're just great people.

PETER COOPER Wow. Now you were you were born in '93, raised around the Chattanooga area. Is that fair to say?

KANE BROWN Yeah. I mean it was. Growing up it was more like Lafayette, Georgia and Ringgold Rock Springs area, but then as I got into middle school we moved closer to the Chattanooga area.

PETER COOPER What was life like, late '90s early 2000s, for you in that area? It's fairly rural area. Chattanooga is a city, but there's a lot of country out there. Were you a sad kid? Were you happy go lucky?

KANE BROWN No I was. You know I didn't know we were basically broke. Luckily my Papaw was a farmer. So we got to live in a trailer that was out on a farm. It was me and my little brother and we thought we had everything in the world. We ran around, played with rocks, sticks. We had a little pond we used to fish in. We got to help our Papaw heard the cows in, so we got to run behind them and chase them which we thought was awesome. And we got to watch how he milked them and everything. It was. The farm was just a big, big toy. I got to sit on the lawn mower and put it rabbit mode and take off.

PETER COOPER Now there are people listening to this all over the world, and some of them may not know what a Papaw is, some of them that aren't from this area. What's a Papaw?

KANE BROWN He's my great granddaddy.

PETER COOPER And were you into music as a kid when you're riding around on the farm and doing all that?

KANE BROWN Yeah. You know I grew up by all females, other than Papaw. But it was always Shania Twain, Sugarland. You know, "I Feel Like a Woman."

PETER COOPER That's your prime musical influence, "Man I Feel Like A Woman"?

KANE BROWN Well no. And Tim McGraw. Tim McGraw was the first song I ever knew was "I Like It, I Love It." So that was kind of my start in my musical influence.



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PETER COOPER Before you had a full-time career in music, you had a full-time job at FedEx. And I'm going to ask you something I've never before asked a country music star, and I've been doing this for a lot of years. And my question that has never before been asked is: What's it like to work at FedEx?

KANE BROWN FedEx is amazing. I love FedEx. If I had to quit music tomorrow, I'd go back to FedEx.

PETER COOPER What do you do there?

KANE BROWN Dude, I made so many cool friendships at FedEx. I mean it'd probably different now that I'm older, but I was 21. So it was like we were still in high school basically. Everybody was my age and we just talked and threw boxes down the aisle and packed trucks. I basically, I got to make my own hours. It was also really cool because it was like when everything was going viral on Facebook. So I would you know take a break, I'd be like "Hey I'm going to take a 15 minute break," like every five minutes. And I would go record covers in my car and put them up on Facebook.

PETER COOPER So explain that. Recording covers in your car. You're taking a break and you're singing what, and you're doing what with it? This is. It's a different kind of country music success story. So you're, you've got to be tired working at Fed Ex throwing boxes around, but then you take your break. And what do you do in the car, and then what do you do with that?

KANE BROWN I was really into Billy Currington at the time. I mean I still like Billy Currington, but that was like the covers I was around. So I was just singing Billy Currington covers in the car acapella, no track or anything. And I would put them up on Facebook. And then once I got to work I would be on my phone watching how the likes and the comments were going. You know, just throwing boxes.

Clip of Kane Brown's cover of "Your Man" originally by Josh Turner.

PETER COOPER Did the people there understand what was starting to go on with you?

KANE BROWN Yeah they were all following me and stuff. And the manager, I think he's still there today, he knew what was going on and he knew what I wanted to do. And while I was at FedEx is when I got the microphone tattoo that I have on my hand. So that, that was crazy was trying to pack boxes and not hurt my tattoo at the same time because my hand was the size of a boxing glove. It was so swollen. But yeah, he knew and you know he knew that I had a dream and he was trying to help me get there.

PETER COOPER What was that dream?



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KANE BROWN Just to be a musician.

PETER COOPER When did that dream take hold? When did you decide that this is what you wanted to do?

KANE BROWN Well it was weird because like I'd never, I would always sing but I never figured that it would be something I would do. Like I was always wanting to play football or play basketball or play baseball. So at that time, as I'm doing these covers I'm also working out every day and trying to go walk on the Ole Miss football team. That was my plan. Me and my buddy David. And so yeah. We're playing 7 on 7 and at the time like you know if I'm bored and I'm not playing football, I'm playing Xbox. If I'm not playing Xbox, I'm putting these covers up on Facebook. I had like a full 48-hour cycle of just constant work. Never slept. That was just my routine. And finally just the routine kicked off with music instead of football.

PETER COOPER Your voice was already low by that point?

KANE BROWN Yeah, it was already there. My voice was low since I was 12 playing PlayStation. Everybody'd cuss at me thinking I was 25.

PETER COOPER I don't believe that's your real voice. I think if I stepped on your foot, you'd be like "Ow! That hurt!" You could have a career doing radio not singing, just talking.

KANE BROWN I've been told that. I don't think that I'm. I think I'm too laid back for it.

PETER COOPER So you're putting this stuff up online and people start to take notice after a while. And the people who like it go back to see what you're going to do the next time you've got a 15 minute break at FedEx. When did you realize I think this is going somewhere. I think I'm getting some place with this?

KANE BROWN Well we recorded my first EP, and we put it up and I actually afforded my first apartment off of iTunes. Which is awesome. I got my first car. It was awesome. I thought I was living the dream. I got to take my friends out to lunch and then start realizing the money was running low and was wondering when my iTunes check was going to come in. But then all of a sudden we wrote this song "Used to Love You Sober." And we put that up.

PETER COOPER With Josh Hope.



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KANE BROWN Yeah, Josh Hope and Matt McVaney. And we put that up and you know we released it independently and it was going up against "Die a Happy Man" by Thomas Rhett whenever it was in its prime. And it was just. It was crazy.

PETER COOPER Now you've spent some time in the studio. When you're recording something, do you ever know that what you're recording is going to be a hit?

KANE BROWN I don't know, because I feel like if you're a musician and if you're a writer on your songs you just feel like they're all your babies. So you can't really pick one out from here or there. I honestly did not think "What Ifs" was going to be as big as it was. I figured "Heaven" would, and I didn't even write "Heaven." So "What Ifs" was a huge surprise to me. And I'm glad I listened to Sony. And I'm glad that we let them take that as single. Because we had already released I think two or three before I ever had anything over 37. So it took 46 weeks for "What Ifs" to go Number One. And I remember counting every single chart that it jumped. I was watching it the whole way.

"What Ifs" - Kane Brown (Chapter 1 - EP / Sony)

PETER COOPER "What Ifs," by Kane Brown and his childhood pal, Lauren Alaina. That was a Number One country hit. And when you're an artist who scores Number One country hits you tend to attract attention at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum. We're here in our audio lair, where engineer Alan Stoker has captured and digitized so much history, and where Kane Brown and his friends and associates are hanging out now. And we have a window here where folks can look at what's going on.

And usually they don't, because there's so much else to look at in this museum. But today, museum visitors are turning away from Hank Williams's suit and boots, however briefly, in favor of waving to Kane Brown and hoping to get a moment of his attention.

KANE BROWN Sorry, waving at them.

FEMALE VOICE They can see in here, just in case you were wondering.

PETER COOPER He's in disguise by wearing a hat that says K.B. on it. So it's really hard for people to figure out that it's him.

You also were developing, early on, a big live presence. You were you were reeling people into shows before there was a lot of music out there other than on the Internet for them to hear about you. When did you see that momentum start really rolling?

KANE BROWN I mean we had some shows in Chattanooga were like 150 to 200 people. I was scared to death. I didn't know what I was doing. And then we had a, our first actual like "gig" gig was in South Carolina. Darlington, South Carolina. We posted it



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up. We didn't have a booking agency yet. And my lead guitar player's like, "We need to do a show." So he did all the booking. And it was crazy. We sold out 800 people in 30 minutes. So then the venue is like, "We want to do another show with you the next night, because a lot of people were complaining they didn't get tickets." So...

PETER COOPER Did you tell them it was a NASCAR race or something in Darlington?

KANE BROWN No. So then we put it up again and the next show sold out in eight minutes. So it was. We had maybe six songs and they wanted us playing 90 minutes. And so we had a lot of covers. And we just. We jammed out. And it was honestly some of the funnest times I've ever had my life. You know it was like a family. And everybody, we had a RV. We were in an RV for like a week and then we went to a tour bus. So it was like crazy fast.

PETER COOPER Did you realize how different this path was than the paths that other people had taken?

KANE BROWN I did, but I didn't. I didn't realize that it didn't happen like this in country music before. Because I've seen it like with Justin Bieber and a bunch of pop. I think Shawn Mendes did it too. And so I've seen it done. I just didn't know it wasn't done in Country before.

PETER COOPER What did people see and hear in you that made them want to come out to these shows, and that made them want to listen to these things you're posting online?

KANE BROWN I have no idea. You know I was really personal and open with everybody. I always show my fans love because they got me where I'm at today. I don't know, maybe they can relate to me. Maybe they just you know feel like I'm the outcast and they feel like they're an outcast so we're talking to them.

PETER COOPER Do you still feel like an outcast?

KANE BROWN I don't feel like an outcast, like I feel accepted now. But I'm still the you know the one that, if you put me in a line with every country singer here you're going to look at me first.

PETER COOPER Yeah. I was looking online. In Billboard magazine an article from Marissa Moss, who's one of the best writers out there, said, "As many fans as Brown has there are plenty of folks who wish he would stay out of country altogether." Do you buy that?

KANE BROWN Oh yeah. But if they ain't listening to me why should I care?



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PETER COOPER Man. So you do, you feel like there's people there trying to be elbows out with you?

KANE BROWN Oh yeah. I don't care about them though.

PETER COOPER Yeah. From the Washington Post. "Kane Brown could be the future of country music. So why is the industry skeptical?"

KANE BROWN I don't know. You tell me.

PETER COOPER I'm not sure that they can be skeptical. It's kind of like being skeptical of the New England Patriots. It's like, well there's a Super Bowl right there.

KANE BROWN Yeah I got. The people that I need is my fans, the people I work with, and country radio. I don't really feel like I really need anybody else. That's who's getting my music out there is the radio. I love them, they love me. And my family that I work with. And my label. I don't need anybody else's approval.

PETER COOPER Yeah. And on Google when I went into a Kane Brown search, there's a little place that says "people also ask" in the search. The first question asked, "Is Kane Brown really country?"

KANE BROWN Yeah. That's probably just because if you look at me I'm not your typical country artist. Like the look, anything like that. I don't know. It's all about imagery these days. Back in the day I feel like. I feel like it's doing better now because back in the day nobody had tattoos or anything like that. Now everybody's getting tattoos.

PETER COOPER Yeah 90s country guys are getting tattoos. Ronnie Dunn's got a big tattoo.

KANE BROWN Yeah. It's different. But for me you know I got them on my hands. I don't think anybody in country music has them on their hands. I have a neck tat. I remember I was at the ACMs. Or no, CMAs are in Nashville right? And we were backstage and there was this one dude back there talking to my agent. And I've been wanting to say something so long but I haven't. But he's like, "At least you ain't got a neck tat like Kane." It kind of hurt. And it had everything in me not to go and say something, but it was. It's what it is, you know?

PETER COOPER Well it's interesting that when somebody comes along that has a different image or a different sound, a lot of times that can fall completely by the wayside and never be paid attention to. But then at other times, and this is somebody who's got nothing to do with your sound or image, but like with Taylor Swift, she came



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along she was like nothing else that was out there. And it was boffo because people hadn't heard anything like that. You know she. If they wanted what she was giving, then she was the only place they could get it. And it seems like that's what happened with you from the very beginning of putting these videos online and people went, "Well I didn't know that I wanted to hear that, but that's what I wanted to hear."

KANE BROWN Mm hmm. I don't know. I just know my fans are here and they're always going to be here.

"Heaven" - Kane Brown (Kane Brown (Deluxe Edition) / Sony)

PETER COOPER That was another one of Kane Brown's big ol' hits, "Heaven."

Do you feel understood yet as an artist?

KANE BROWN I feel like this whole time I've been trying to be understood. I just, I don't care anymore. You know if you understand me, you understand me. If you don't understand me, then get out of my way.

PETER COOPER What's to understand?

KANE BROWN I don't even know anymore. It's gone. I'm just here doing music. If you're a fan, I'm going to try to help you in life anyway I can. That's all I want to do is just get to where I can help people. And, I mean I'm already here, but if I can keep you know getting higher and keep inspiring people, that's all we've got to do.

PETER COOPER Do you have instances that you can think of where you have inspired people? Where people tell you that what you're doing matters to them in their lives?

KANE BROWN Yeah we actually. The craziest story I think I've heard, and I want to meet the girl. There was a girl that went into a coma. And they didn't think that she was going to live. So they asked her mom or her dad, one of them, was like, "What's her favorite song? We're going to play it for her so she you know passes easy," or whatever. And so they started playing "Heaven." And as she's in a coma there's a tear that comes down her face. And then the next day she woke up. And she said that she was going to change how she was living and just be a better person and stuff like that. That's the stuff that touches me and makes me love doing what I do.

PETER COOPER That's what helps us love what you do as well. Kane, thank you so much for being here on Voices in the Hall.

KANE BROWN Thank you. Thanks for having me.



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PETER COOPER Kane Brown, a man who didn't wait for radio or corporations to come calling before he announced himself to the world. We live in a time when filters have been minimized, and when music can be heard by millions without contracts or board meetings or television appearances. Kane Brown has all that stuff. He's got contracts, and people have board meetings about him, and he makes television appearances, but that's because he created his own success, on his own, and on his own terms.

Learn more about Kane Brown at our website, Voicesinthehall.org. And use the handle @VoicesintheHall to find us and follow us on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

Our next podcast episode features the husband and wife duo of Buddy and Julie Miller. If you'd like to get in the mood, there's a playlist of their stuff on the website.

Voices in the Hall is produced by the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum in collaboration with Ben Manilla and Jennie Cataldo of BMP Audio. The show is recorded by Alan Stoker. I'm Peter Cooper. Thanks for listening. We invite you to visit the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum in Nashville, Tennessee. You never know who you'll meet.