

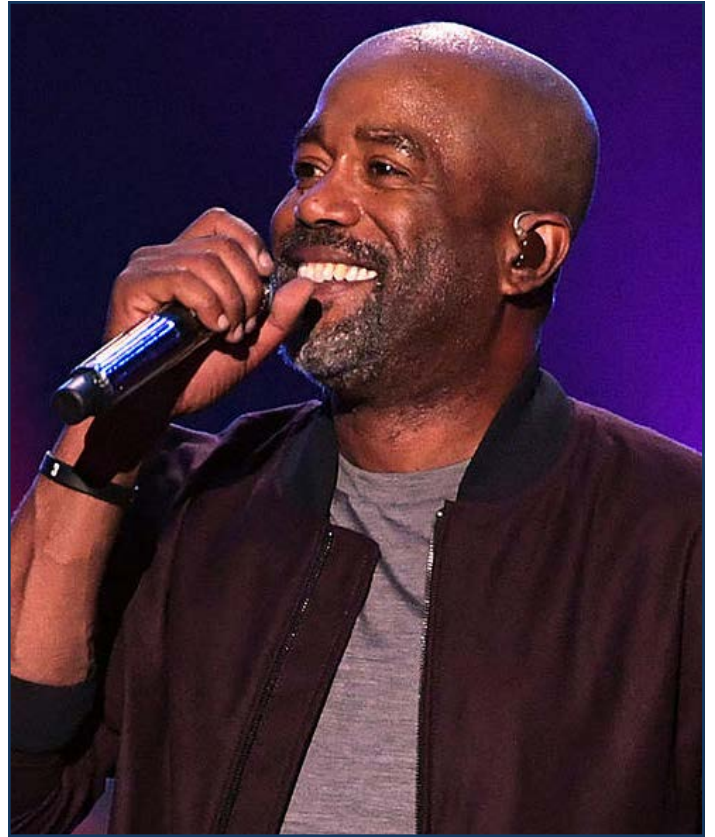
DARIUS RUCKER: COUNTRY'S BOUNDARY JUMPER

Darius Rucker is the rare artist who has had successful careers in two genres—first as the lead vocalist of the pop-rock band Hootie & the Blowfish and then, beginning in 2008, as a solo country singer-songwriter. As a Black artist who has achieved success in a largely white genre, he has helped break down racial barriers in country music.

Born May 13, 1966, in Charleston, South Carolina, Rucker was one of six children of a single mother who worked as a nurse. Growing up, he listened to such R&B icons as Otis Redding and Al Green, but he was just as drawn to country and pop music: “I think I just said to myself, ‘I’m never going to let anybody tell me what I can listen to.’ And I never did.”

In 1986, while enrolled at the University of South Carolina, he and three classmates formed Hootie & the Blowfish, a name inspired by the nicknames of two college buddies. With Rucker’s smooth baritone voice in command, the band’s melodic pop-rock sound proved wildly popular. The band’s 1994 debut album, *Cracked Rear View*, sold twenty-one million copies and remains among the best-selling records of all time. After four more albums, the band took a break in 2008, and Rucker decided to explore his love for country music.

Making the jump, though, meant overcoming the prevailing perception that country music excludes Black musicians; Charley Pride was the last major Black artist, and his stardom had peaked decades before. Rucker has been open about resistance that he has faced. “I was going into radio stations,” he says, “and being told that they didn’t think it was going to work because I was African American. That was tough.”



In fact, Rucker upended preconceptions, and his debut country album produced three straight #1 singles: “Don’t Think I Don’t Think About It,” “It Won’t Be Like This for Long,” and “Alright.” In 2009, he received the Country Music Association’s award for New Artist of the Year, and in 2012, he became only the third Black artist to join the cast of the Grand Ole Opry. He has gone on to score more #1 country singles, record five more solo albums, and, in 2020, co-hosted the *54th Annual CMA Awards* with Reba McEntire. Rucker’s Nashville experience, he says, has helped him grow

Continued on back

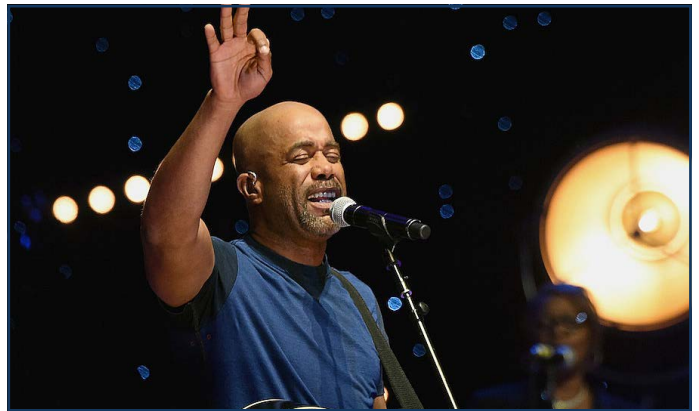
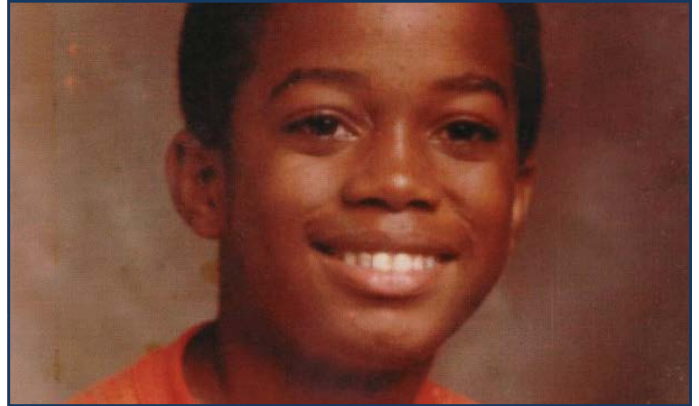
LISTEN

“Wagon Wheel,” “Come Back Song,” “Don’t Think I Don’t Think About It,” “Alright”

DARIUS RUCKER: COUNTRY'S BOUNDARY JUMPER (CONTINUED)

as a songwriter. “With Hootie, we would mostly just [each] write songs and then bring them to the band,” he says. “But with country, I started co-writing a lot.” He also used to wait for inspiration to strike, but scheduled writing sessions in Nashville taught him that “songwriting is not just an art here, it’s a business. That’s what people do.”

Switching genres as a songwriter has been less of a challenge. “For me, it’s really just music,” Rucker says. “We all put our own labels on it, and I understand that and live with it. But it’s really the same notes and the same words, just played a little differently.”



CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. Explain the perception that Darius Rucker had to overcome once he decided to record country music.

2. Describe how Rucker’s songwriting process changed once he moved to Nashville. How did it stay the same?

3. Describe Rucker’s greatest impact on music in your own words. Highlight evidence for your answer in the text.
