

CHRIS STAPLETON: A SONGWRITER FIRST

Chris Stapleton never intended to be a star. He wanted to write songs *for* the stars. Stapleton was born April 15, 1978, in Lexington, Kentucky, and raised in Staffordsville, in rural eastern Kentucky. He began writing songs and playing guitar in his teens, teaching himself to play the instrument after only one formal lesson.

Stapleton grew up listening to a wide range of artists and styles, including country, soul, blues, R&B, and rap, all of which influenced the budding musician. As an artist, Stapleton has also found inspiration in fellow Kentuckians such as the Judds and Ricky Skaggs, rock artists including Aerosmith, and the rappers Dr. Dre and Snoop Dogg.

Stapleton first moved to Nashville in 1996, to attend Vanderbilt University and study engineering, but he quickly discovered he wasn't passionate about the subject. He returned to Kentucky, where he sold cars, drove an ice truck, and worked at a pizzeria while writing songs and playing in bars.

When Stapleton began working with songwriter Steve Leslie, he realized it was possible to pursue a career in songwriting. He moved back to Nashville in 2001 and signed with a music-publishing company, becoming a full-time songwriter without dreams of a career as a performing artist.

Within two years, Stapleton's songs were being recorded and released by artists like Gary Allan and Patty Loveless. He earned his first *Billboard* #1 hit as a songwriter with Josh Turner's "Your Man" in 2006 and has written several more #1 hits for himself and other artists.

Also in 2006, Stapleton joined the bluegrass band the SteelDrivers as lead singer, guitarist, and songwriter,



recording and performing with them until 2010. Later that year, his blues-influenced rock band, the Jompson Brothers, released their first and only album, and he also stayed busy recording background vocals for other artists.

Stapleton's first solo success came in 2015 with his debut album, *Traveller*, which was inspired by an eleven-day road trip he took after the death of his father. He wrote the album's title track during the cross-country journey, after picking up a 1979 Jeep Cherokee that his wife, Morgane, had purchased for him in Arizona. The trip—and the recording of the album at historic RCA Studio A with co-producer

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LISTEN

"Traveller," "Cold," "Say Something" (with Justin Timberlake), "On the Run" (by the Jompson Brothers)

CHRIS STAPLETON: A SONGWRITER FIRST (CONTINUED)

Dave Cobb—marked a turning point in Stapleton’s embrace of his individuality and pursuit of artistic freedom.

Stapleton catapulted to stardom after performing with pop star Justin Timberlake at the 2015 Country Music Association Awards and winning all three CMA awards for which he was nominated that year. Following the show, his debut solo album, *Traveller*, skyrocketed to #1 on the country album charts.

Stapleton remains a top-selling recording artist and touring act with his band, the Honchos, and has accumulated armloads of awards, including nine Academy of Country Music awards, fourteen CMA awards, and nine Grammys.



CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. Circle the word “accumulated” in the last paragraph. Underline the clue words and phrases that help you understand the meaning of the word. Then, define it in your own words.

2. What was the significance of Stapleton’s road trip and recording of the album *Traveller*? Explain how these events were turning points in his life.

3. Highlight three events in Stapleton’s life that had a significant effect on his current success. Pick one and, in at least three sentences, defend why it is the most important.
