

KACEY MUSGRAVES: INSPIRED BY SMALL-TOWN ROOTS

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

“He saw that I dabbled in writing a bit and really pushed me to work on that,” Musgraves recalls. “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. “What separates and sends Musgraves soaring higher than her peers is her writing,” notes music critic Brennan Carley.

Born 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 dressed up in fringed cowgirl outfits and began performing classic country songs at amateur shows around the area. Her guitar teacher, John DeFoore, set Musgraves on a journey to discover her own country music identity. (DeFoore also taught Miranda Lambert, another country star from East Texas.)

In 1999, Musgraves and another child performer, Alina Tatum, formed the Texas Two Bits, a duo that sang and yodeled in harmony. Following a performance with Asleep at the Wheel at President George W. Bush’s 2001 “Black Tie and Boots Inaugural Ball,” the duo split up, and Musgraves pursued a solo career. She went on to release two independent solo albums, *Movin’ On* (2001) and *Wanted: One Good Cowboy* (2002).



“When I first started writing my own songs, they were pretty bad,” she says. “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, Musgraves struck out for Austin, a hotbed of live music, and earned a spot on the television singing-competition *Nashville Star*, placing seventh. Two years later, in 2008, she moved to Nashville to focus on songwriting and was hired as a staff songwriter by a publishing company. But even as she wrote for other artists, she still 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 says.

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LISTEN

“Dandelion,” “Good Ol’ Boys Club,” “My House,” “Golden Hour,” “Dime Store Cowgirl”

KACEY MUSGRAVES: INSPIRED BY SMALL-TOWN ROOTS (CONTINUED)

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 critically acclaimed 2013 debut album, *Same Trailer, Different Park*. It went on to win two Grammys. On November 14, 2018, ten years to the day after Musgraves moved to Nashville, her album *Golden Hour* won Album of the Year at the Country Music Association Awards. The next February, she won four Grammys: Album of the Year (in the highly competitive all-genre category), Best Country Album, Best Country Song (“Space Cowboy”), and Best Country Solo Performance (“Butterflies”).

In 2021, Musgraves released her fifth studio album, *Star-Crossed*. She co-wrote and co-produced the album—planned

as a three-act tragedy—during the COVID-19 pandemic with Ian Fitchuk and Daniel Tashian, with whom she collaborated on *Golden Hour*. The album debuted at #1 on the *Billboard* Top Country Albums chart and at #3 on the all-genre *Billboard* 200.

Musgraves is known for turning her small-town upbringing into song material, and her lyrics crackle with wit and clever wordplay.

“If a song’s message resonates with me,” she explains, “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.”

CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. In the last paragraph, what does the word “resonates” mean in this context? Circle the clue words and phrases that help you understand its meaning, and on the lines below, define the term in your own words.

2. Highlight three events in Musgraves’s life that had a significant impact on her career. Which of them had the greatest impact? Explain your answer in at least three sentences.

3. In the final paragraph, Musgraves discusses why she loves country music. Explain what she means in your own words.
