

# Tyler Farr

## Biography

“I wanted to make an album you could take anywhere,” says Tyler Farr of his Columbia Nashville debut, “and I can take this one to a barn party on a back road and have everybody rock out, and at the same time kids can enjoy it and dance to it.”

He pauses and laughs. “And I could play it for my grandma! I wanted everybody to be able to listen to it, and I think we accomplished that.”

As someone who believes that sharing music is not about fences, Tyler recorded a stylistically rich debut album, true to his roots and influences, yet with a freshness and personality that allow it to stand alone in contemporary country music. The project ranges from power ballads, displaying a voice honed by years of classical training, to edgy tracks influenced by Tyler’s relationship with his good friend, country rapper Colt Ford.

“The album is who I am,” he says, “and it is different. It’s going to be one of the most diverse albums out there. I spent two years listening to songs, picking those I thought represented me the best—not just great songs, but the right songs. There are things that will make you cry and some that are pure fun, like ‘Hot Mess,’ or one I did with Colt called ‘Chicks, Trucks, and Beer.’ ‘Hello Goodbye’ is a break-up song, a big ballad, and then there are songs like one I wrote with Craig Wiseman called ‘Makes You Wanna Drink’ and one called ‘Redneck Crazy.’ If it’s great music,” Tyler adds, it isn’t about the instrumentation or the style: “You either rock or you don’t, and if it rocks, I like it.”

Bringing the project to fruition was part of a journey that has transformed the young singer’s outlook.

“My life has done a one-eighty in the past few years,” he says. “I went from having nothing to being able to make a solid living doing what I love to do—to be on the road and on a tour bus year-round.”

Part of that one-eighty included playing more than 200 dates with Ford.

“We met and just hit it off,” he says, “and I became his road vocalist and opened shows for him. I learned what my crowd is, what they like and what gets them going.”

While his abilities as a vocalist and showman were serving him well on the road, his knack for songwriting had earned him a publishing deal and helped lead to his recording contract. It was the culmination of a long road to national attention that began in Garden City, Missouri, a farm community a little over an hour from Kansas City.

“We had 800 people,” he says. “We didn’t even have a stop light!”

He grew up loving the outdoors—at one point he considered a career in wildlife management or as a game warden, but his love for entertainment sprouted early.

“I would always be running around the house impersonating people, how they talked or how they sang,” he says, “and that probably helped me more than anything because I learned how to make my voice do different things.”

Those skills were in evidence when he joined the middle school choir, then did a solo at a Christmas show.

“Everybody was talking about how much they liked it,” he says. “They told me, ‘You need to do this,’ and so my mom got me classical voice lessons.”

He took those lessons in Harrisonville, which was 20 miles away and “had a movie theater and an Applebee’s—all your basic necessities!” He kept up the lessons in high school, a choice that Tyler says “was the best thing I could have done. On this album, you’ll hear a lot of things that show how those lessons expanded my range and helped me learn to make my voice more expressive.”

Tyler received several vocal scholarship offers and accepted one at Missouri State University. In the meantime, his mother’s remarriage had another huge effect on his life.

“My mom married DeWayne Phillips, who played lead guitar for George Jones. I was 16, and my first thought was, ‘Who’s George Jones?’ But then I started going on the road with him, and I saw him on the bus and thought, ‘Man, what a cool voice. I’ve never heard anyone talk like this in my life.’

“I remember seeing him on stage, and if there’s a moment where I knew what I wanted to do for the rest of my life, it was when I was standing on the side of the stage while he sang ‘Who’s Gonna Fill Their Shoes,’ with pictures of Hank Sr. and Lefty Frizzell and Elvis and Vern Gosdin up on the screen behind him. I got goose bumps. I started wearing out country gold from that point on.”

Phillips recognized Tyler’s singing ability and took him to Nashville to record some songs.

“I was still in high school,” he says, “and I sounded like a little Vince Gill. But nothing happened, and at that point you think, ‘What are the chances of me being able to do that for a living?’”

He sang regularly at small-town Oprys in several states, especially during the summer, as well as at occasional talent contests.

“I liked great music of all kinds,” he says. “Country, R&B, rock, hip-hop—everything, really. When I was younger, Garth Brooks was really hitting it, and Tim McGraw’s first albums were out, and I remember listening to that stuff on the way to school. But I was listening to MC Hammer, too. If it made me sing along, I liked it.”

Once he’d learned to separate his classical techniques from the popular music he enjoyed, Tyler could bring the strength and control of his vocal training to bear on the music he wanted to make.

During his senior year in high school, music took on added meaning for Tyler following the death of his grandfather, who had given him his first guitar. “The last thing I remember him saying is, ‘Keep singing. I know that’s what you’re supposed to do.’”

“I took his passing really hard, and that loss carried over into college,” Tyler recalls. It was during this time that he began playing guitar more often and skipping class to write songs. At one point he took part in a talent show called “Big Man on Campus,” singing the Rascal Flatts hit, “I Melt.”

“The whole school was there, and the girls all loved it, and afterwards I was getting phone numbers,” he says. “People were saying, ‘Man, you should move to Nashville,’ and I thought, ‘You know, this is alright. I could do this.’”

“I remember calling my mom and saying, ‘I’m gonna move to Nashville.’ She wasn’t happy about it, but I said, ‘I’m sorry, but one day you’ll understand.’ I literally picked up my stuff that I had in the fraternity house I was living in, threw it in the back of my car, and just took off to Nashville. I came down here with nothing. Mom thought I was crazy, but she and my father drove all the way down and helped me load my stuff and move in.”

Tyler took a job working the door at Tootsie’s Orchid Lounge, a magnet for singers and musicians moving to Nashville. At one point, he got on stage to sing and immediately got encouragement from the band.

“I loved the whole feel of the honky-tonk,” he says. “I was like, ‘Man, I should’ve been born here. This is what I should have been doing since I was ten.’ I ate it up.”

He played guitar on and off the job, flipped burgers in the kitchen, worked the door and sang. He took a landscaping job in nearby Franklin, “doing whatever I could to make it. I was broke as all hell, but after I’d sung a few times at Tootsie’s, they said, ‘We need to get you your own show here. Two months later, I’m playing three or four nights a week, 10:00 ‘til close.’”

Tyler and his family scraped together all the money they could, and he made a CD that showed off his vocal talents, but taking it to the next level wasn’t yet in the cards.

“I didn’t know enough people,” he says. “I wasn’t in the loop.” Discouraged, Tyler recalls waking up one morning and saying, “I’m moving back home.”

He worked at a children’s rehabilitation facility in the Ozarks, singing to the kids at night and staying with an aunt and uncle.

“I was content, but something was missing,” he says, but then the CD he’d made reached songwriter/artist Rhett Akins. “He asked if I was still writing, then said, ‘I really like your voice.’ He and his writing partners Dallas Davidson and Ben Hayslip said they

wanted to work with me. It turned out they had also heard a song I had done for a GAC outdoor show. It was like God redirecting my life, saying, 'This is what you need to do,' and it happened a week after I decided I was going to go back to school."

Akins and his partners recorded some new material with Tyler and began pitching him as an artist. In the meantime, a Sony executive heard him perform at a National Wild Turkey Federation event in Nashville and made an introduction that led to his publishing deal. That, in turn, helped lead to his record deal.

Tyler's unique background, from avid small-town outdoorsman to classically trained vocalist, makes him one of the most compelling young singers in contemporary country. His life experiences and outlook have let him enjoy the ride.

"I've learned not to worry too much or to take life so seriously," he says. "Just have fun because you never know. I was with Luke Bryan and Lee Brice on the bus, and I'm always like, 'C'mon boys, let's get a picture. I don't know how long I'm going to be doin' this.'" It's a perspective that modestly allows Tyler to appreciate every step of his career, as he says, "I do not take one day I get to do this for granted."

The combination makes him one of the most accessible artists out there.

"Every place I go," he says, "I try to do something fun and meet somebody new. I am going to be one of those artists who's in it for the fans. I'm the guy that's gonna come out and drink a beer with you after the show. I don't know how many times I've almost not gotten into my own show because I look like the people who are coming to watch! Which I think is fine. I'm just like my fans, and that's the way I like it."