

Jon Pardi *Honkytonk Hollywood*

It's been more than a decade since Capitol Records Nashville artist Jon Pardi began careening down the highway, leading the charge to modernize honky tonk with roaring guitars and a roaring, good-time spirit.

Now with four Top 5 albums which include 2016's Platinum #1, *California Sunrise*, Pardi's reputation for punchy, against-the-wind bravado has only grown. Never afraid to break from the pack, 14 RIAA-certified singles feature six #1s (like the back-to-back 6x-Platinum songs "Head Over Boots" and "Dirt On My Boots"), and with years of blue-collar barnstorming behind him, the California native has earned international headlining acclaim, alongside 9.3 billion global streams. But despite the success – or maybe emboldened by it – today's Jon Pardi feels more restless than ever.

In point of fact, it's also the most liberated, shapeshifting record Pardi has ever made; the soundtrack to a place where anything can happen and worlds collide – *Honkytonk Hollywood*. Taking big steps out of his normal routine while fulfilling some lifelong dreams, Pardi calls it his "rock and roll record" and says that with pride, barreling full speed ahead with no real destination in mind. The spiritual successor to his fearless breakout hits, it once again finds a star pulling out the stops to stay true to himself – yet gives his signature sound a spark.

"All my albums have been rock and roll with a country flare – this one keeps on rockin'," he explains. "It's also the most grownup record I've ever made. It's all my soul basically."

The story starts about a year ago, when Pardi got a kick in the Wranglers after a single fell flat, challenging his creative direction. Meanwhile, in a Tom Petty documentary, the Rock and Roll Hall of Famer made a salient point that struck Pardi. As Petty explained it, he'd force himself to change his recording approach every few albums – because obviously, he had changed, and his songwriting had, too. "I'm like, 'Tom Petty, from the grave, is telling me to try something new!'" Pardi says, recalling the vow to shake it up. "I decided, 'Let's do whatever we want and be super creative.' And that's where it all came about."

Enlisting Jay Joyce for the first time as producer – a studio wildcard famous for sharpening the jagged edges of Eric Church, Brothers Osborne, and more – Pardi chose 17 diverse tracks, each one different from the last.

Stepping outside from the "Nashville" system (and as close to the rock ethos as possible), Pardi spent three solid weeks in the studio, building each track up from nothing. His touring band handled the vast majority of recording – and every time the group thought a song was done, Pardi says Joyce would disappear into the "Jay Lab" and cook something up. Something no one saw coming.

Depending on the day, their work might result in some lean, snarling twang and a gut-punch rhythm, or the warm, soft-focus shimmer of West Coast nostalgia. Some tracks ring with pristine, pure-country tenderness, while others embrace fuzzed-out fiddles and soaring tripled guitars, or grungy bass lines and bottomless grooves. But no matter how far he roamed, Pardi's barbed-wire vocal fenced the new ground in, claiming it as his own. It ended up being an experience he'll never forget.

"It really felt like we were making music," he explains. "It was like your high-school dream of what it would be like to make a record in Nashville, without knowing the business."

Co-writing eight songs alongside Luke Laird, Ross Copperman, Hillary Lindsey and more, the unbridled energy (and unapologetic fun) of Pardi's brand got a makeover, too. Now a husband and father of two, new maturity permeates everything from awe-struck attraction to the magnetic throes of midnight passion, with more perspective as well. Sourcing outside cuts from Jeff Hyde, Ryan Hurd and more, inner resilience and the bittersweet pangs of parenthood join his rowdy, working-class anthems.

The title track, "Honkytonk Hollywood," set the creative mood. Placed strategically in the core of the album, it's a grits-and-glitz tribute to the dual nature of Pardi's life and mindset ... and to the "Hollywood" in his personal

“Honkytonk” – his wife Summer. “That ‘Honkytonk Hollywood’ title alone spoke to me, like Nashville but also with West-Coast vibes,” Pardi says of the roots-rock anthem. “And then the whole song is basically about Summer. So how am I going to turn it down?”

Starting the album off in overdrive, “Boots Off” explodes from the speakers with a brash guitar hook and roadhouse stomp, representing the first of many hot-and-heavy love songs – and a throwback to Pardi’s boot-centric breakout hits.

Tracks like the grungy “Rush” continue the flirtatious fun, fusing alt-rock attitude with a skid-row crunch and howling vocals, perfectly capturing the swirling ecstasy of desire. Likewise, “Love the Lights Out” melts into a steamy soul rocker with slide guitar hooks and a throbbing pulse – a soundtrack for love that takes its time – and “She Gets to Drinking” sways with an intoxicating swing.

Meanwhile, others push boundaries even further sonically, with the current single “Friday Night Heartbreaker” pairing a dark, tortured blast of hard rock with a sleek singalong vocal. “Hey California” cruises down a Sunset Strip of ‘70s-style sophistication – complete with dreamy vocal stacks and atmospheric guitars. And with the slow-grooving “Don’t You Wanna Know,” Pardi’s twangy vocal pleads for romantic reconnection through a cloud of mellow, new-wave pop.

Elsewhere, family-minded balladry makes timeless trad-country feel modern, with tracks like “He Went to Work” tipping a hat to the steadfast fathers of the world. The cinematic beauty of “She Drives Away” will leave a lump in your throat. He goes all-in on the moody “Gambling Man,” a busted flat tuxedo-twang warning to avoid his dice-rolling ways. And the two-stepper “Bar Room Blue” aches with a woozy, San Antonio swing.

But by closing the set on “Kinda Wanna Keep It That Way,” Pardi once and for all declares his creative independence. A tranquil, acoustic-groove anthem with the easy strut of self-confidence, its message sums up where the restless counter-country star is at – and ultimately, the foundation of his success.

“We did what we wanted and it stands out because of it,” he goes on. “Taking the chance paid off, and I kind of want to keep it that way.”

For all the success of his multi-album, decade-plus climb, it has to come honestly, from a spark of true creative interest – and good old-fashioned fun. The lessons for Pardi, just made him stronger.