

WILLIAM MICHAEL MORGAN

William Michael Morgan has only just arrived in his mid-twenties, but with a love of country music deeper than The Big River itself, the Mississippi native is the very definition of an old soul. His pristine Southern vocal, timeless sound and honest lyric represents a new generation of hit-makers in Music City – modern day descendants of artists like Randy Travis, Alan Jackson and George Strait.

After signing his major-label deal at the tender age of 19, Morgan began by hitting the top of the radio charts, landing at No. 1 on Mediabase with the Gold-certified “I Met a Girl.” He then released an acclaimed EP and earned a *Billboard* Top 5 with his 2016 album debut, *Vinyl*. He has performed more than 50 times on the Grand Ole Opry and was featured by the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum as a highlighted artist in the 2017 American Currents exhibit.

But now that he’s a few years older – and few hundred shows wiser – this old soul is looking toward a new horizon.

“I thought our first album was a very good representation of what we do and what we like, so we set the bar really high,” says Morgan of his next batch of country tunes. “My whole message with this project is that I want to show growth – not only musically, but also personally. ... I feel like now I understand myself, and I understand the music I want to make.”

Produced once again by Scott Hendricks and Jimmy Ritchey, five new tracks show off the man Morgan has become. A hard worker and big-time dreamer, a single father and hopeless romantic, and a pure-country stalwart who’s not afraid to embrace the here and now. His new music is still drenched in twang and tenderness, but also infused with fresh energy from across the musical spectrum.

“We tried to diversify on this project,” Morgan says with an easy grin. “That can sound scary, like ‘Oh no, Willy’s changed,’ but it’s not that at all. ... I’m from Mississippi, so I’ve got a lot of that rhythm and blues in my soul. I’m influenced by a lot of music. I could be listening to Frank Sinatra and switch over to Barry White, or go from Pink Floyd to the Isley Brothers and AC/DC to Merle Haggard. ... We were trying to find a happy medium between what’s current and what we love.”

That happy medium shows up in full force on “Tonight Girl,” a grooving anthem about living in the moment that drips with the same casual-country soul Morgan grew up around. Think of it as the steamy second chapter of the “I Met a Girl” saga.

“Where I’m from in Vicksburg, a lot of the casinos down there get packed out every night with blues music and soul,” he says. “It’s everywhere, and they play right from the heart, so I wanted to put some of that sound on there.”

With plans to release a video alongside every new track, Morgan will paint pictures in fans’ minds to enrich each story. But according to him, the foot-stomping country rocker “Workin’” doesn’t need any help. He first heard the track while traveling through Mexico, and it immediately struck a chord.

“It was just a rough work tape, but I saw those pictures,” he says. “I saw the guy out there working and the girl with her feet up, drinking some red wine and waiting on me to call quitting time.”

“Gone Enough” features a wide open Texas Country feel – plus a full, orchestral string section. Three fiddles, two violas and a cello bring the heart wrenching breakup anthem to life. “I could get in the darkest room, drink the strongest drink, drive the longest road, but I’m not gonna get gone enough to get gone from you,” he says of the track.

“Brokenhearted” features a throwback, ‘90s-country sound and highlights how the genre Morgan loves so much is changing. “It *is* changing, *the world* is changing,” he explains. “Everybody is having a good time at their bonfires and, trust me, I love a bonfire and the whole idea of cold beers flowing, girls on the tailgate. But people also work, people have real lives and go through bad times. The whole message of the song is, ‘Ain’t nobody brokenhearted in country music anymore?’”

Meanwhile, “Talking to a Girl” puts a hopeful spin on that same emotional honesty. Co-written by Morgan and taken straight from real life experience, the uplifting ballad stands in classy contrast to a wave of hooky anthems – and as a reminder that every romantic cloud has a silver lining.

“I feel like we all have those moments in life where it just doesn’t go the way you thought,” Morgan says. “Sometimes it’s your fault and sometimes it’s nobody’s fault – and sometimes you’re just not ready. That was the case with me. ... I don’t think you can truly love somebody until you love yourself, and I learned that.”

Clearly, Morgan has grown a lot since he first slid into the Music City mainstream. But no matter how much growing he does, some things will never change – like his passion for sharing country lyrics with pure, raw emotion with the fans who feel the same way.

“I think we all still feel like kids sometimes,” he says. “Every time I hit that stage I go back to my old Mississippi honky-tonk nights. Those four-hour sets, loading in and loading out in a smoky bar, sneaking a beer or two when mom and dad weren’t looking – just having a good time. Even today, it’s still for the pure joy of it.”