

billboard Country Update

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BILLBOARD COUNTRY UPDATE

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A Bundle Of New Country Acts Prepare Debut Projects For The Remainder Of 2021

As the pandemic eases, Americans are heading out into the world in large numbers.

So are some of country music's newest artists, plotting the release of their first albums or EPs for major labels and established independents.

Where most six-month windows would boast 10-13 such titles, 20 acts will bring their debut projects to the marketplace during the third and fourth quarters of 2021, including six solo women and a female duo. Underscoring Music Row's growing sensitivity toward inclusiveness, one of those females, **Mickey Guyton**, is Black, while "You Ain't Pretty" singer **Nate Barnes** is of mixed racial descent and **Frank Ray** offers the genre a new Latin voice.

Musically, the majority has some degree of gritty, roll-up-your-sleeves attitude, as the class primarily blends its brand of country with varying shades of rock.

Several of the group have already landed top 20 singles, including **Niko Moon**, **Elvie Shane**, **Chase Bryant**, **Parker McCollum** and **Jameson Rodgers**.

Release schedules may change, but here's a look at 20 country artists planning their first album or EP for a label of significance before Dec. 31:

- **Nate Barnes** (Quartz Hill) — His first single, "You Ain't Pretty," establishes him as a singer of impressive sensitivity. His initial full album, expected in the fourth quarter, widens the brand with elements of old-school rock, soul and country twang.
- **BEXAR** (Warner Music Nashville) — Duo **Chris Ryan** and

Logan Turner are prepping for a Sept. 3 EP and an opening slot on a **Keith Urban** residency. It's an appropriate booking, given their adventurous musicality and loose **Lumineers** positivity.

• **Dusty Black** (Black Label Country/AJE) — Black maintains a

Tyler Farr sort of gravel, an affinity for Southern rock and a rhythmic intensity. His first five-song EP arrives July 23, with a reported guest appearance by **Gary LeVox**.

• **Priscilla Block** (Mercury Nashville) — Introductory single "Just About Over You" is paving the way for a firebrand whose music captures grit and real-world disappointments without giving up.

Her own persistence leads to a debut album this year.

• **Laci Kaye Booth** (BMLG Records) — She sang with **Brett Young** and **Luke Bryan** as an *American Idol* contestant and duets with **Charles Kelley** on her eponymous Aug. 6 debut EP. Still, her mysterious, airy tone stands on its own.

• **Chase Bryant** (Green Iris) — Bryant earned two top 10 singles at Red Bow, where he leaned pop. His first full-length — *Upbringing*, due July 16 — better matches his **Randy Meisner**-like tone with subtle hooks and heartland sonics.

• **Kolby Cooper** (Wheelhouse) — Lots of swampy slide and grinding guitars complement the struggle in the Texan singer-songwriter's pain-soaked stories, including the finely crafted "One Night Stand." His first major-label EP, *From Anderson County*, is out July 16.

• **Ashland Craft** (Big Loud) — Her weathered, Carolina voice is a bridge between **Lainey Wilson**'s twang and **Janis Joplin**'s



BRYANT



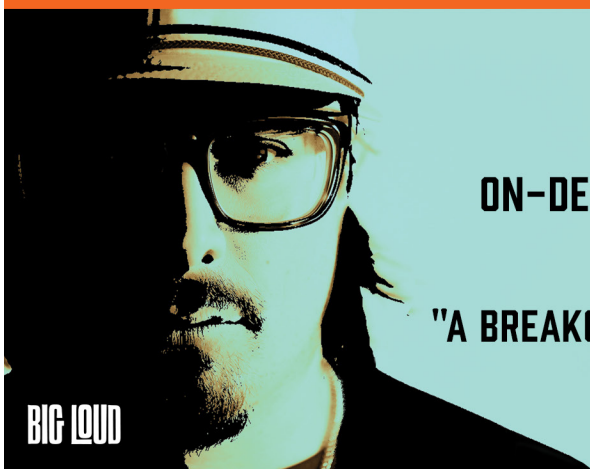
SHANE



GUYTON

BRYANT: JEFF RAY

FOR YOUR CMA CONSIDERATION NEW ARTIST OF THE YEAR



OVER 877 MILLION
ON-DEMAND STREAMS [US]

HARDY

"A BREAKOUT IN THE MAKING"

"HARDY HAS THE MAKINGS
OF A SONGWRITING LEGEND"

- HITS

American
- songwriter
the craft + music

BIG LOUD

scratch. Craft applies it in a forthcoming album to hard times and hell raisin', emphasized in bold, rough-house arrangements.

- **Hannah Dasher** (Sony Music Nashville) — There's a cutting edge to her voice that recalls '90s **Lorrie Morgan** records, though Dasher sounds more Southern and uses a tougher instrumental palette. Her first EP, *The Half Record*, is due July 9.

- **Ray Fulcher** (Black River) — He has co-written four of **Luke Combs'** hits and self-issued several previous projects, though his first EP with an established label, coming in September, further spotlights Fulcher's visual lyrics and straight-forward musical approach.

- **Mickey Guyton** (Capitol Nashville) — Guyton possesses a fiery voice — the dynamic one she applies to dramatic material and the brave one she displays in media. Her debut album will boast an appropriate title, *Remember Her Name*.

- **Parker McCollum** (MCA Nashville) — After self-releasing two prior indie albums, McCollum's first major-label project — *Gold Chain Cowboy*, arriving July 30 — employs a raw commerciality: a Texas rebel attitude built on bar stool experience and a loner's defiance.

- **Drake Milligan** (Stoney Creek) — An **Elvis Presley** impersonator during his youth in Fort Worth, Milligan retooled as a country singer with fellow Texans **George Strait** and **Cody Johnson** among his Northstars. A self-titled EP is set for July 23.

- **Niko Moon** (RCA Nashville) — Like a bobber on a wet line, Moon hooked listeners with the country-meets-hip-hop chart-topper "Good Time," introducing them to his chill positivity. A full album is on the drawing board before 2022.

- **Frank Ray** (Stoney Creek) — The former Las Cruces, New Mexico, police officer leans on a sizeable vocal range and strong melodic sensibility, revealing his Hispanic heritage without overplaying it. An EP is likely before year's end.

- **Jameson Rodgers** (River House/Columbia Nashville) — Currently charting with a Luke Combs collaboration, Rodgers snagged a No. 1 single with "Some Girls" plus hits as a writer for **Florida Georgia Line** and **Chris Lane**. Expect his debut album this year.

- **Elvie Shane** (Wheelhouse) — Lead single "My Boy" captures the sensitive family-man version of Shane, though he has a rock-and-soul wildman side, too, evident in his *County Roads* EP. His first full album emerges this fall.

- **Tigirlily** (Monument) — North Dakota-bred sisters **Kendra** and **Krista Slaubaugh** blend contemporary phrasing and cutting harmonies with strong material, ranging from confessional to snarky. Their self-titled debut EP, produced by **Shane McAnally** and **Luke Laird**, is due July 9.

- **Georgia Webster** (River House/Sony Music Nashville) — The Massachusetts teen accrued 2 million TikTok views in just days with the poppy "Tell Your Mom." There's a **Taylor Swift** sensibility to Webster's sound on the *First Goodbye* EP, which streets July 16.

- **Sam Williams** (Mercury Nashville) — **Hank Williams'** grandson is moody, dramatic, sensitive and occasionally elegant in this summer's debut, *Glass-house Children*. If **Rufus Wainwright** were a country artist, this is the kind of forward-thinking album one might expect. ●



Niko Moon performed June 30 during a KPLX Dallas Country Close Up concert. From left: KSCS Dallas assistant PD/music director Al Farb, Moon, KPLX assistant PD Smokey Rivers and KSCS/KPLX PD Mike Preston.



Alan Jackson (center) raised over \$2 million in disaster relief with a June 26 concert in Newnan, Ga., which was hit by a tornado in March. The bill included Chris Young and Caylee Hammack.



Indie artist Bailey James gave a live in-studio performance on June 30 at WGGC Bowling Green, Ky. She's flanked by PD Greg Almond (left) and afternoon personality Kenny B.



FOR YOUR CMA CONSIDERATION

MITCHELL TENPENNY

▶ **NEW ARTIST OF THE YEAR**

OVER 1 BILLION ON-DEMAND STREAMS

SONG OF THE YEAR

MUSIC VIDEO OF THE YEAR

"BUCKET LIST"