

# LONESTAR

Not every musician has the opportunity to revisit and even potentially improve upon their biggest hits. But on the forthcoming *TEN to 1* record, the award-winning band Lonestar—Dean Sams (keyboards, acoustic guitar, background vocals), Michael Britt (lead guitarist, background vocals), Keech Rainwater (drums) and Drew Womack (lead vocals, guitar)—are taking a fresh look at all 10 of their chart-topping country songs.

This streak started in 1996 with the band's second single, the rock-edged "No News," which describes a man left bereft (and confused) when his girlfriend suddenly disappears, and the following year's tender "Come Cryin' to Me" and "Everything's Changed." The band's quadruple-platinum 1999 album *Lonely Grill* spawned four No. 1 hits (including the beloved global smash "Amazed") and established Lonestar as music's preeminent pop-country band—a status they'd maintain through the 2000s and beyond, thanks to songs full of energy and creative lyrics ("What About Now") and ("Mr. Mom"), along with heartfelt messages and soaring melodies ("I'm Already There").

With these re-recordings, the band members were mindful of striking a balance between preserving the sonic elements fans were familiar with—and not repeating them. "It was a high wire act trying to figure out how to change it a little bit and not throw people off too much," Britt says. "I've seen bands that when they do the big hits that I know, and they change it up too much, I feel disappointed. I think people want to sing along—the vocal melody is what people really are latching onto the majority of time.

"That's what was in everybody's minds when we were trying to come up with different arrangements, was trying to keep the vocal melody true," he continues. "Don't change it so much that people go, 'That's not even the same song.'"

As a result, many of Lonestar's re-recordings have merely cosmetic updates and changes. "Mr. Mom" is "a little bit more country-sounding," Britt says, while Sams created some loops for "Smile" to "make it more modern-feeling, and have a little more motion," he says. "It's a little bigger-sounding than what the original record is. We kept most of the songs pretty close to the originals, but with just more updated, modern sounds."

The changes to "Amazed," meanwhile, reflect the power ballad's status as an exclamation mark during concerts. "Since it's usually the biggest part or finale of the show, we've made it a little bit more bombastic," Britt says. "We didn't want to change it so much as just to make it more epic."

*TEN to 1* reflects the ways Lonestar's hits have evolved over the years during the band's rousing, high-energy concerts. For example, Britt improvised a guitar solo in the studio for the new version of "Tell Her," just as he's done live in the last few years.

"We've all played these songs live so much that we've morphed them over the years and play them a little bit differently," Sams says. "In re-recording them, it was taking all the different things that we have done and harnessing it into the best direction for today. Michael's got a lot better guitar sounds than he had when we made a lot of these hits; Keech has better drums."

Sams also produced the *TEN to 1* record sessions, and he approached the songs with fresh ears from both a musical and studio perspective. "I had to look at the music this time, like, 'As not only a band member, but as the producer of this record, how can I keep the integrity of what made the songs the hits they were—but also update them so when people listen to them, there's something unique and different about them that catches their ear for today's time?'"

Perhaps the biggest example of this contemporary updating is "Come Cryin' to Me," which the band members agree is the biggest sonic departure. A particular concert by indie-folk act The Lumineers inspired a completely new direction for the song; Lonestar's updated version has gang vocals, four-on-the-floor beats, and percussion that adds a galloping vibe.

Womack, who joined the group in early 2021, also put his own soulful spin on the songs, and brought his deep experience recording session and lead vocals to the studio process. "I sat there and listened to each song about 20 times, and the phrasing and the feel of the new tracks, and tried to absorb it to where I can sing it in one take," he says. "And then I went in and sang four or five passes, and then go back and listen to it and choose the best track."

The vocalist is also no stranger to chart success. He co-wrote Kenny Chesney's first No. 1 hit, "She's Got It All," while his former band, Sons of the Desert, also had multiple country hits in the '90s and collaborated with Lee Ann Womack on her crossover hit "I Hope You Dance." Drew Womack also has deep personal and professional ties to his new band; Sons of the Desert crossed paths with Lonestar many times, even opening shows for them early on.

"We actually covered a couple of the songs that I'm re-recording," Womack says. "It's surreal re-recording for a greatest hits record songs that I covered back when I was 23, 24. But it's been great. We have very similar tastes in music and similar temperaments. And I've always been a band guy from day one—so this is just like coming home, like flopping right back into a band. It feels right to me."

The rest of Lonestar also speak of how easily Womack fit into the lineup. "Everybody has a best friend somewhere—and then all of a sudden, at the job that you love, you get to work with them every day," Rainwater says. "It's a great feeling that one of your good friends is now one of your bandmates. And it shows on stage when we play—it comes through in the music a little bit, in the attitude and the stage presence."

Adds Sams: "His vocals are soulful. What I love about him is that you feel every word that he sings, which is probably the biggest compliment I can give. He has this really unique way of attaching himself to the lyric of the song and making the audience that is listening to him feel what he is feeling. It's a gift."

Lonestar's roots date back to the early '90s, when Sams originally moved to Nashville from his native Texas intending to be a solo artist. However, after a few months, he realized that he was better suited for a band and recruited Britt and Rainwater. Lonestar found success out of the gate with their self-titled 1995 debut, which spawned the hit "Tequila Talkin'" along with "No News." Other honors soon followed: The band has won many of music's top honors, including Academy Of Country Music awards for New Vocal Group in 1996, and Single and Song Of The Year in 2000, along with Humanitarian Of The Year in 2002. They also won Country Music Association's Vocal Group of the Year and International Artist Achievement award in 2001. All told, Lonestar have sold more than 10.5 million records since their formation.

Sams and Womack have already started writing new songs together, which has been a hugely positive creative experience. "We jelled very quickly," Sams says. "When something feels comfortable, it really makes the creative process much more enjoyable and fun, and it actually doesn't feel like work. Drew is such a positive person and

he fits in with me, Michael and Keech so much. And there's just this newfound energy and life that we haven't had for some time."

And so as Lonestar looks toward a big career milestone—the band is celebrating 30 years in 2022—and the release of *TEN to 1*, they are full of gratitude for what they've accomplished already, and excited about what the future holds. "People that we used to look up to back in the day—like the Rolling Stones, Boston, and even bands like Alabama—they're older than us," Rainwater says. "We look up to those people as like the senior class. But now we are sort of the senior class that people seem to look up to and ask questions about and ask for our expertise."

Adds Sams: "It's amazing that we're still standing and putting on great shows after all these years. The fans are still coming out to our shows night after night, to see us and hear our music. That's almost 30 years of touring, and I can't tell you how grateful I am—and I've never once taken it for granted."