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Young

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various moments of their journey, which included three breakups before they decided they truly should be together.

"For us, our story wasn't linear anyway," Young said. "I met Taylor, this Thanks-giving it will be 16 years ago. So we have a long, storied history."

"Across The Sheets" continues down a similar lyrical path. There are songs that celebrate love, such as "Dance With You," which can be seen as a song of devotion either to Taylor or to Young's children. Often, however, Young explores the muddier corners of love. In "Love Goes On," Young muses about the resilience of a special love that allows for multiple chapters to happen in a relationship. The song "Uncomfortable" touches on both the thrill of having a beautiful wife or girlfriend — and the fear that someone else will be

just as smitten. "Let Go Too Soon" can easily be seen as having been inspired by one of those periods where Young and his future wife weren't together, while "I Did This To Me" sees Young taking the blame for a breakup.

Young feels the songs about the times when his relationship wasn't on the solid ground it occupies now offer substantial subject matter and resonate with his fans.

"Our story really is just about timing," he said. "And we both knew when it was finally time (to marry), and it's been beautiful ever since. So telling the stories about when it wasn't time, as long as she's comfortable with it, I feel like that's something that fans will be interested to hear because they're getting their hearts broken on a regular basis."

Like his history with Taylor, Young's musical life has been a journey that had its share of frustrations before things fell into place for the 42-year-old singer/songwriter.

"It would have been really tempting to just write basically a lullabies record, love songs about my wife and songs about my children. So the challenge was that you can't write just about what you're going through in your life right now. That's going to be boring."

— Brett Young

Young turned to music after a promising baseball career ended suddenly and in heartbreaking fashion in college when he blew out his elbow while pitching. He found he could make a living by playing covers of other peoples' songs, first at restaurants and other venues around his Orange County home base and later in Los Angeles.

In the meantime, he wrote songs and recorded a pair of EPs and three albums he released independently, hoping to get a record deal.

But Young's career remained stuck in neutral

until he realized his songs actually were well-suited to country music, and he made the move to Nashville. There, Young quickly made contacts, and within nine months, signed with Big Machine Records.

In short order, he was in a studio making his self-titled debut album with noted producer Dann Huff. The album's advance single, "Sleep Without You," reached No. 2 on "Billboard" magazine's Country Airplay chart. Then another single, "In Case You Didn't Know," did one better by topping Country Airplay and reaching the top 20 on

"Billboard's" all genre Hot 100 chart. Two more singles from the debut album — "Like I Loved You" and "Mercy" — followed and kept Young on the radio through summer 2018.

By that point, Young's second album, "Ticket To L.A.," was being readied for release. It was another success, topping "Billboard's" country album chart and adding two more No. 1 country singles, "Here Tonight" and "Catch," to Young's arsenal. "Weekends Look A Little Different These Days" gave Young another No. 1 single in "Lady."

Now comes "Across The Sheets," which remains squarely in Young's wheelhouse of pop/country mid-tempo material and ballads.

For awhile, Young worried that he might have to leave even some of his popular ballads out of his concerts to keep his shows from getting too sleepy for audiences. But as his current shows demonstrate, he's found that his

fans aren't worried about the pace of his concerts.

"What we've found out is that people aren't thinking about that at my shows. They bought a Brett Young ticket. They know the music," Young said. "They came to hear the music that they know. So every time we try to kind of inauthentically ramp it up for the sake of ramping it up, they've felt like they missed out on a song or two they wanted to hear. So it's been less about the set list and more about paying attention to my fan base and what they're actually coming to the show for. I think we're in a space where they aren't asking me to create a party. They're just asking me to play the music they got to know me through. And so that's been good to kind of figure out and get OK with because now we're not playing any games anymore. It's like 'All right, these are your favorite songs. Here they are.'"

Alan Sculley is a freelance writer.

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