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# Controversial Country Star Tops Charts With Triple Album

Sam Bunn, Investigative Editor

Perhaps no mainstream music star has drawn as many talk radio segments, think pieces or angry Twitter rants as country artist Morgan Wallen. With a six-year run marked by a meteoric rise through country's ranks and an inability to avoid controversy, the release of his newest album is the news of the day, but the start of Wallen's career was just as foundational.

The first time Wallen appeared on country fans' radar was through his 2016 single, "The Way I Talk." The title was fitting—Wallen's voice immediately drew commentary, with rough delivery and powerful Southern drawl combining rock, pop and country vocals.

"It's got a touch of the town where I grew up—something in it, them California girls love. Something people like to make a little fun of," Wallen sings.

Wallen began to make waves in the mainstream after collaborating with Florida Georgia Line on his single, "Up Down." The song, featuring a small town party and blatant self-promotion of Florida Georgia Line's brand of whiskey, was described as a "bro country banger" by Rolling Stone.

Bro country, a term coined by New York Magazine columnist Jody Rosen, would follow Wallen for several years. The subgenre was widely criticized for lyrical content centered on partying, repetitive themes and misogynistic portrayals of women, all off-and-on themes in Wallen's music.

Wallen's first studio album, "If I Know Me," featured some of the same, tempered with heavy drinking. The album's final two singles, "Whiskey Glasses" and "Chasin' You," both center around alcohol as a coping mechanism following a breakup. Both also reached number one on the country airplay chart, with "Whiskey Glasses" being certified seven-time platinum by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), cementing itself as one of the biggest hits of the decade.

As Wallen's stardom continued to rise, he announced the release of a titanic sophomore album titled "Dangerous, the Double Album." With 32 tracks, the project was released Jan. 8, 2021. The A-Side of the album featured a more reflective Wallen. The A-Side also further established breakup songs as his bread and butter, with ten of the fifteen songs featuring lost love. Also included on



Morgan Wallen performs his hit single "Whiskey Glasses" during Freedom Fest, June 28, 2019, at the Iron Horse Park, Fort Carson, Colorado. Image courtesy of Robert Vicens.

the A-Side was a rendition of Jason Isbell's independent hit, "Cover Me Up," a surprising choice for a mainstream artist. The B-Side had a more up-tempo feel and featured several unashamedly bro country tracks. It also showed Wallen's willingness to step outside genre lines, with a collaboration with EDM DJ Diplo titled "Heartless," a self-reflective alt-pop single called "Living the Dream" and a bonafide hip-hop flow on the title track.

With "Dangerous," Wallen achieved escape velocity. The project would go on to be certified four time platinum by the RIAA in just two years, spend ten weeks at Billboard's first overall spot, and more than double the record's streams for a country album in its first week. While Wallen's detractors cite the album's unnecessary length and low-quality tracks, especially on the B-Side, Wallen was, briefly, the golden boy of all of entertainment.

Despite public controversy surrounding Wallen using a racist remark, "Dangerous" would go on to be the best selling album of the year, outpacing releases from Olivia Rodrigo, Adele, Drake, The Weeknd and Doja Cat. Wallen's belated album tour sold out arenas across the country. Music fans and Nashville brass were still divided as he announced the release of his third album, aptly titled "One Thing at a Time." Whether Wallen is truly trying to make amends, or attempting to revive enough good will to resume touring is still a topic of discussion.

"One Thing at a Time" dropped March 3, 2023. Wallen described the effort as a collection of influences that shaped his music, with hip-hop, rock, alternative and country elements. The most notable feature of the album was its 36-track length, outstripping even "Dangerous." Marketed as a triple album, "One Thing at a Time" provides hours of new music set to Wallen's undoubtedly successful formula.

The opening track, "Born With a Beer in my Hand" is undoubtedly country, and tells a surprisingly thoughtful story of generational alcoholism. Wallen stays introspective at times with songs like "Money on Me," and the prereleased "Thought You Should Know," but cuts into the worst excesses of bro country at the other extreme with "In the Bible," "F150-50" and "Me to Me." With "One Thing at a Time" and "Last Drive Down Main," Wallen dips into alt-rockier production, all while courting hip-hop audiences with "180 (Lifestyle)," "Sunrise," "You Proof" and "Cowgirls." In short, the tracklist perfectly exemplifies Wallen's approach to music—something for everyone, but too oversaturated to be anything more cohesive.

The album had the second-most-successful week in terms of sales and streaming in country music history, surpassed only by "Dangerous." On release day, the 36 songs took up 36 of the Apple Music Top 50. Wallen is not only the biggest thing in country, but arguably in all of music. As "One Thing at a Time" sits at the top of the Billboard Hot 200 chart, and "Dangerous" still remains in the sixth spot, it's clear that he is here to stay.

As Wallen embarks on an arena tour, fans will get to vote with their wallets on whether the singer's past transgressions are worthy of forgiveness in the face of new music. If the early numbers are any indication, it seems like they've already made their decision.