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JOE SIX PAK

Blake Shelton Keeps It Short, If Not Sweet, With New Album Format

Blake Shelton is nothing if not a realist. "I can look at SoundScan and want to slit my wrists, not just for me, but for the entire industry," he says. "You can either try something new or you can go with what you already know isn't working. So I'm all about being a guinea pig."

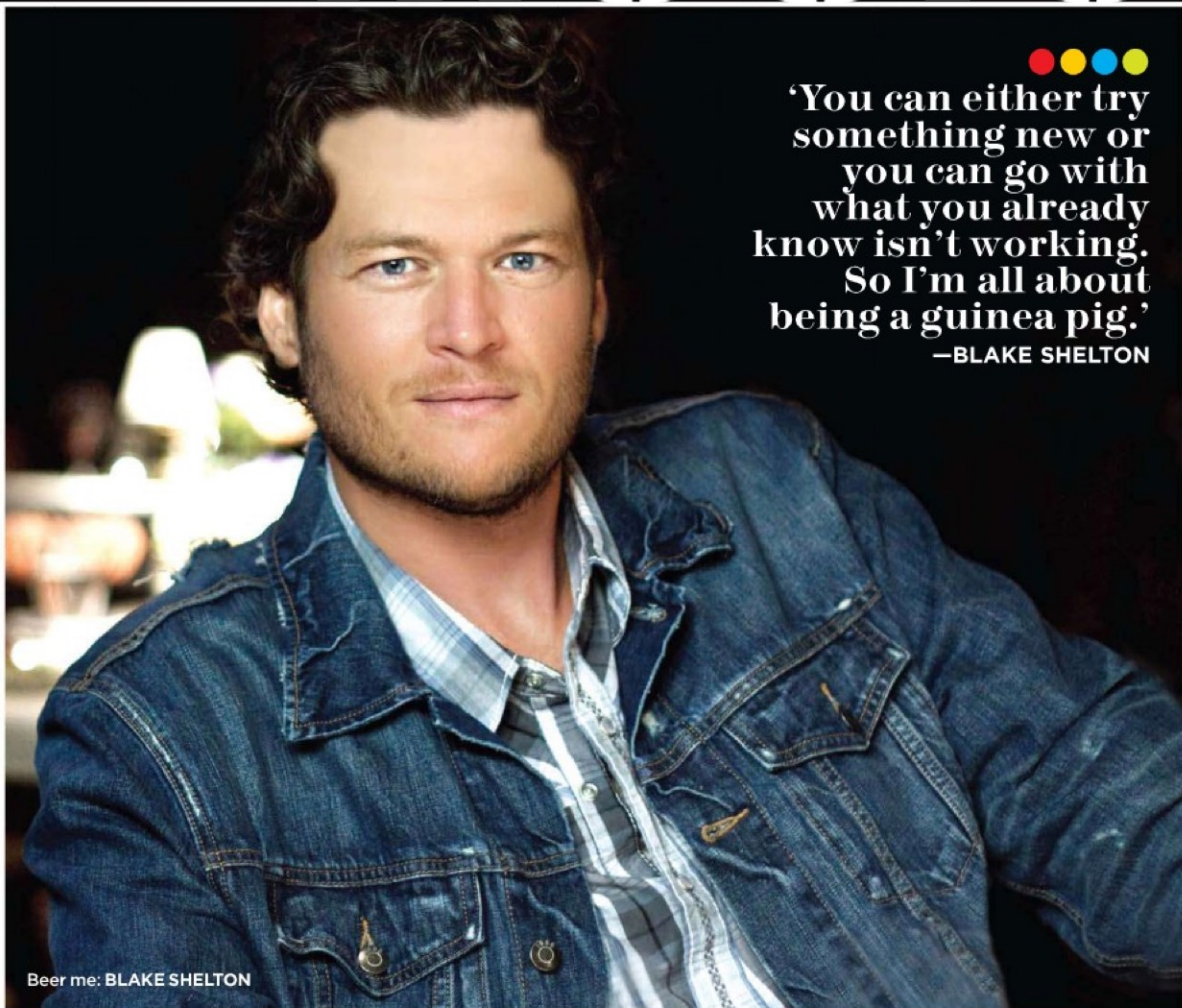
Luckily for Shelton, his label was more than happy to have him run some unexplored Habitrails. With the March 2 release of his "Hillbilly Bone" album, Warner Music Nashville is employing a different tack in delivering new music to country consumers. Shelton's release is the first in what Warner is dubbing a "Six Pak," a six-song album of new material, to be followed by another still-to-be-recorded CD tentatively set for August.

Shelton says industry reaction has been positive, especially from songwriters and publishers. "People have said, 'Thank you for trying this. We think it's going to work. We can get music out quicker,'" he says. "Fans will get more music than me putting out a new album every two years. It's a quicker way to get new music to them."

Warner Music Nashville senior VP of sales and marketing Peter Strickland says Shelton was the right artist to launch this new strategy for several reasons, including "how fans react with him online and on the road. He's continuously being asked about when he has a new album coming out . . . and timing was good too because Blake was in the studio making a new record."

Strickland says the Six Pak will enable artists "to deliver music to [fans] on a much more regular basis at a value price package."

"Hillbilly Bone" is Shelton's sixth studio album. The Oklahoma native debuted in 2001 with the hit single "Austin," which spent five weeks at No. 1 on Billboard's Hot Country Songs chart. Since then he's hit the summit with "The Baby," "Some Beach," "Home" and



Beer me: BLAKE SHELTON

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—BLAKE SHELTON

"She Wouldn't Be Gone."

His current title-track single, a raucous duet with Trace Adkins, is No. 12 on Hot Country Songs. "Lyrically it's just a fun song," Shelton says. "Once we got in the studio, we thought it would be good to have Trace's voice on there. Originally all we were going to do was put him on the chorus as a bass part, and then we thought, 'This needs to be a duet.' If you have Trace Adkins on a song with you, you're stupid not to take advantage of that."

The label also took a new approach in selling the digital single. "We decided that instead of putting out the digital single in the middle of the traffic that happens in November and December, we would be better-served putting out the video on iTunes first when we went to radio

with the song," Strickland says.

"Typically, we put out the digital single at the same time we go to radio. This was a little bit of a different marketing strategy for us," he adds. "In doing so, that video did show up in the top five on the digital side. It is one of our most successful videos on a digital sales platform. Then when it came to releasing the digital single, we waited until the third week in December and he had a huge debut for us."

The album was produced by Scott Hendricks. "It's the most creative album I've done," Shelton says. "We did a lot of cool things that involve my sense of humor. There are little snippets of comedy between songs. It's something people won't expect."

Shelton wrote one of the six tracks, "Delilah,"

and turned to such Nashville tunesmiths as Craig Wiseman and Rhett Akins for others. Akins penned two tracks, including "Kiss My Country Ass," which Shelton notes isn't likely to be a single. "It just says 'ass' so many times, you kind of limit yourself," he says with a laugh. "These are all songs that I'm pumped about doing live in front of my crowd."

Upbeat, playful and occasionally tinged with sarcasm, the new songs reflect his personality, according to Shelton. "I'm a redneck at heart and a huge country music fan. I love to hunt and drink beer," he says. "It's not just something I sing about, it's really what I do. And with more exposure lately people are seeing that side of me, and this album is the stamp on all of that. Here's the guy y'all are starting to get to know." ♦♦♦