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Blake Shelton 'Turnin' ' To Gwen Stefani, Fleetwood Mac For Latest Single

It's no secret: **Blake Shelton's** latest single, "Turnin' Me On," celebrates his relationship with **Gwen Stefani**, the pop singer Shelton first met when both were judges on NBC's *The Voice*.

"The song has always kind of made her blush," he says. "She doesn't know how to react because — believe it or not it — she says she has never had a song written about her, and it's kind of flattering and embarrassing and overwhelming at the same time. Not to mention the fact that it's a song about how she turns me on."

The nature of any relationship is a mystery: What bonds two people together? How long can it last? Why does this particular bonding work? The answers are often elusive even to those in the relationship.

Thus, the journey of "Turnin' Me On" is an appropriate one. At every crossroads came a question — What is this? Where does it need to go? — as Shelton and his creative partners unlocked the mysteries beneath it.

It began April 22, 2017, when Shelton arrived early for a concert with **Thomas Rhett**, **Lynyrd Skynyrd** and **Kelsea Ballerini** at Jordan-Hare Stadium in Auburn, Ala. Shelton had some alone time on his bus, so he pulled out a guitar and started strumming a passage built around minor chords. That naturally led to a melody, and as he pondered exactly what that was, a phrase repeated in his head: "Turnin' me on, turnin' me on." He realized he was writing a song, but wasn't sure where it would lead. The one thing that wasn't a mystery, however, was the subject matter.

"When I write, I kind of see a video of the song in my head, and of course I was picturing Gwen," he says. "Specifically, a few of her videos — like 'Underneath It All' and 'Sweet Escape,' where she's so sexy. These videos that she has done, it's breathtaking."

With those images in mind, the "turnin' me on" theme took a more decisive turn as he found what became a setup line shrouded in classic-country wordplay.

"The melody seemed kind of mysterious and sexy at the same time, and at one point, I came up with that hook: 'Sometimes I think she must get off on/Turnin' me on,' " he remembers. "I thought, 'What the hell. That's pretty good for me.'"

Shelton lived with it for a couple of weeks before deciding he needed assistance. So he texted songwriter **Jessi Alexander** ("The Climb," "I Drive Your Truck"), who had previously completed songs he started: "Friends," from the *Angry Birds* soundtrack, and "Savior's Shadow," from the album *If I'm Honest*. He sent her voice recordings of the basics — the chorus melody, with the title repeated in several key moments, and that "she must get off" setup.

"I call it the 'money' line," says Alexander. "As songwriters, that's what we're all working for — that kind of line that plays so well. He had so much of the song. You might not think that's a lot, but really it is."

She debated taking it on alone, but chose to bring in a third person, and made a list of songs that had a similarly mysterious vibe. Atop that list was "Sangria," and she reached out to one of its writers, **Josh Osborne** ("Kiss Somebody," "Hotel Key"), to help round it out. Osborne was likewise won over by the hook and the money line, but also intrigued by the sex and mystery in the sound.

"It's the magic of the minor chords," he says. "That does add a thing to it."

Alexander and Osborne expanded on the lyrical foundation with a series of sexy images and allusions to other objects that get turned on in different ways

— the push of a button, the tug on a string to light a neon sign or the drop of a needle onto a vinyl record. Along the way, they referenced seductive red lips, though the word "red" needed a descriptor for emphasis.

Alexander blurted out the solution — "She's Revlon red in the blackest night" — cleverly incorporating one of Stefani's corporate partnerships.

They also changed one of Shelton's "turnin' me on, turnin' me on" lines in the chorus to "If I'm what she wants, she gets what she wants," to get a little more variation in the chorus.

"I didn't want to wear people out with 'turnin' me on,' " recalls Alexander. "We needed to find some more words that rhyme and put them in that spot."

Once they finished it, they did a quick guitar/vocal iPhone recording with Alexander singing harmonies. They channeled a sort of **Stevie Nicks** midtempo groove in the process, though they never actually shared that info with Shelton when they sent it to him.

"If you think about **Fleetwood Mac**, so much of their music was sexy but mysterious," says Osborne. "There's such a tension in the music."

Shelton's vision for it was bigger and louder — like **Ronnie Milsap's** "Stranger in My House" — but when he played it for the musicians during a tracking session at the Sound Stage, it took a different turn.

Its lyrical inspiration was clearly Stefani, but drummer **Nir Z** heard the Mac influence in the chords and melody. He sifted through a series of drum heads to find the right snare sound, and one in particular captured it.

"I remember him saying something along the lines of, 'Man, this sounds like **Mick Fleetwood**,'" says producer **Scott Hendricks (Dan + Shay, Michael Ray)**. "So we channeled Mick Fleetwood. It's just got a groove from top to bottom."

Pianist **Gordon Mote** created a waterfall figure on Wurlitzer for the intro that harks back to **The Doors'** "Riders on the Storm," and it gets reworked in the guitar solo. Two guitarists, **Troy Lancaster** and **Kenny Greenberg**, trade dueling licks in a lengthy outro that extends the album version to nearly five minutes.

Shelton cut his vocals at his home in Oklahoma, looking out over Texoma Lake, and Stefani popped into the room repeatedly as he worked through "Turnin' Me On," serving some kind of concoction that helped the mood.

"I have a video of her making me a mix of rum and fruit," says Hendricks. "It wasn't a piña colada, but it was in that family of things. You had to put it in the blender. They were so good, they just slipped down like milkshakes."

After the *Texoma Shore* album arrived Nov. 3, 2017, "Turnin' Me On" emerged as one of the most-played tracks. It ties to Shelton's personal life made it an obviously marketable title, and as it drew comparisons to 1980s and '90s country by Milsap and **Alabama**, it extended a country thread created by the set's first two singles, "I'll Name the Dogs" and "I Lived It."

"It's kind of fun to revisit that sound for a minute and have it played on the radio," says Shelton. "As long as they're going to let me do it, I'm going to keep trying it."

Warner Music Nashville released "Turnin' Me On" to country radio through PlayMPE on July 16, and it is No. 28 on *Billboard's* Country Airplay chart dated Aug. 25. It's seemingly well-received, dispelling a bit of the mystery about its destiny, though it has caused some additional anxiety for Stefani.

"Now that it's a single, she's like, 'Oh, my gosh. I hope the song that you wrote about me is a hit and doesn't break your streak at radio,'" says Shelton with a laugh. "And my answer is, 'Hell, me too!'" ●

