

Country Music Collaborator/Interloper Field Guide

Welcome current/former/washed-up rock/pop/R&B/ hip-hop star to the loving confines of country music! Whether you're here on a lark, here to collaborate with a current country star, here to rehabilitate your dwindling popular music career, or are just a raging narcissist who can't stand the idea of living outside of the spotlight, all are welcome in country music because of the industry's insufferable and long-standing inferiority complex with its place beside other genres, and because all of our gatekeepers are either dead, been put out to pasture, moved on to Americana, or are summarily ignored.

Generally speaking, you can expect the pliable and convivial country music fan to be very inviting and open-minded to your music, regardless if it comes close resembling anything near country. But if by chance you do find someone who questions your inclusion in the genre, just cast them off as closed-minded, or explain to the individual that country music must evolve, and your pithy, derivative pap is just the key to carrying on this forward-looking momentum. If this doesn't work, here are a few more tricks.

Claim Affiliation with The South/Small Towns

Forget that for decades to make it in country music you had to pay dues and study the discipline for years and years, many times under the apprenticeship of legends before you dare even consider to take center stage by yourself. All you have to do today to be embraced warmly by country music is claim any loose affiliation with either the South, the West, the Bakersfield or interior valley of California, or really any rural landscape in America, regardless of its orientation with the Mason Dixon Line, and assert that it is your birthright bestowed by your geographical origination to be involved in the country genre, even if the true nature of your upbringing was in the intercity or a "new" South white flight suburb, sheltered and coddled from the true rigors and tribulations of Southern or agrarian life.

And if you don't have any true affiliation with any of the aforementioned environs, claim a kinship with them because your grandparents or parents grew up there. And if you can't claim any of these once-removed virtues of country credibility, just make one up. Nobody's fact checking here.

You've Always Loved Country Music

To further ingratiate yourself to country fans, make sure to explain how you've always been a country music fan. Don't worry that you're not on record saying such until you're trying to peddle some mislabeled, watered-down single that has absolutely nothing to do with country to the format, just explain how some member of your family listened to country music and you were exposed to it from an early age. Again, nobody's checking facts, and make sure not to go into too much detail about your country fandom, lest someone call your bluff by asking you a simple question about country music we all know you can't answer. Better to just say "George Strait is the King," and smile!

You Can't Get Enough of Those Country Legends

Just as important as proclaiming your country music fandom is pledging allegiance to very specific country music legend or legends. Dolly Parton and Willie Nelson are great picks for their widely-known status and universal appeal. Hank Williams and George Strait are other good picks. Steer clear of folks like Waylon Jennings or Townes Van Zandt---way too obscure. Make sure to spend a minute or two brushing up on the biographies of these legends on Wikipedia before you assert your fandom, so you can namecheck one or two of their songs to really ingratiate yourself to the complicit country music media when questioned.

Support The Troops

If nothing else works, ramrod home your love and appreciation for America's service members with vim and vigor. We're not talking about a perfunctory check to the Wounded Warriors project. Really get out there and talk about how much you love the troops, wear camo and dog tags on stage, get your picture taken with service members, and make sure your publicist documents all of these escapades and blasts out dedicated press releases for each instance dovetailed with social media mentions. That way if anyone has the gall to question what the hell you're doing in country music, others will assert as your surrogate, "Yeah, but he/she loves the troops!" ...and you'll be off the hook for any wrongdoing.

And most importantly, don't forget to enjoy your stay in country music, and we'll see you collaborating with Thomas Rhett/Kelsea Ballerini/Rascal Flatts at the CMA Awards!

NOTE: The Country Music Association may send you a survey about your experience in country music after your single falls off the charts.