

I love to hide in the crowd at my concerts



BY
ANNA GAULT
Features Writer

COUNTRY superstar Thomas Rhett may have topped the US charts last month but he still manages to join his fans without them even knowing he is there.

The singer reveals he likes to slip into the crowd to watch his warm-up band but admits it's getting tougher and tougher not to get caught out.

Thomas, 27, scored a No1 album with *Life Changes* but still feels like he is a small fish in a big pond.

He says: "I like to put on my hat, pull it down low and head out into the crowd to see the support acts."

"I've managed to go unnoticed but it is getting harder to do now. It is still a great way to get the feel of the audience."

The chart-topper has seen his career go full-throttle just as he became a new dad over the summer to **TWO** daughters.

'Give them a good life'

Thomas recorded the album while he and wife Lauren were adopting their daughter, Willa Gray, now two, from Africa, and awaiting the birth of their second child, Ada James, now three months.

The couple had struggled to conceive and had started the adoption process when they discovered Lauren was pregnant.

But soon after Ada's arrival Thomas was on the road for a gruelling promotional tour before he headed overseas.

He says: "It is difficult to be away from my family. The girls are just too young to come out to Europe and see me a lot."

"But I know I am working to give them a good life and I feel the time away honestly makes me a better dad when I get back."

"I named the album *Life Changes* because

my life has never changed this much in a short span of time.

"From seeing the success of a song like *Die A Happy Man* to putting out my third album to going on my first headlining tour to having two children, both under two years old."

"I thought the title of the album was a good representation of what is happening in my life right now."

Thomas has already bagged several music awards and is up for Male Vocalist of the Year at the prestigious Country Music Awards next month.

But he admits to being disappointed at missing out on a Grammy this year – until he was given a dose of reality from Ed Sheeran. Thomas says: "I was at the Grammy's after-show party and I had met Ed before but never really spoken to him."

He asked me what I thought of the awards and I said 'Well, I didn't win the category I was nominated in' and he goes 'I lost six times before I won one' – that put things in perspective for me."

Thomas is playing Glasgow's O2 Academy next month and confesses he is shocked to see so many Scots heading out to country music gigs.

He says: "I am always surprised by the reception of country music in the UK and Scotland."

"But it's amazing and I can't wait to play in Glasgow again. We try to make every show a little different, so I'll try to find a Scottish song to play."

"The more I became comfortable being me on stage, whether that means dancing or playing a Bruno Mars song in our set, the more it changes the way I wrote songs. I

want to continue making our concerts a fun place for all people, including people who want to dance to love songs and people who want to rock to rock songs."

Thomas has been credited with bringing a blend of pop hooks and R 'n B grooves to his music. But his country roots go deep – his dad Rhett Akins is a musician whose career also spawned No1 hits.

Thomas grew up around country singers and even played drums for his dad on stage but his mum Paige Braswell wanted him to finish college – something he failed to do. Thomas adds: "My mom just remembered my dad being gone all the time with his career and I think she wanted me to have something else up my sleeve."

"But she is happy for me and is over the fact I didn't finish college."

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STAR TURN . . .
Thomas is loving his tour and is proud of his new album *Life Changes*



THE STRANGE BLUE DREAMS

WHO: Dave Addison (vocals/guitar), Dave Rae (mandolin/vocals), Richard Anderson (double bass/vocals), Duncan Kennedy (guitar/vocals), Ross Wilson (drums).

WHERE: Glasgow.

FOR FANS OF: Roy Orbison, Richard Hawley, Nick Lowe.

JIM SAYS: Encompassing early rock 'n' roll, skiffle, surf and rockabilly with a contemporary twist, *The Strange Blue Dreams* are gloriously retro, but timeless. They were born out of The Shiverin' Sheiks, putting their own spin on vintage songs from the 30s-50s.

I first encountered Dave Addison in Aberdeen over 20 years ago. I was involved in the label that put out his old band The Needles' debut single in the late 90s.

The Shiverin' Sheiks came together through a mutual admiration of their previous bands. As well as The Needles, their musical lineage includes The Five Aces, The Hidden Masters, The Meat Men and The Bottleneckers.

With their 50s influence The Shiverin' Sheiks were the obvious choice for a cameo in last year's ITV true crime drama *In Plain Sight*, starring Mar-



NEW MUSIC
By Jim Gellatly

tin Compston and Douglas Henshall. Guitarist Duncan said: "It was a great experience, apart from having to be on set at 6am after playing late gigs the night before. The real challenge for us was trying to sound like a Scottish band in 1955 hearing American rock 'n' roll records for the first time."

Working on their own material, they were already keeping it separate from The Sheiks. The *Strange Blue Dreams* debuted in 2013 in front of 2,000 people supporting Glasvegas.

Duncan recalled: "It was a big gamble as we had just finished a UK tour with Glasvegas as The Shiverin' Sheiks and that had gone really well. It was

very much a 'shut your eyes and jump' scenario as we had no idea how the audience would react to our own songs. Luckily it went really well."

"We decided to keep The Shiverin' Sheiks as the party band with our interpretations of old songs. Any time we did original material we used the name The Strange Blue Dreams in order to keep the two bands distinct."

"It also means that with The Strange Blue Dreams we can play any style of music we like."

The Strange Blue Dreams have just released their self-titled debut album through Glasgow label Holy Smokes Records. Some of it was recorded with Johnny Smillie at La Chunky Towers Studios in Glasgow's West End. They also went back to basics in the garage where they rehearse – this time with George Miller from Scottish beat group The Kaisers at the controls.

Duncan said: "It is amazing to see what George can do with the most basic, simple recording equipment in a terrible environment for making records. We love the results."

MORE: facebook.com/thesrangeluedreams
● Jim presents a weekly showcase of New Music on Amazing Radio, Sundays 2-4pm.

amazingradio.com
jimgellatly.com

▶ Watch a video of the band playing at: www.thescottishsun.co.uk