



**GARY ALLAN**  
***GET OFF ON THE PAIN***

"I ain't really happy," sings Gary Allan on "Get Off on the Pain," the down-home masterstroke that begins and provides the name for his new MCA Nashville collection, "until the sky starts driving rain." Unhesitatingly frank, mercilessly guitar-crazed, it's the rocked-out country confession of a smart guy drawn to what the rest of the world calls wrong roads and long shots, or complains of as aching bones and stubbornness, or -- as Allan sings in a spectacular stretch of drawn-out soulful vowels -- underestimates as dark horses. And as the California-born superstar releases his eighth studio album, it's about the most Gary Allan piece anyone could imagine.

"That's, like, very autobiographical," Allan understates, talking about the song. "I feel like I'm living that right now. It's got a lot of life in there for me: It represents the relentless quality of life on the road. You'll never hear me singing about tractors or farms, just because I don't know anything about that stuff. Wrong roads and dark horses I know about. Still, I think the pain can get to be some kind of a positive for me because it connects to everything I've ever dreamed of. While it's relentless, it's confirmation of the actual existence of this big musical drama, the result of the dream."

That dream, for Allan, was to become exactly what he has become over the course of a lifetime in the field: a singer and songwriter forever cognizant of country music's rough and storied past yet never wholly enslaved by its stylistic or social traditions. As a teenager performing in California, he skipped the bars that didn't want to hear him play George Jones music; as a Nashville artist, he never worried about rocking things out or missing an awards-show red carpet. "It's almost become a challenge to get into this town. But I'm also really comfortable with where I am, being slightly on the outside." Allan always has developed and continued to refine his own tattooed power and finesse.

But none of it has ever confused him. "I just wanted to be viable and, I guess, prove that the viable stuff can be necessary," Allan says, and if his career often has seemed less loud and permanently neon-lit than those of some of his peers, Allan has indeed achieved a robust viability, consistently hitting all the gold and platinum sales benchmarks by which those kinds of determinations are measured. "I remember talking about this when I first got signed to a Nashville major label," Allan says. "Even then I was able to say, 'Look, I'm never going to be the latest greatest thing, because that usually goes straight up and then burns out.' My goal was - and remains -- to be like Willie Nelson or George Strait, people who consistently rise. I think because I've done this since I was a little kid that I want it to be in my life forever. I want to be like Willie, playing until I'm 70. That's what I'm swinging for."

With aspirations like that, *Get Off on the Pain* sure fits the bill, an eighth album that shows no signs of musical fatigue and, moreover, promises an undeniable future. Songs like the atmospheric "We Fly by Night," the indestructible title track, and the dramatically cascading, deliberate "I Think I Had Enough" consolidate the strengths of previous Gary Allan music -- the Orbisonesque elegance of "Smoke Rings in the Dark" (1999), the brute power of "Man to Man" (2001), the smarts of "Watching Airplanes" (2007). The album strikes out in different directions, too. This is country music from a guy who effortlessly can sing the wry, despondent "Kiss Me When I'm Down," which imports elements of rock chamber-pop, into the same collection song cycle that contains the rollicking "That Ain't Gonna Fly," whose choruses taps the richest harmonic fundamentals of gospel music turning into pop.

Whatever style, these songs, produced by the award-winning Nashville music man Mark Wright, proceed with an unusual confidence. "They're more focused," Allan says. "Everybody just knows more of what we're going for now, because I always use the same players in the studio; I've done that since day one. This is nine records, counting our *Greatest Hits* album, we've made together. So I think everybody just knows what I want. It's just a lot easier. I've sat down and played those guys things on my guitar, trying to show what I wanted. I think just with time you just get better with it."

A couple albums back, Allan did a triumphant version of Jessie Winchester's "A Showman's Life"; packing lifetimes of drama and consequence into his performance, he uncovered and demonstrated what it feels like to live your life on the road, day in and day out, to play music. "You beat yourself up pretty bad doing it," Allan says. "There are lots of sacrifices, mostly personal, but it's a rush." *Get Off on the Pain*, is like a ten-song demonstration of Allan's version of Winchester's song. The album sums up and expands Allan's fifteen years of Nashville music-making as it lately has arrived out of the frenetic pace of his jam-packed touring schedule.

'I relate to the road," he says. "It's a relentless life you live out there. But it's been my life for the last four or five years. Since Ange passed, it's been like a healing process for me -- a way to sanity, a way of keeping my mind on something else, namely my music." The reference is to Angela Herzberg, Allan's wife, who committed suicide in 2004 after suffering from depression and migraines; *Tough All Over*, Allan's album from 2005, contained songs that addressed her death. "We were crying," Allan says, "the whole time we were making it."

Right now, Allan finds himself in a different although not disconnected place; the new collection climaxes with "No Regrets," a ballad that retraces and reexamines some of those still-present 2004 emotions. "I feel like I'm always," Allan says, "going to be writing songs about Ange."

He returns to the notion of his road album being also his current career summary album. "It's a consolidation of everything I've done, and what's to come is the settling of Gary Allan," he says. "I'm still not there. I'm still in a transitional state, healing and partying and trying to find out how we're going to bring all this home -- how to grow up, settle, find a place where I'm content. Some place I can go, I guess, to bring it all home, when it's all done. I hope to be able to put it all on paper and in the sound waves so you can watch and hear it. That's what I've tried to do with every record before this one. It's the accumulation of it all. And right now, I feel like the ground is trembling."