

# Partners in Rhyme

With the launch of his new album, singer-songwriter Tyler Tisdale hits paydirt

BY JIM BEAUZEZ



**It's a showbiz cliché, but Tyler Tisdale really has worked all of his life—or at least his adult life—to become an overnight success in music. But it took Delta music impresario and hit songwriter Steve Azar to make it happen.**

Tisdale's 2021 single "She's the One," recorded with Azar at the Delta Music Institute, landed on CMT.com as well as on Apple Music's Best New Americana playlist in September, where it debuted at No. 7 between well-established artists Amanda Shires and Bela Fleck.

"I couldn't tell you who was more excited to release those singles, me or [Steve]," jokes Tisdale from his home in Petal, Mississippi. "It takes somebody like Steve Azar, who believes in you and gets just as excited about your music as you are. I've been very grateful to have him on my team."

The buildup to the launch of Tisdale's debut album, *If It's All the Same to You*, released in May 2022 on Azar's Ride Records, has also seen four other singles hit streaming services. "She's the One" has racked up more than half a million streams on Spotify alone, while "High" is closing in on 75,000 listens as of this writing.

"Scrolling through [those lists] and seeing my name next to all these big artists

was a very surreal experience," Tisdale says. "It's weird, because you're seeing these things happening and you're super excited about it, but at the same time, I'm still here in Petal waiting for these gigs to come in [*laughs*]. We've had to be patient, but we're finally starting to see success from all of it."

Tisdale grew up in the Hattiesburg area and attended Pearl River Community College as a young man, but his heart was always in music, not school. Raised on a steady diet of rock 'n' roll thanks to his father's record collection, he latched onto artists like James Taylor and Joe Cocker—"More as a performer and not a songwriter," he says; "I just really love the way he attacked the microphone, and I try to take a similar approach"—and rounded out his music education with contemporary Americana heroes Jason Isbell and Sturgill Simpson, as well as jam legends Widespread Panic.

Midnight Revel, the Hattiesburg-based



Tisdale's most recent album, *If It's All the Same to You*, was released on April 28.

jam band he played in for five years, wove all of those musical influences and more together, and kept him on the road. His song "High" was inspired by being on tour and trying to keep the whole traveling rock 'n' roll circus from unraveling. "We definitely learned a lot of hard lessons on the road," he says. "We got the craziness out of our systems in the first couple of years."

As the band wound through a two-week tour in Colorado and New Mexico, Tisdale remembers having fun but also felt his bandmates begin to drift apart. "That [tour] started the trickle effect of everyone starting to put their perspectives in order, and their priorities, and what they really



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Tisdale playing with Mike Doussan Music at their Live at Five show.



wanted to do,” he adds. “And Midnight Revel wasn’t it for most of us.”

While some of his bandmates formed a new band, Royal Horses, Tisdale “went into a hole” and began to write new music and figure out what kind of artist he wanted to be. Not long into that process, his path crossed with Azar. Tisdale’s father happens to be an avid listener of “In a Mississippi Minute,” Azar’s radio show on Supertalk FM, and he heard him talk about his consulting work in music.

“My dad reached out to me and sent me the website and was like, ‘You should send a video of yourself and a little bio and just see what happens,’” Tisdale recalls. “I fought him on it for a month or so. I was coming from the jam-band world; I’d just left my five-piece Southern-rock jam band, so I was in between and hadn’t decided which direction I wanted to go with my music.”

Those songs felt like a return to the Americana singer-songwriter vibe he had when he first started playing solo acoustic shows. What did he have to lose? “I sent a video to Steve, and he emailed me back that night. We got on a phone call the next day—it happened that quick.”

Tisdale began collaborating with Azar in songwriting sessions without realizing he was auditioning for Ride Records. He would send Azar music and lyrics, and they would begin to work out words and phrases together. Azar’s sports background—he’s an avid golfer in addition to being a musician—meshed well with Tisdale, who spent a lot of time playing sports, as well.

“He naturally has a coach aspect to his personality,” he says. “Writing with him, he just pushes you. He would pick out a line and say, ‘I think you can do better than this word here, chase that.’ And he would talk about what he calls ‘furniture.’ If you’re gonna talk about a tree, what kind of tree is it? Put some detail behind it and really bring the scenery to life so people can [have] a picture in their mind while they’re listening to your song. That really stuck with me.”

The lesson changed Tisdale’s approach to songwriting. Instead of writing a song and considering it finished and ready to record, he now sees them as works in progress. He returns later with a sharpened focus but doesn’t rush the process. Curiously, as he went back through his record collection, he began to hear songs he’s heard his whole life in new ways.

“Whenever he unlocked that for me in my mind, it became a lot more second nature to me after that clicked,” he says. “I feel like my confidence really grew a lot as far as my approach to songwriting.”

Tisdale hit his stride writing rootsy character sketches—not necessarily true stories, but true to the spirit and emotion of the characters. Like all great songwriters, he looks outward for inspiration and stories to tell as much as within himself. One song deals with a divorce, while he’s currently never been married. Another, “She’s the One,” he wrote for his fiancé.

“I definitely pull from life experience and I love just coming up with a story,” he says. “‘Unscathed’ on the record is a story of two love people in love, trying to outrun the law. There’s a scene in my mind of them running down a shoreline, running toward a lighthouse, and that’s where the idea for the song started, and it ran from there.”

Before they got too far, though, the Covid-19 pandemic brought a halt to their plans. That is, until they decided to make use of the technology available, including computer programs that allowed them to record the entire album in real time from remote locations.

The pair got access to the Delta Music Institute recording studio at Delta State University for a few days and cut basic tracks—just Tisdale singing and playing guitar—for all ten songs on *If It’s All the Same to You*. Then, with Tisdale in Petal and Azar at his home in the Delta, they patched into a Nashville studio with drummer Chad Cromwell, who has played with Neil Young, Kenny Chesney, LeAnn Rimes and many other country legends, and pulled up a Zoom videoconference to talk through the song arrangements.

“It worked out really well and I love Delta State’s studio,” he says. “It’s so beautiful, and that big room, I would love next time around to get a full band in there and cut some live recordings.”

With *If It’s All the Same to You* on the streets, Tisdale’s calendar is filling up with shows for the summer and fall 2022. But now that he’s somewhat older, and a heck of a lot wiser, his perspective is squarely focused on the music.

“It’s just about doing what you love, and if you’re lucky enough to pay your bills doing it, then fantastic,” he says. “If you’re not, then you still love it, and [you] keep writing and making music.” **DU**



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Tisdale (far right) at the recent Mockingbird Music Festival with Steve Azar (middle) and Phillip Lammonds.



Dell Smith, Tisdale, and John Mark Odom