

COUNTRY

HOME > MUSIC > COUNTRY MUSIC OCTOBER 26, 2020 10:38AM ET

Cam on Accepting Change, Working With Harry Styles on New Album 'The Otherside'

The Nashville songwriter is in perpetual motion on her latest album, which features some of pop music's most creative minds like Jack Antonoff and the late Avicii

By JON FREEMAN



Cam's arrival in country music defied a lot of the usual stuffy Nashville conventions: her first single "My Mistake" dealt frankly with the prospect of a one-night-stand and her own pleasure, while her breakthrough hit "Burning House" was a rhythmically complex ballad with no drums. The latter stood out in the best possible way in 2015, an emotionally devastating and uncommonly empathetic song about a doomed relationship.

It was a tough sell, even back then. Tough enough that it's hard to imagine what it would be like trying to do it in the midst of our dystopian present reality.

"I don't think anybody needs a 'Burning House' right now — we have a literal burning house," Cam says, calling from home in Nashville where she lives with her husband Adam Weaver and daughter Lucy. "I think everyone needs the opposite."

Cam's new album *The Otherside* (out October 30th) delivers on that front, slotting fizzy, upbeat love songs like "Classic" alongside the romantic synth-pop of "Til There's Nothing Left" and heartbroken numbers like "Forgetting You." Working with her frequent collaborators Tyler Johnson and Jeff Bhasker, Cam expanded her creative circle to include Jack Antonoff as well as pull in outside songs co-written by Sam Smith, Harry Styles, and the late Tim Bergling, more famously known as Avicii.

RELATED

Harry Styles Explores Italy in Gleeful 'Golden' Video

Harry Styles Has Invested in What Could Be the U.K.'s Largest Venue

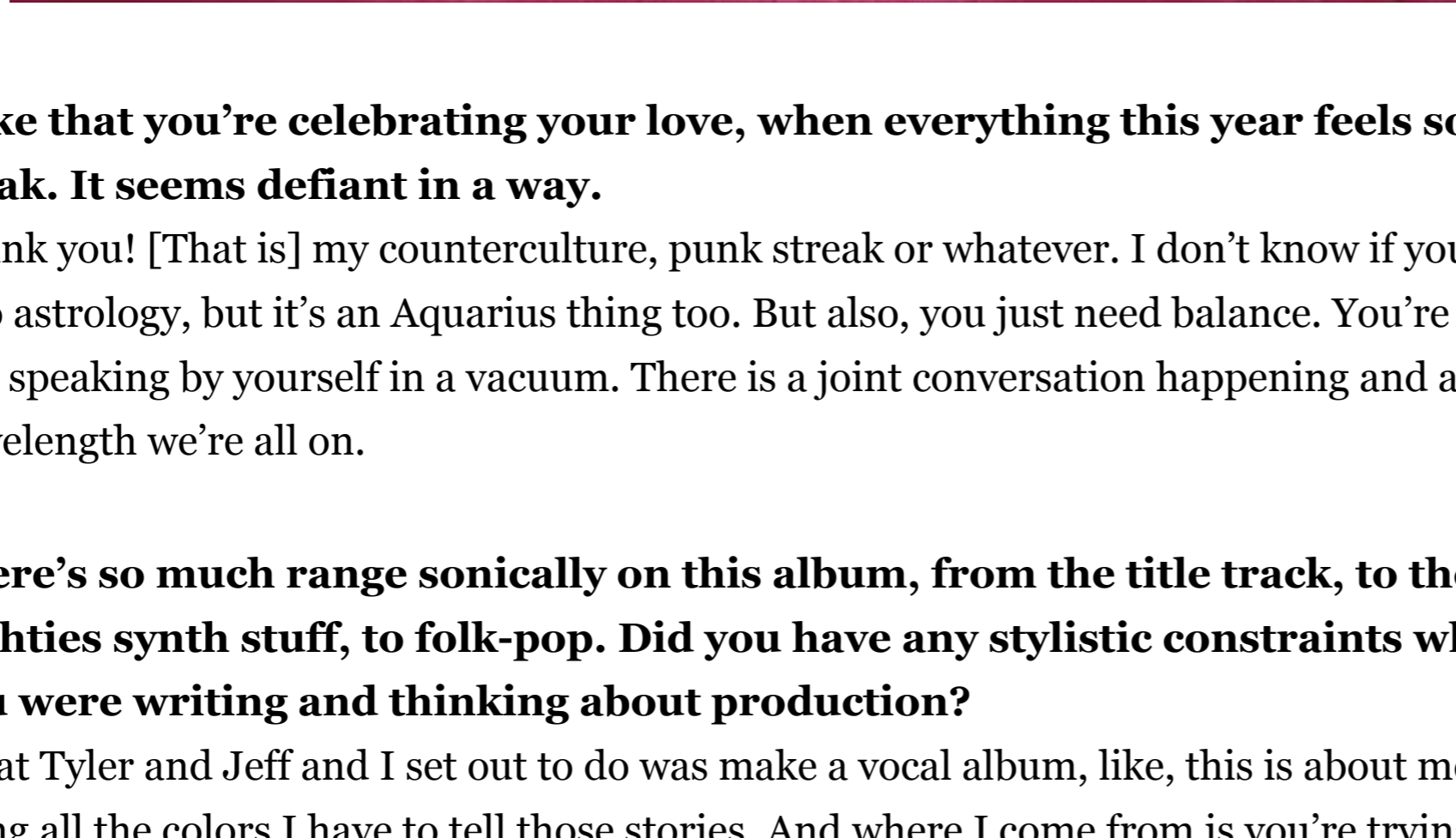
There's also an undercurrent of change and transformation on *The Otherside*, something that reflects Cam's last few years. After her debut album *Untamed* came out, she left her label home at Sony Music Nashville and found a new partner in RCA. She also gave birth to her first child in late 2019. It's evident in the disco-country rush of the title track or especially the album-closing "A Girl Like Me," where she offers up a few lessons on the way the music industry can mess with your head — and how she was able to keep moving forward.

You've been working on *The Otherside* through a period of change, including leaving your Nashville label. How much did the music change between that point and now?

It's been evolving slowly, but there was never a dramatic shift or a change in content. The process remained true to how I make music, which is like a slow build and tweak. I just had more time to tinker. The last two [songs] came toward the end, but it was probably a year ago, or something like that. It wasn't like, "The album's due, let me write a song in July." I felt like the album was done but when you have more time, you're like, "Hmm, but I could mess with this one!" You keep writing no matter what. And I'm glad I did — I got to go up with Jack Antonoff in New York and hang out with him at Electric Ladyland studios. You can tell why he writes with so many great people — he makes music fun. I hadn't had it feel so easy before. You can hear that in "Classic," it's such a fun song.

Did you write that one about your experiences with your husband?

We were traveling in Argentina — [Adam] found these Lucky Strike cigarettes. He doesn't smoke anymore and he said, "I gotta have these, because they don't make 'em like this anymore." That seemed like such a good line, and I like to steal lines from him and give him no credit because I joke that he gets 50 percent, because we're married. The deeper thing is like, who is a person that is your stone-cold classic, like, my husband — underneath it all they outlast all the trends. It's light and nostalgic and it's sort of a love song. The last album I wasn't married, didn't have a kid. There's still dark, thinking-about-your-ex-stuff on this one, but on *The Otherside* you get "Classic" and "Like a Movie."



I like that you're celebrating your love, when everything this year feels so bleak. It seems defiant in a way.

Thank you! [That is] my counterculture, punk streak or whatever. I don't know if you're into astrology, but it's an Aquarius thing too. But also, you just need balance. You're not just speaking by yourself in a vacuum. There is a joint conversation happening and a joint wavelength we're all on.

There's so much range sonically on this album, from the title track, to the Eighties synth stuff, to folk-pop. Did you have any stylistic constraints when you were writing and thinking about production?

What Tyler and Jeff and I set out to do was make a vocal album, like, this is about me using all the colors I have to tell those stories. And where I come from is you're trying to support the story with the production. Whatever that magic soup it is that you're making ... whatever you're doing needs to serve it up in a way that it hits people and they can access their own memories. If you're playing with only so many colors or one hand behind your back, it feels weird to say you're only allowed to use certain production elements. And also my perspective is influenced by the fact that "Burning House" is a different sounding record. It was commercially successful and different from mainstream country. So early on it was like, go with my instincts, whatever that is. It's more about a songwriting truth and really nailing that with the vocals and the production than it is, like, "Make sure you have a banjo on each track!"

On the subject of making a big vocal album, I hear you doing a lot of new things with your voice on *The Otherside*. What did you discover about yourself as a singer while you were writing and recording?

It's just like a muscle gets stronger, physically the muscle gets stronger from having to do so much work. I realized I can hit higher notes, louder, and also sing softer, just have more control to be able to really sell it. That's the main thing. Because when I'm putting together the album, everything gets a color code, and I'm trying to get the whole spectrum. It's like when Mary Poppins pours her medicine and it's different colors for the different kids. I don't want a full album of one sound or one type of anything, really. I want songs that feel I'm singing to you and I'm right next to you and I want songs to feel like I'm yelling and you're yelling with me as you're singing along.

How did you end up connecting with Avicii for the title track?

He came to Nashville and he wanted to write with people for his stuff. I got in the room with him and Hillary Lindsey and Tyler. Tim had this keyboard melody he was playing over and over. It was so intense, actually. He was also a definite free spirit in how he'd put production together, but he was a very hard worker for the vision he had — he was going to execute it. I remember being very frustrated in the session, like, "Wow, this is very difficult. You are not putting everyone's comfort in the room in the equation." And then afterwards thinking, "Wow, this is an amazing song." I'm so glad he stuck to what he wanted. It was a really important lesson for me. And then he released a batch of songs, and he didn't release that one and I was like, "Oh my God, let me have this song." Unfortunately, the final stuff, I didn't get to show him because he passed away. It was a huge responsibility to feel like I wanted to make sure I honored that creative genius who didn't settle. What a legacy to make other artists want to be the best versions of themselves.

Among the other well-known names in the credits is Harry Styles, who co-wrote "Changes." How did that come to be on the album?

Tyler works with Harry on his albums, and I got to open up for Harry at the Ryman — I joke we're like musical neighbors. We're all connected enough. I heard [the demo] and was just like, "Oh, this ache to outgrow something that you don't want to outgrow!" It felt so good. I normally don't take outside songs, [but] knowing how hard Harry and Sam [Smith], too, work in their music to keep evolving and discovering themselves, I very much trust them enough to really be open to hearing a song. Then I had to work extra hard to make sure I made something they were proud of, because they don't normally put out things on other people's albums either. A lot of good kind of high expectations were around. And it's still [Harry's] whistle on that bridge.

Along with the theme of that song, change in your life — both personally and in your career — obviously informed the making of this album. At what point did you really start to accept what was happening?

Acceptance definitely comes at the end. When you're in the thick of it, the blueprints that somebody gave you for how the world's gonna work and how your life's gonna work, when you really realize it's not gonna work like that and good people are gonna do bad things and people you don't trust got past your instincts... It's gonna happen and it's gonna continue to happen and are you just going to sit there being jaded and keep saying, "I told you so" and not participate? ... The hard part, and the most beautiful part, and the most freeing part, is just that it isn't what you think it is and you just have to be OK with that. Well, you don't have to be OK with it, but you have to keep living in spite of that.

In This Article: Avicii, Cam, Harry Styles, Jack Antonoff

Want more Rolling Stone? Sign up for our newsletter.

SPONSORED STORIES

You've Never Found Glasses This Way Before | Affordable Glasses Online | The Home Décor Superstore

Men's Yoga Essentials | Carbon Side Swept Sunglasses | 14 Movies That Totally Shattered Celebrity Marriages

Most wine drinkers in the US don't know these 5 simple Dos and Don'ts... | Neil Young's Older Brother Bob Young Releases First Song at Age 78

Nick Lowe on the Legacy of 'Peace, Love and Understanding' | Harry Styles Explores Italy in Gleeful 'Golden' Video

14 Rock 'n' Roll Girlfriends Who Influenced Classic Songs | 'Studio 54: Night Magic': See Photos from Brooklyn Museum's Exhibit

Make your mark by designing your own pair of Custom Chuck Taylors. | Keith Ranieri Sentenced to 120 Years in Prison

Nashville, Tennessee: This Tiny, Unknown Company is Disrupting A \$200 Billion Industry | H.E.R. Performs at Los Angeles' Roxie Theatre in 'Damage' Video

Ario Guthrie Retires From Touring: 'It's Time to Hang Up the Gone Fishing Sign'

Rolling Stone CBS HITS, ORIGINALS & LIVE TV

Queen Elizabeth enters an era defined by Margaret Thatcher and Diana Spencer in the new trailer for...

Make survey data a team effort

Popular in the Community

Staples | AdChoices | Sponsored

Variety: 'Pen15' Creators Anna Konkle and Maya Erskine Discuss Vulnerability and Relatability in Writing

WWD: Pyer Moss' Your Friends in New York Appoints New Leaders

Dirt: Rolling Stones Guitarist Ronnie Wood Strums Out of Artistic London Lair

Indiewire: 'A Teacher' Review: FX's Blandly Addictive Illicit-Sex Drama Should Have Been More Scandalous

Sportico: NFL Preparing for Owners To Restructure As Election, Possible Tax Changes Loom

Trending

- Eddie Van Halen: The Joy and Pain of Rock's Last Guitar Superhero
- Jimmy Page on His Vision for Led Zeppelin
- Watch Dave Grohl Fight Coffee Addiction in Freshpotix Parody Ad
- Billy Joe Shaver, Seminal Outlaw-Country Songwriter, Dead at 81
- Neil Young's Older Brother Bob Young Releases First Song at Age 78

EYEBUYDIRECT

Vinyl \$39 | Shanghai \$15 | Vinyl \$39 | St Michel \$32

Journalism That Matters. Music That Inspires. Subscriptions from just \$4.99 a month.

Rolling Stone SHOP

THE COVERS COLLECTION

Explore the exclusive collection inspired by Rolling Stone through the decades

WHAT WE'RE BUYING

HP Just Released Its Holiday Look Book — Here Are the 10 Best Deals to Get

The Best Cold Weather Accessories to Keep You Warm All Winter

The Best Affordable Duvet Covers

EYEBUYDIRECT

Epilogue \$25 | Belleville \$25 | Daydream \$32 | Vinyl \$39 | Attitude \$45 | Vinyl \$39 | Resonance \$70

I care about/am actively involved in environmental issues and causes: Yes/No

EDITORS' PICKS

MUSIC LISTS: The 50 Greatest Rock Memoirs of All Time

POLITICAL COMMENTARY: The Unraveling of America

MUSIC FEATURES: The Beatles Breakup And Why Their Music Still Matters 50 Years Later

EYEBUYDIRECT

FRAMES STARTING AT \$6