

SHOWCASE

BY ERICA THOMPSON, STAFF REPORTER
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Mickey Guyton's new "House on Fire" has all the hallmarks of a contemporary country album.

There are tales of good times in jeans and cowboy boots. There are sassy critiques of a partner not pulling his weight. And there are deeply personal love letters like "Deserve" and "Make 'Em Like You."

On those memorable songs, Guyton sweetly expresses that she is grateful for not settling because, despite her flaws, she is worthy of the fairy-tale ending.

"I went through a really bad breakup that just crushed me," said Guyton, 41, of Nashville. "And I knew that in my next relationship I just wanted someone where it didn't matter how much money he had or didn't have. What mattered is that he loved me 100% for me and made me a priority."

Now happily married, Guyton said her husband and 3-year-old son have inspired the album, which she is showcasing on her first headlining tour. She will visit Chicago on Wednesday for a show at Joe's on Weed St. Four years after her breakout success with the Grammy-nominated song "Black Like Me," she said she is enjoying a season of artistic freedom and ambition.

And the Texas native is still passionate about advocating for diversity in country music. In fact, she said she views it as a calling.

"It's definitely changing," she said of the country music landscape. "There were a lot more Black artists and Black journalists at the [2024] CMA Fest. I've been going for years, and for the longest time that was non-existent. So, I do feel and see there's change. How long will it last? Who's to say?"

Guyton said the needle was moved by Beyoncé's "Cowboy Carter" album, which featured several Black country artists. Among them is Shaboozey, whose "A Bar Song (Tipsy)" has held the top spot on the Billboard Hot 100 for 14 weeks as of mid-October. Though Guyton wasn't a guest on Beyoncé's album, the pop superstar sent her flowers and thanked her for "opening doors."

"She has such a massive following," Guyton said. "[Cowboy Carter] definitely brought more eyes to the genre than I ever could."

Still, Beyoncé's efforts weren't enough to garner a single Country Music Association Award nomination. Experts and other artists were quick to weigh in, debating if she was "country enough" or whether she had mingled enough with the right crowd.

"People really do expect country artists to really immerse themselves in the community and embrace this community," Guyton said. "Country music is definitely a family type of vibe. But at the same time, it still is very disappointing that she did get shut out,



Mickey Guyton will perform Wednesday at Joe's on Weed St. JOSEPH LLANES

JUST GETTING STARTED

Country star Mickey Guyton enters next phase with tour, new music and TV ambitions

MICKY GUYTON WITH DENITIA

When: 7:30 p.m. Wednesday

Where: Joe's on Weed St., 940 W. Weed St.

Tickets: \$30 at the door

Info: joesbar.com

even for "Texas Hold 'Em." But there are so many factors. There are the members, the voters and a lot of radio programmers. And so they're going to choose the people that they want to choose. We definitely have a long way to go."

The opportunity for improvement is further illustrated by the lack of radio play for women country artists of all races. Only seven women were among the top 40 artists played from Oct. 10 to Oct. 16, according to Mediabase. And two of the women were singing duets with men.

Guyton said she doesn't try to push for more airplay.

"I kind of just let it be what it is," she said. "How often can you run into a burning house? I can only try so much, either accept me or not. I just have to find my own way. And I tell all female country artists — white, Black, whoever — find your own way. You don't need to follow this formula just to have a career."

Pointing out inequity in country music has come at a cost for Guyton. In a recent interview on "The Breakfast Club," she revealed she was cyberbullied after speaking out about singer Morgan Wallen's use of a racial slur. She said the stress contributed to her going into early labor in 2021.

"Even to this day, I question whether I want to go through that again," she said. "People can be so mean behind their keyboards. But I think what keeps pushing me forward is sometimes you're given an assignment and you need to follow through with it because it's essential to change. And it's something that's so important that I just take my little Zolof and then I move on."

Reflecting on the "whirlwind" of the past few years, Guyton cites singing "The Star-Spangled Banner" at the 2022 Super Bowl as a highlight.

"I wanted to be a singer based on hearing someone sing the national anthem," she said, referring to LeAnn Rimes' rendition as a young girl in the 1990s. "It was a full-circle moment."

Looking ahead, Guyton said she has dreams of expanding her entertainment career.

"I want to get more into film and television," she said. "Being a talk show host and celebrating artists. And just becoming a triple threat. I love careers like Kelly Clarkson's. I think she has such a well-rounded career and I really identify with her as a Texan."

But for the next month, she will be sharing her gift live with fans across the country.

"It's definitely a spiritual feeling," she said of performing. "I just can't wait for people to be a part of it."