

Chris Cagle is 'Back in the Saddle'

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Ask Chris Cagle what's most important to him and you can bet he'll answer this way: "Family, ranch, music. That's it." This response is seemingly simple for a man whose professional credits include two gold albums, two No. 1 albums and 12 charted songs.

From 2000-2008, Cagle released an almost nonstop catalog of hits that resulted in a scorching hot career. Cagle's musical character and burning ambition never wavered but today, Cagle's personal perspective has mellowed. His 2012 release, 'Back in the Saddle,' is, in more ways than one, a new lease on life.

Born in DeRidder, LA, and raised "all over," Chris set off for Nashville after trying his hand at college in Texas and finding the pull to pursue music too strong to ignore. Like many young artists, he spent several years working odd jobs in Nashville and scraping up enough cash to record four original songs for a demo tape. Thanks to a couple of chance meetings and the opportunity to be heard by Scott Hendricks, Chris was signed to Virgin Records in 2000 – that first album featured the unaltered version of his demo songs. Chris quickly earned critical and commercial success and attracted a legion of fans that included industry heavyweights and country fans alike. Cagle's first number one smash, "I Breathe In, I Breathe Out," remains a fan favorite.

For Chris, the professional success and sales were gratifying but his personal life blistered under the spotlight. "I was tired of who I was in this business," Chris says. "I had become somebody who I didn't want to be." He bowed out and retreated to Marietta, Oklahoma, a place where he could distance himself from the industry, reconnect with his roots and take back control of his life. He spent the next couple of years staking his claim on home life and embracing a lifelong dream: building his family's home, "Big Horse Ranch," with his own two hands, nail by nail. What started out as a "piece of dirt," is now an impressive Oklahoma homestead. Chris also met his wife Kay, who he describes in the song "Let There Be Cowgirls": "Something you can't tame/She's a mustang/ The heartbeat of the heartland." "The worst days we've had together are better than the best I've had with other people," Chris says. He also

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found a new identity as a father. On the birth of his daughter in 2010, Chris says, "She made me want to be better at everything. Period. I've never cared enough about myself to take responsibility for my faults; she made me man right up."

Cagle's 2012 release from Bigger Picture Group has been a homecoming – a rekindling of his creative flame and a roaring reminder of his rock-infused country roots. It's something he originated and what he does best: relatable, back-roads and familiar, while also being a striking form of country music worth getting excited about. While assuring his fans that the Chris they love hasn't changed, Cagle sees his new persona as a better version of himself. "I want my music to be an environment, to strike chords, passions, memories, faults, loves, angers and redemptions," Chris says. "Imagine my music just on the outside of town right where the road turns to the rural route. A dirt road cul-de-sac with trucks all parked in a circle. I would love to see my music fit into that."

This Chris Cagle may look a little different to those who are used to a louder, harder-partying version of the star. Rest assured, Chris still gets "as rowdy as a redneck can get," but these days he confines himself to a smaller space – the 40'x40' stage. And when the show's over, he puts on a different hat and heads back to hearth and home. It is there that Chris has found balance and a new passion. Today, his biggest off-stage thrill is training and raising cutting horses, and when he puts on his cowboy boots and favorite hat, it is because he's living the true cowboy lifestyle, not because he's putting on a show.

Chris' self-proclaimed version of "redneck rock 'n roll," has been firing people up for over a decade, and this time around, Chris is enjoying an energetic reintroduction to the country music community that's been a long time coming. Fans still see flashes of the Chris they know, but they also see the joy and confidence that home life provides him. "I'm happy. You're gonna hear the smile through the radio," Chris said of his new record. "For the first time since April 2001, I am truly happy to do it; I have a new lease on all of it." Chris is back with all the energy of a newcomer and the wisdom of a veteran and the renewed passion is contagious. "I'm at a place in my life where I think about everyone I'm working with, especially the fans. I thank God that I'm in a place in my heart where I am grateful and aware. I am very, very, very lucky."

Cagle still has a fire, but his passion is driven by not just music, but family and horses and a place he calls home. His fans at the Beaufort Water Festival will recognize the glow and appreciate the authenticity: "I'm a lot like charcoal. Once you light me up, I'm gonna burn hot for a long, long time, but if you pour water on me it takes a little effort to get me started again. Bigger Picture Group and my family have helped light that fire for me. So let's throw some gasoline on it, light it up and watch it burn."

Chris Cagle will perform the Concert in the Park on Saturday, July 20th, with opening entertainment by Chris Jones, followed by the Chuck Courtenay Band. Gates open at 7 pm and show starts at 8 pm.