

My Thoughts on Morgan Wallen and Ernest

Morgan Wallen

My introduction to Morgan Wallen came through what many have described as his “breakout hit”: *Up Down*. As I recall, this song was played endlessly on the radio between 2017 and 2018, at about the same time as standardized, overbearing “country party songs” started fading off the radio.

By this time, I thought I had heard enough of this kind of music to last me a lifetime. So, when I heard *Up Down*, played repetitively on the radio, I assumed the rest of Morgan Wallen’s debut album, *If I Know Me*, would simply be a collection of more of this. So, I did not feel at all inclined to listen to the entire album.

However, Wallen’s second album: *Dangerous: the Double Album*, showed me that he is in fact capable of writing and recording more insightful and compelling songs than just the standard party anthems. I enjoyed the album very much and found the fact that he had Co-written at least half of the 30 songs quite respectable.

On the other hand, many people thought this album, despite its respectable aspects, had several “filler songs” or songs that were there solely to extend the album's runtime. It was and still is widely believed that the main reason the album broke streaming records was not because many people were listening to it, but rather because the album was 30 songs long.

At this point, people (pundits) began wondering if Wallen had become so giddy with the success of this first long album that he would make another extra-long one for the sole purpose of “gaming the streaming system.” Sadly, those people were not mistaken.

While, it is easy, for me at least to identify which are the “filler songs” on *Dangerous*, Wallen’s third album: *One Thing at a Time* contains so many “filler songs” that it's impossible for people to agree on which are the good songs and which are the “filler songs”. *One Thing at a Time* is 36 songs long and contains so many different styles of music that there is something to appeal to everyone’s tastes.

For many people, this album has cemented the image of Morgan Wallen as a person who cares a lot less about artistry and consistency than about profits, that is, the number of streams he gets. If Morgan Wallin's goal with this album was to "try to please everyone" or to try to please both sides of the country music debate (traditionalists and modernists) then I think it's fair to say he succeeded in pleasing neither side. I think it would have been better to make a second double album with one half traditional country songs and the other half more techno infused songs than to release the mishmash this album is.

Now, Morgan Wallen's fourth album: *I'm the Problem* is out and it's 37 songs long. So, I don't think there's any doubt that it is yet another album designed to "game the streaming system." However, I think a difference between this album and *One Thing at a Time* is that there are several songs on *I'm the Problem* that, in my opinion, appear to be actual stories of things that have happened in his life or actual emotional reckonings he has had. These include, *Genesis, Revelation, The Dealer, Skool Chevy and Browning*.

Morgan Wallen only Co-wrote 14 of the 36 songs on, *One Thing at a Time* as compared to 22 of the 37 songs on, *I'm the Problem*. What if anything does this indicate? Clearly, he has good songwriters.

What I know for sure is, I'm impressed by the difference in the number of songs co-written by Wallin on, *I'm the Problem* versus *One Thing at a Time*. This indicates that Morgan Wallen's confidence in his songwriting ability has increased and maybe the emotional reckonings he's had in his life have encouraged him to open himself up more than before. I hope this is an indication of a more sincere side of Morgan Wallen that some people think is long overdue.

Ernest

I was first introduced to Ernest through his highly acclaimed, *Flower Shops*, album released in 2022. That album, as well as its successor, *Nashville Tennessee*, released in 2024, made clear statements that Ernest had firmly planted his flag in the realm of, "the old school country sound."

This consistency between two albums as well as the fact that Ernest started out as a songwriter before making his own albums and thus “climbed the music industry ladder,” made him arguably far easier to like and respect than Morgan Wallen who started out on, *The Voice* and who seems only to write or co-write half of his own songs.

I was surprised to learn that Ernest and Morgan Wallen are in fact best friends and that Ernest had written many of Wallen’s most successful songs. Often, when I find myself listening to an Ernest album, I catch myself wondering: how is this the same person who wrote *You Proof*? On the other hand, I can easily imagine Ernest putting songs like *Somebody’s Problem* and *This Bar* onto his own albums.

No doubt, everyone deserves a best friend like Ernest, and Morgan Wallen is lucky to be able to count on his writing skills. However, the other side of the debate says that being Morgan Wallen’s “go to hitmaker” is tarnishing Ernest’s credibility with old school country fans.

While I think that both those arguments are valid, I’d be more likely to say that if Ernest knows what to put on his own albums, and if Morgan Wallen can count on him to make commercially and artistically successful songs, everyone is happy.

In the end, the question is which approach do you favour? Ernest who climbed the ladder, going from songwriter to singer and always writing his own songs, or Morgan Wallen who probably used his “Voice” connections to get his record deal and whose mentality seems to be “more music, more money, more people in the country music fold, country music should be cosmopolitan.”

Personally, I favour Ernest’s approach, but I’m also a Morgan Wallen fan. For me, it comes down to the fact that both artists make good music in their own way. It’s just that Wallen is more inconsistent than Ernest. That these artists can approach their careers so seemingly differently and still be friends is remarkable to me and probably to anyone else paying attention to their trajectories.