

There's a very good reason that no less than four songs from Rodney Atkins' platinum-selling 2006 album *If You're Going Through Hell* became No. 1 hits—a feat that no one had accomplished since 2002. It's the same reason that two of those songs became the most-played of 2006 (“If You're Going Through Hell [Before the Devil Even Knows]”) and 2007 (“Watching You”), and why concert audiences all over the country are cheering him on and singing along.

It's because Atkins has a rare gift for reflecting the lives of his listeners in his music—their hopes, their concerns, their spirit, their adversities, even their sense of humor. Simply put, as he sang in another chart-topping smash, “These Are My People.” A native of small-town East Tennessee, the adopted son of a loving family and the proud father to a family of his own, Atkins understands regular lives because he leads one. “People always talk about image—‘You're the guy in the ball cap, the All-American country boy,’” says Atkins, who does indeed still favor caps to cowboy hats. “But if the songs don't connect with the folks listening, then none of that stuff matters.”

Atkins makes that connection again and again on his current album, *It's America*. The whole album is pretty much “about being human,” says Atkins. Currently, riding the wave of the smash hit “Farmer's Daughter,” Atkins is busy on tour and preparing for his upcoming Curb release. In September, Cracker Barrel released *Rodney Atkins* to their fans and his in the stores resulting in successful sales for the project in the first week. The collection features the current Atkins single and a few bonus tracks, as well as his string of no. 1 hits over the past few years.

Atkins' gives an honest view to his upbringing. He was adopted as a frail, sickly infant from the Holston Methodist Home for Children in Greenville, Tenn. (for which he has passionately raised awareness and financial assistance since finding stardom), but two families returned him to the home because the burden of caring for him was too great. Then Allan and Margaret Atkins took him in.

“From what I understand, I became more sick than I had ever been during that time,” he says. “But it just never crossed their mind to take me back.” With their love and care that weak, ill child grew into a strong, healthy young man. He began singing in church as a boy, and learned to play guitar and write songs while in high school. Soon after he headed off to college, Atkins began making regular trips to Nashville in order to write, perform and learn the business. Word got around quickly about this talented and charismatic up-and-comer, and soon he was signed to Curb Records. Atkins' 2003 debut album, *Honesty*, earned him a Top 5 hit with “Honesty (Write Me a List).” Never one to stray far from his roots, Atkins, along with his wife of 13 years, Tammy Jo, continue to raise their family (9-year-old son Elijah and college age stepdaughters who affectionately call him “Big R”) and enjoy a simple life right here in Middle Tennessee. “My family is my priority,” he says. “I cherish them so much.” Atkins and longtime co-producer Ted Hewitt even recorded the vocals for *If You're Going Through Hell* and *It's America* at the singer's modest “home studio”,

little more than a closet really, amidst the hubbub of his happily full house. This unique recording technique proved a winning one, and the chart-topping, platinum-selling *If You're Going Through Hell* gave Atkins his true breakthrough. In addition to the overwhelming radio and video airplay, he earned the Academy of Country Music's Top New Male Vocalist award, plus five other ACM nominations and two Country Music Association nominations. He has also had the opportunity to amass some amazing memories—from public moments like performing for a half-million people at the National Memorial Day concert in Washington, D.C., to private ones like getting to thank hero Garth Brooks for his inspiration. He's performed for former President George W. Bush, twice. He's toured with the superstar likes of Brad Paisley, Brooks & Dunn, Martina McBride and ZZ Top. Similarly, he's had the pleasure of helping the causes that mean a lot to him, such as the National Council for Adoption and performed a national ad campaign for Kraft's *Velveta Shells and Cheese* "Best Side of Dinner" campaign. His current tour is also being sponsored by the brand. He also in into his third year as a spokesman for Chevy's *Silverado* brand.

"A lot of my dreams have become reality – I'm living the American dream," he acknowledges. "It's amazing to me."

Even so, Atkins hasn't changed a bit. He's still the caring husband and father who wants to see his family thrive, still the hopeful dreamer who paid his dues in honky-tonks across America, still the small-town boy who inherited his parents' warmth and work ethic. He still feels an unbreakable connection to the fans who buy his albums, request his songs and fill up his shows. These are his people, and he has no intention of letting them down.