

# Jerrod Niemann

## *Judge Jerrod & The Hung Jury*

### Biography

Jerrod Niemann is not a typical country artist, and the audacious, groundbreaking *Judge Jerrod & The Hung Jury* is a far cry from a typical country album. With the first track, which is a humorously hyperbolic movie trailer, and the attention-grabbing lyrics of the opening song, “They Should Have Named You Cocaine,” listeners quickly realize they’re in for an extraordinary ride.

Niemann’s debut for Sea Gayle/Arista Nashville includes up-tempo cuts, heartache balladry, wicked wordplay and a couple of cool covers, all woven together with short comedic interludes. The 20 tracks constitute a progressive, album-length voyage into utterly unique territory in the country music landscape.

The lead single, “Lover, Lover,” is a groove-oriented, handclap-fueled #1 smash that features nine vocal parts, all recorded by Niemann himself.

“My original plan was to just sing the lead vocal part,” Niemann explains. “I was going to get Jamey Johnson, Randy Houser, Chris Young and a bunch of my friends to each sing a part. But I didn’t have a record deal, and I realized that getting permission for all of them would have been torturous, so my co-producer, Dave Brainard, suggested that I try singing all the parts. I sang eight out of nine parts the first night. The only part I didn’t have was that low bass part. I just couldn’t hit those notes. So Dave and I went down to the Tin Roof in Nashville, and in the name of country music, we properly medicated the vocal cords. When I woke up the next morning, I sounded like a mix between Richard Sterban from the Oak Ridge Boys and that cartoon Grape Ape.”

Listeners might get the catchy chorus of “Lover, Lover” permanently stuck in their heads — which is exactly what happened to Niemann when he heard the original version of the song, written by Dan Pritzker of the rock band Sonia Dada, and titled “You Don’t Treat Me No Good.”

“When I first heard that song, I was in a community swimming pool in Liberal, Kansas, in 1993,” Niemann recalls. “I’ve always loved that song, and I associate it with my childhood. I took it into the studio, played it for Dave [Brainard], and literally five minutes later we were recording it, just on a whim.”

Niemann wrote or co-wrote ten of the album’s dozen songs. His co-writers on “They Should Have Named You Cocaine” were his buddies Jamey Johnson and Dallas Davidson. This track’s unusual production merges traditional, jazzy sounds with a

space-age theremin (inspired by the Beach Boys) and just a touch of the Electric Light Orchestra hit “Strange Magic.”

Niemann shows his sensitive side with “What Do You Want,” the emotional centerpiece of the album. “That was the first time I had ever written a song truly from the heart,” Niemann admits. “I wasn’t trying to write a hit song. I just wanted to get it out of my system. I was missing an ex-girlfriend, and I would just start the process of getting over her, and then I’d hear from her. So that’s how that song came about.”

Niemann’s compositions reflect an adherence to the adage “Write what you know.” He calls “Old School New Again” his “soapbox” number because it comments on the machinations of the music industry. The song chronicles the hopes of a struggling musician, as Niemann sings, “I know times, they change / So I ain’t sayin’ we need to go back to Nudie suits, rhinestones and fringe / I just wanna be proud of what I’m playin’ / And sing a little Lefty now and then.”

He returns to the music-industry theme with the lighthearted barroom anthem “One More Drinkin’ Song.” The track is preceded by “A Concerned Fan,” a tongue-in-cheek skit addressing the notion of using demographic data as the basis for writing a country song.

The solo composition “For Everclear” is the smile-inducing tale of a hard-partying college student who winds up in bed with his instructor. A boisterous cover of Robert Earl Keen’s “The Buckin’ Song” features the kind of sly wordplay that Niemann has made a trademark of his own songwriting. “I didn’t write that song, but I thought it was just offensive enough to put on the album,” he jokes.

Puns and wordplay also are showcased in the tropical tune “Down in Mexico” and its accompanying sketch, “Phone Call at 3 A.M.” This Buffettesque track proves that an episode of quasi-drunk-dialing can result in a great country song.

Other album highlights include the R&B-flavored scorcher “Come Back to Me,” a poetic rumination on lost love called “Bakersfield,” the honky-tonk rave-up “How Can I Be So Thirsty” (penned with John Anderson and Billy Joe Walker, Jr.) and a dramatic ballad with strings, “I Hope You Get What You Deserve.”

With a single spin of the album, it’s obvious that the recording sessions for *Judge Jerrod* were a blast. Ironically, Niemann’s personal life at the time was in tatters.

Although Niemann had experienced triumphs as a songwriter — with his songs being recorded by Garth Brooks, Jamey Johnson, Julie Roberts and Blake Shelton — he yearned to be a performer himself. Things weren’t going well in that regard. He had signed a recording contract, only to see the deal fall apart. Niemann signed another recording contract, but that one also failed to come to fruition. Then his life took a turn for the worse.

“I was at rock bottom,” he recalls. “I had horrible depression. I ran off a girl I was dating, and she moved clear to India. I gained 60 pounds, so I looked like the Marshmallow Man from *Ghostbusters*. I didn’t write a song for almost a year. That’s when I ran into Jamey Johnson, at that point in my life. He said, ‘Man, I can tell you’re not yourself. Why don’t you go cut a record? That’s what I did, and it changed my life.’ And Jamey was right. So I took a year to record the album, and by the end of that process, I had lost every bit of the weight. It’s amazing how doing something that you love can change your inner self and your outer appearance.”

After Niemann finished the album, he shared it with the heads of his publishing company, Sea Gayle Music. They wanted to shop it to Arista Nashville, and Niemann agreed, but under one condition: Not a single note on the album could be changed. In a bold move, Arista Nashville signed Niemann and agreed to release the album as is, even keeping the title (with its double entendre) intact.

Niemann says, “We called it *Judge Jerrod & The Hung Jury*, but it’s not so much because I’m a judge. Instead, it’s about the idea that everybody is going to judge me and my band for making this album. Whenever you attempt to do anything different or unique, people are going criticize it. But that’s okay. I’ve been made fun of my whole life. Why stop now?”

Niemann grew up in Liberal, a tiny town in west Kansas. As a child, his knowledge of music was expanded at the skating rink that his parents owned. “That’s where I got my street cred, as a 7-year-old, rolling in circles, looking dangerous and mysterious on eight wheels of Country & Western thunder,” he recalls with a laugh. “I remember skating to Queen, to Run-D.M.C. and Aerosmith doing “Walk This Way,” and to the Oak Ridge Boys’ “Elvira.”

After graduating from Liberal High School, Niemann studied music for two years at South Plains College in Levelland, Texas. Then he moved to Fort Worth, where he honed his songwriting and learned how to win over tough crowds in bars. He moved to Nashville in 2000.

Today, Niemann is ready to become the full-fledged artist he always dreamed of being.

“A few years ago, my friends and I were burning up the honky-tonks in Nashville, but now everybody has matured a little bit,” he reflects. “We all realized that we’re representing country music whenever we leave Nashville. We still get rowdy and have fun, but we know where this town came from. We love it and we respect it. We’re doing what we can to ensure that country music fans have music that not only entertains them, but that they can enjoy in any mood.”

Niemann feels that he can be a distinct voice in country music, but he realizes he’s standing on the shoulders of giants. “Waylon and Willie are considered hard-core

traditionalists now, but they were very innovative back in the day, and they caused a lot of controversy. No one's ever going to say what they said, or sing what they sang, as well as they did. But I think there's something unique that I can contribute to the format. If I can make somebody laugh, or get someone who's never listened to country music to come over and check it out, then I've accomplished my goal."

[www.jerrodniemannofficial.com](http://www.jerrodniemannofficial.com)