

It's a crazy-good story. The Eli Young Band—four musicians who met during their college days in Texas—is now 11 years into a career built on touring without a single lineup change. That dedication is paying off big-time as the band enjoys a crazy new level of success. They sell a crazy amount of tickets. Get a crazy amount of airplay. And are selling a crazy amount of downloads—EYB is on the verge of its first Gold single for the aptly named “Crazy Girl.”

Penned by fellow artist Lee Brice and Nashville songwriter Liz Rose (“You Belong With Me”), “Crazy Girl” is a perfect introduction to *Life At Best*, a 14-track album that takes the band's wide-ranging multi-genre influences and distills them into a focused, engaging vision: edgy country with hints of heartland rock bands such as Tom Petty and classic Eagles.

Produced by Mike Wrucke with executive producer Frank Liddell (a team noted for its award-winning work with Miranda Lambert), *Life At Best* takes the listener on a journey, winding through songscapes that walk a delicate line. There's a distinct variance from track to track as EYB veers from energetic quasi-rockers to steel-ladled country songs to conflicted ballads. And yet the album maintains a singular identity, built around a sound that's been masterfully created over the course of three studio albums.

“We were able to just go in and record the entire record all in the same time period, and so you're in the same state of mind the entire time you're recording,” lead singer Mike Eli notes. “There's something to be said about that when you're creating music, and I think this album demonstrates it. There's a degree of cohesiveness with this record that I don't think we've had with our prior records.”

There's also a degree of anticipation—understandable given that “Crazy Girl” provides a new level of exposure to a national presence that's been created by simple touring. Their last album, *Jet Black & Jealous*, debuted at No. 5 on the Billboard Country Albums chart in 2008 even though the group had never made the Top 10 through radio play at that point in its career. One title from that project, “Always The Love Songs,” provided that Top 10 breakthrough while the group earned critical acclaim from *People*, *USA Today*, *Billboard*, *The New Yorker*, *American Songwriter* and *Country Weekly* and picked up television appearances on *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* and *The Tonight Show With Jay Leno*. EYB also nabbed a nomination from the Academy of Country Music for Top New Vocal Group of the Year.

Still, nothing demonstrated the band's impact on the public consciousness better than its ability to turn a disappointing concert hurdle into personal triumph. A handful of dates on the multi-act Country Throwdown Tour were dropped in 2010 as the promoters made a cost-cutting move during a difficult touring season. With only nine days notice, the Eli Young Band announced a concert on its own in Dallas and sold an impressive 20,000 tickets with little advance. “We were rolling the dice on that show,” drummer Chris Thompson admits. “It was great to see the payoff on that concert and know that those people have our back.”

If the band's fan base has its back, it's merely an extension of the solidarity the Eli Young Band has demonstrated since the beginning. Thompson, guitarist James Young and bass player Jon Jones formed an instant friendship and started performing around Denton when they were students at North Texas State University in 1998. Eli came into the picture when he enrolled at the school the next year, first playing duo shows with Young, then singing lead as the gang of four officially made its live debut in October 2000.

"In the very beginning, we decided that this is gonna be the four of us or it wasn't gonna work," Jones reflects. "Way before Nashville was even on our radar, we had time to figure out how we wanted to do it and really kind of commit to each other. We decided that we would be stronger, the four of us going through it together instead of just one person, which I think is the best thing about being a band. You have a group of people to share everything with—to share some of the work and keep each other grounded."

There was plenty of work. And little pay. EYB built its reputation by honing its music in front of audiences. They'd play a club, sometimes for fewer than 100 members, but when they returned to that venue, the crowds were invariably larger. Within three visits, they usually sold out the house and would soon need to move up to a larger hall.

The group routinely plowed its earnings back into the business, buying better equipment, fueling its cramped van, and gambling on the good vibes the musicians shared as a band—and with their growing legion of fans. It's the same method that lifted many classic bands: New Jersey's Bruce Springsteen & The E Street Band, Seattle's Nirvana and Detroit's Bob Seger. The Eli Young Band established itself first in Denton, grew to prominence in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, expanded into a regional act across Texas and Oklahoma and eventually extended its tentacles from coast to coast.

EYB shed the van in favor of a bus several years ago and has stepped into even larger venues, opening for the likes of Alan Jackson, Jason Aldean and the Dave Matthews Band. And the group has reached a level where it regularly sells out 5,000-seaters on its own in the Southwest and 3,000-seaters in other areas of the nation.

"Crazy Girl" underscored the strength of the group's foundation when it sold 47,000 copies in its first week out. It quickly became the fastest radio hit in EYB's career and sent an undisputable signal that the group is now a coast-to-coast phenomenon.

"Some of the biggest responders were way outside of Texas," Jones asserts. "It seemed like everywhere we're went people were really welcoming us into the doors and ready to give the single a chance." But as strong a reception as "Crazy Girl" has received; it's merely an introduction to an album long on ingratiating melodies, magnetic hooks and subtly provocative storylines. "Even If It Breaks Your Heart" kicks it off with a breezy Petty feel, and the project runs through the punchy "Every Other Memory," the optimistic crunch of "Recover," the introspective ballad "My Old Man's Son" and the gritty "Skeletons."

“What I like about our records is there are different kinds of songs here and there, and there’s something for everybody,” Young says. “We don’t set out to write just one kind of song.”

EYB members wrote or co-wrote nine of the 14 tracks, drawing on their collective experiences as musical partners and growing individuals. They referenced their struggles as a band, the pitfalls of relationships, the complexities of family heritage and the difficulties of simply being human. Despite digging into hardship, they transmitted it with an unerring sense of optimism.

And they did it in a way that only four guys who have held together as friends and business partners through several years of difficult touring can. They were all born within a 15-month span, and that’s created a shared prism through which they’re able to see the world and their music.

“Life At Best has just a little bit more maturity than anything we’ve done before,” Jones says. “We’re always writing about what we’re going through, and the type of song that appeals to us changes with our lives. We’ve been growing up together and going through the same phases really since college, and you can see some of that in this record. You can see that we’re a little bit older than in Jet Black & Jealous.”

And a little more established. Their growing TV presence, their continuing road-warrior commitment and the imminent Gold of “Crazy Girl” all point Life At Best in one direction: a crazy little thing called success.