

Country music artist Justin Haigh plays by 'new rules'

[Jim Bessman](#), Manhattan Local Music Examiner
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Country artist [Justin Haigh](#) was in New York this week along with his key business associates, and together they've made a pretty formidable team in terms of making a dent in the new era of music marketing--country music marketing in particular.

"There are new rules now in the business," said Pathfinder Management's Jim Della Croce, who manages Haigh and also works with the country music likes of John Anderson, Megan Rae and Nicole Donatone, as well as Leon Redbone.

Della Croce, along with Haigh's Austin-based Apache Ranch Records' label's Jason Landry, was taking Haigh to meet New York music business VIPs at a time when Haigh's single "All My Best Friends (Are Behind Bars)," from his label debut album *People Like Me*, was climbing Nashville music trade publication *Music Row's* Country Breakout Chart.

"It's a whole new world," continued Della Croce. "Apache is a little label, but Justin has management, a promotion team, booking agent. We assembled a small team of experts in February who could work quickly as a group, and here we are the first of November at No. 47 on the *Music Row* chart ['All My Best Friends (Are Behind Bars)'] has since gone up a notch."

For the record, Haigh (pronounced HAIG) is booked by veteran Nashville agent Bobby Roberts; longtime country radio promoters Sam Cerami and Jerry Duncan are handling that aspect of the Haigh team's efforts.

But central to the campaign, obviously, is the music.

"He's a *real* country artist," notes Della Croce, distinguishing his client from much of the current country pack by invoking the emergence of young traditional country artists in the 1990s: "He fits in with the 'Class of '92'--Alan Jackson, Clint Black, John Anderson, Tracy Lawrence, Mark Chestnut."

Della Croce further puts him in league with the current country likes of Chris Young, Josh Turner, and Jamey Johnson--who co-wrote *People Like Me's* "Is It Still Cheating."

"Like Josh, he has the ability to write real country music without stepping back in time," says Della Croce. "He's very progressive, yet real country at the same time--very real-and-now country."

Indeed, Haigh credits country music role models like Merle Haggard, Waylon Jennings, Lefty Frizzell, Hank Williams, Sr. and the legendary *Hee Haw* show, while also citing the likes of Brad Paisley, AC/DC, Sunny Sweeney and Jamey Johnson.

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"I titled the album *People Like Me* because my music will appeal to those traditional country music fans--like me!" he explains. "My goal is to make true country music come alive in the modern age through my songs."

He surely has the qualifications. The Wessington, South Dakota native is the son of a rancher who grew up with horses and cattle--cutting hay, mending fences and breaking horses while listening to country music and learning to play guitar. After a short stint in the service, he was a commercial fisherman in Alaska for a couple years, "bummed around and came back home," he says.

"I drove a truck for a few years, and played and wrote all that time," adds Haigh. He then got a recording deal at a studio in Aberdeen, which eventually connected him with Apache and a move to Texas.

"We had enough material for a good demo after doing demo sessions in Nashville, and were showcasing for industry there in search of the right people," says Landry, whose label also has Americana artist John Arthur Martinez. "'All My Best Friends' had just been written, and was the last song Justin sang. It really put everything over the top."

Haigh, meanwhile, notes that his instant country drinking song classic is only one of two songs on *People Like Me* that he wrote.

"We got top writers like Erv Woolsey and Jamey Johnson, and great Texas songwriters like Kevin Higgins, Jeff Posey and John M. Greenberg, who are underrated and whom we hope to put on the map," says Haigh.

Other Haigh teammates, incidentally, include *People Like Me* producer Lew Curatolo (also producer of Kevin Higgins' Texas Music Awards-winning Americana band Cosmic Dust Devils), "All My Best Friends (are Behind Bars)" video director Jim Shea and PR firm The Press Office. The album is currently available through iTunes and at Haigh's Web site.