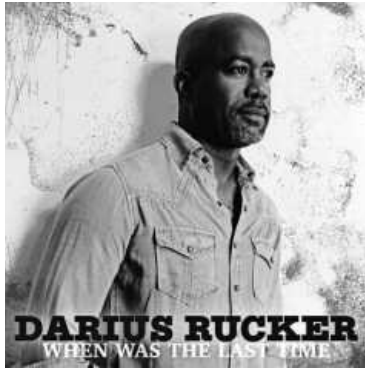


ALBUM OF THE WEEK

# Rucker will make you look forward to 'The Last Time'

**Bob Doerschuk**  
Special for USA TODAY



**REVIEW** Darius Rucker's latest album, *When Was the Last Time* (out Friday), reaffirms two points made on all the albums he has released since launching his post-Hootie & the Blowfish solo career. Let's start with the more fundamental and important one: Rucker is a seriously underrated singer. Blessed with a rugged but warm timbre, he has a rare ability to invite listeners into a song rather than keep them at a distance through extraneous, show-offy display. He knows what each word, each rise and fall in a tune, is intended to express. He draws consistently on that insight, espe-

cially when given material he can interact with creatively. This leads to the second point: That kind of material is more the exception than the rule in modern country music. Forged in Nashville's songwriting shops, where fabricating hits is the *raison d'être*, most of it sticks to formula, which generally involves listing accou-

terments of a particular lifestyle — trucks, girls, etc. — and, as if to accommodate that process, avoids longer melodies in favor of more digestible fragments. There's plenty of this on *When Was the Last Time* (★★★☆ out of four), his fifth solo album. Almost every track begins with a four-bar instrumental intro, per Music Row practice. Several draw from the country tradition of building lyrics on an initial brief phrase. The opening number does so successfully, using its title, *For the First Time*, to weave a pattern of playful questions that return to the come-on: "When was the last time you did something for the first time?" Sometimes, though, the predictability of the writing poses too formidable an interpretive challenge. The clichés on *Life's Too Short* — back porches, ice-

cold beer, "feet up on the cooler" — parade through a simple repetition that ultimately constitutes a call to inaction. Similarly, *She* unleashes a flood of familiar images right at the top: a "double-wide or a little white house her daddy built," "green grass growing up around that Oldsmobile in the yard." All of this paradoxically turns whoever "she" is into an archetype, seemingly the opposite intent of an ostensible love song. It bears mention that *Hands on Me* tries a little too hard to make a forced metaphor work. The music has a toned-down gospel feel, which is mirrored in lyrics that include "born again," "soul revival," "lead me to salvation" and "I'm down on my knees." But in the chorus, where one might expect a call to the altar, Rucker suggests that the object of his attraction "turn the lights off, slide your

jeans off and put your hands on me," perhaps not the most elegant way to tie the pieces together. Rucker handles all of this well, far better than many of his peers might. But on more substantial songs we hear more clearly what he can accomplish. *Another Night With You* and the excellent *Twenty Something* give him more to work with and he responds with compelling performances, altering their more extended melodies and connecting us to their stories. Somewhere between these approaches are the songs written and sung purely for fun. The saloon shuffle *Straight to Hell*, featuring brief appearances by Jason Aldean, Luke Bryan and Charles Kelley, and the amiable *Story to Tell* go down easy and complete the picture of Rucker as a singer who can do well with any song that comes his way.

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## PUZZLES

**CROSSWORD**  
BY David J. Kahn

**DO THE MATH**

**ACROSS**

- Wise old head
- Bikini parts
- Overplay, as a role
- Platinum Card offerer, for short
- Roller hockey venue
- Get hitched in Vegas, perhaps
- Was victorious
- Dental hygienist's request
- Scatters, as seed
- "CSI" setting
- Entry on a Merchant Copy
- Schooner filler
- (not my error)
- Tanning salon units
- 1967 Sidney Poitier movie, or its theme song
- Husband of Jackie O.
- See 63-Across
- Double affirmative statement
- Oldest U.S. airline
- Unspecified degree
- Fund, as a grant
- Pull up stakes quickly
- Sushi or sashimi selection
- Milk source for Romano cheese
- "I don't know why, but..."
- Stunt cyclist's prop
- Many an heir
- Variety show since 1975, familiarly
- Dada pioneer Jean
- Topper with a tassel
- Does 80 in a 55, say
- Word with spitting or mirror
- Reduced gradually
- With 32-Across, instrument played by Coltrane
- Old World Style sauce brand
- Frat house Z
- Check for fit
- 1-Down, e.g.
- Site of a biblical temptation

**DOWN**

- Tree surgeon's need
- "Famous" cookie maker
- Lady's mate, briefly
- Actors in crowd scenes, say
- MLB team that switched leagues in 1998
- Clears (of)
- Gasteyer of "Suburgatory"
- Like a hotel atrium
- Basil or dill
- He sparred verbally with Cosell
- Capital of Uruguay
- Like the Poseidon, after the tidal wave
- Incubator sounds
- Prefix with pad or port
- Needing an analgesic
- Next number in a series suggested by the starts of 17-, 27-, 46- and 60-Across
- Ship's petty officer, briefly
- One involved in timber production
- BP or PetroChina
- Obi-... Kenobi
- Spike who directed "Chi-Raq"
- Toss in
- Be in the hole
- Rain-delay rollout
- Early hrs.
- The Beatles' "And I Love..."
- Yoga position
- Namesake of a line of Gibson guitars
- "The Marriage of Figaro" composer
- With a clean slate
- Disreputable sort
- Bonnie in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame
- Seedless, flowerless plant
- ... lily (Utah's state flower)
- Like Easter eggs
- Fill to excess
- Melted chocolate, e.g.
- Lao-tzu's "Way"
- Vacationer's shade, perhaps

**Wednesday's Answer**

TIAGS WYETH FEW  
OSHEA AUDIO RICA  
RYANGOSLING ERR  
TENDONS TETANUS  
ETAS BUT DISC  
TARPIT ETHAN  
GOHOME PAT IFSO  
EMU PALJOEY RIO  
RISK KIA LIBYAN  
ETHIC URBANE  
PEAS SUV DRAM  
NOUVEAU RISSOLE  
APP SURVIVALKIT  
PEP ANNIE TAEBO  
ANY RASPS TRIO

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**WORD ROUNDUP**  
By David L. Hoyt and Jeff Knurek 10/19

Find and Circle:  
Three poker hands  
Three countries with rainforests  
Three U.S. states  
Three Olympic medals  
Three four-letter musical instruments

Wednesday's answer: GAZELLE GERBIL GOPHER GOAT / UNIFORM GLOVE FIELD GAME / EGRET HERON FINCH EAGLE / LIZARD TURTLE SNAKE / UMBRELLA

**QUICKCROSS**  
By John Wilmes 10/19

Hot rock  
Roswell sightings  
Grasp  
Lays turf  
Drags  
Popular '70s hairdo  
Invalid  
Venomous Nile snakes

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**SUDOKU**  
Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x3 box contains the numbers 1 through 9 (no repeats).

2								
	9		5	8	1			7
7	5		3	1				4
			4	6				
	1	6				9	7	
				1	5			
1			5	4		6		3
6	4	1	9		8			

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**UP & DOWN WORDS**  
By David L. Hoyt and Russell L. Hoyt 10/19

**1. GARBAGE**

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

6. \_\_\_\_\_

7. \_\_\_\_\_

**POINT**

Clues:  
1. Place for trash  
2. Luggage identifier  
3. Pro wrestling strategy  
4. Unselfish person  
5. Automated instrument  
6. It could be black or white  
7. Most important remark

**Wednesday's Answer**  
BOLDLY GO FISH FARM BILL CLINTON KELLY RIPA

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**SUDOKU**  
Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x2 box contains the numbers 1 through 6 (no repeats).

	1	6	2		
		5	6	3	
5			4		
		4			5
		5	2	1	
		1	5	2	

**DIFFICULTY RATING** ★★★★★  
**Wednesday's Answer**

7	2	9	4	6	3	5	8	1
4	3	5	1	8	7	9	6	2
1	6	8	9	5	2	7	3	4
3	4	2	6	9	1	8	5	7
5	8	7	2	3	4	6	1	9
6	9	1	5	7	8	2	4	3
2	5	4	8	1	9	3	7	6
9	7	6	3	4	5	1	2	8
8	1	3	7	2	6	4	9	5

**DIFFICULTY RATING** ★★★★★  
**Wednesday's Answer**

6	3	2	1	5	4
1	5	4	3	2	6
2	4	1	5	6	3
5	6	3	2	4	1
3	2	6	4	1	5
4	1	5	6	3	2

**TXTPERT**

Across  
2. 77463  
4. 3478  
6. 63783  
8. 2253  
9. 97478  
10. 3937  
11. 25663

Down  
1. 7246  
2. 7227  
3. 46332833  
5. 775336  
7. 327

**Today's theme**  
Human body

1 aa 2 abc 3 def  
4 ghi 5 jkl 6 mno  
7 pqr 8 tuv 9 wxyz

Use the phone keypad to decode the clues.  
For example: 2 could be A, B or C... and 5678 could be LOST

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**DON'T QUOTE ME**

Poet Maya Angelou talks about the dangers of cynicism.

Rearrange the words to complete the quote.  
CYNIC GONE KNOWING MEANS NOTHING QUITE TRAGIC

THERE IS NOTHING \_\_\_\_\_ SO \_\_\_\_\_ AS A YOUNG \_\_\_\_\_, BECAUSE IT \_\_\_\_\_ THE PERSON HAS \_\_\_\_\_ FROM \_\_\_\_\_ NOTHING TO BELIEVING \_\_\_\_\_

Wednesday's Answer: "Some people can stay longer in an hour than others can in a week." - William Dean Howells