

Top Shape

Joe Nichols films the video for his new single, "The Shape I'm In," with a heroic cast of characters.

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Joe endorses the Boot Campaign, which supports U.S. troops; (below) Joe talks with CMT Insider.



Joe's in character while filming the video; (below left) with veterans Marcus Luttrell (left) and Chad Fleming.



Joe Nichols would have every mom in the country aghast at his wardrobe on this chilly and damp December morning in Nashville. The temperature is hovering around the mid-40s but Joe's walking around in a black T-shirt and jeans with no jacket anywhere in sight. But it's all for the sake of art, as he's busy filming the video for his latest single, "The Shape I'm In," at an old motel on the city's east side. The single is from Joe's current album, *Old Things New*, and will also be included on an upcoming greatest-hits collection, slated for a Jan. 25 release.

"Nothing wrong with a little chill," he says with a grin, keeping the vibe

in a positive vein. "It keeps everybody on their toes. And everybody's in good spirits, so nobody seems to mind." Besides, one can hardly complain about a little dampness when you take note of some of the video's co-stars. They are U.S. soldiers who have been severely wounded in action overseas, and a few wear prosthetic limbs in evidence of their sacrifice. Marcus Luttrell, a former U.S. Navy SEAL and author of the book *Lone Survivor: The Eyewitness Account of Operation Redwing and the Lost Heroes of SEAL Team 10*, provides the opening introduction and the closing narration.

The soldiers' presence serves as a visual support to the song's tag line, *I'm doing alright for the shape I'm in*.

"Those are the real heroes," Joe says. "We were purposely looking for a certain kind of treatment that would be different for this song, and I think this is a very interesting idea. The song is really about a relationship. But everybody's gone through something in their lives that has been challenging, not just a

heartbreak. And they get through it, they get better," he explains. Joe believes that the military angle will effectively capture the song's message. "I think it will make the song even more powerful," he says.

Joe's own support for the military is well documented, as he's played shows for U.S. troops in Iraq with the Stars for Stripes organization. He has also aligned with the ongoing Boot Campaign, which raises funds for the USO and the Lone Survivor Foundation, which helps American wounded warriors and their families. "I am always honored to be a part of those [events] because you can always tell

it raises morale for the soldiers," Joe says. Marcus Luttrell, who established the Lone Survivor Foundation, speaks for many when he praises Joe's commitment to the military. "I think he's very genuine," Marcus says. "He is always saying or doing something to support the troops. I mean, we don't get bent out of shape if people don't support us," he adds, "but when these stars do, we appreciate it."

Marcus had his qualms about being on camera at first. "I was contacted by Joe's people to be a part of this," he recalls, "and I was like, 'Oh, I don't know.' I didn't know if people wanted to see

me on TV. But they sent me a copy of the song and I wore it out. And now that I see how they are going to do the video, I think this will be a great thing."

Joe, meanwhile, is content to serve as the centerpiece for the video, doing mainly performance scenes as the story unfolds around him. Acting roles, he notes, are not his strength, even though most fans would agree that he certainly sports leading-man looks. "No, I'm fine with just being the narrator, I guess you would say," Joe maintains. "I don't always like to act. The main thing is, people are really going to relate to this video. I just think it's a great idea." **CW**