

REVIEWS

BLAKE SHELTON

*Red River Blue*

[Warner Bros.]

Blake Shelton, known outside the mainstream country world as resident cornball on NBC's *The Voice*, swarmed to the top of the charts recently with the hillbilly valentine "Honey Bee." On *Red River Blue*, perhaps the most pop-sounding collection in his catalog, he works best when exposing the different shades of domestic partnerships. The harmonies of Nashville's leading women ("I'm Sorry" with Martina McBride, "Red River Blue" with wife Miranda Lambert) draw a sharper focus to his stately Oklahoma drawl on songs of love gone wrong. Smart redneck rock anthems like "Get Some" and "Good Ole Boys" display his goofy side effectively, but the album's quality dips on more trite tales of rural-route life ("Hey," "Ready to Roll"). Shelton's country soul truly shines when he colors outside his format's narrow grid. Exhibit A: the steel-laced "Sunny in Seattle," a clever homage to George Strait's classic "Ocean Front Property." —Blake Boldt

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