

Three Acts to Watch: DeLila Black, Alana Springsteen and Sydney Mack

BY [BOBBY MOORE](#) 6 HOURS



Sweetheart Pub, John Shearer and Creekhouse Entertainment

Every month, [Wide Open Country](#) will spotlight three country or roots music acts with upside that's yet to equal commercial airplay or inclusion on taste-making playlists.

In most cases, Acts to Watch isn't code for new. Most appeared on our radar after years of paying dues on stage and in the studio.

Read on to meet May 2021's three Acts to Watch.

DeLila Black

One sentence on [DeLila Black's](#) website sums up her creative process better than any laudatory blurb or review ever could: "I look for cultural overlaps and explore them."

Black's cultural excavations have dotted the globe, with stops in Haiti, the American South and her current home in London. Each environment informed what can best be described as three-chord musical amalgams chock-full of punk-informed, heart-on-sleeve truths.

"I've been developing my own alt-Americana sound, exploring what I call electro-mountain music, country-noire, punk-country and roots-rodeo-rock," she says in a press release.

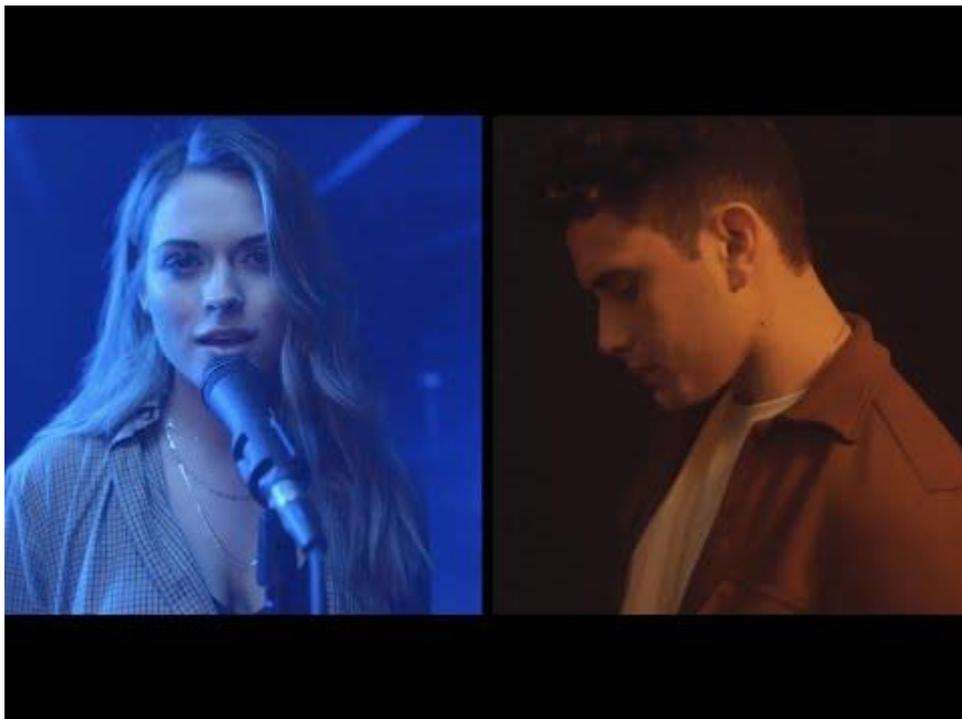


Black's mishmashes of influences position her as a storyteller and social critic, tackling everything from the mind-numbing aspects of popular culture ("Cain't Git None") to others' juvenile finger-pointing ("Accountability," a May 14 release featuring pedal steel veteran BJ Cole).

Black finished recording "Accountability" after receiving a [Color Me Country](#) grant. Country artist and Apple radio host [Rissi Palmer](#) started the program with help from [The Rainey Day Fund](#), which was [co-founded](#) by journalist, playwright, podcaster, radio show host and credit to all things folk and Americana, Kelly McCartney. Per Palmer's website, the grants support "the underrepresented voices of BIPOC artists in country music that, for too long, have lived outside the spotlight and off the airwaves."

Here's a [Spotify](#) playlist featuring every [Wide Open Country Acts to Watch](#) to date.

Alana Springsteen



As is the case with most younger talents featured on similar lists, over a decade of hard work preceded the hype surrounding 20-year-old Alana Springsteen ([no relation](#)).

The Virginia Beach native first picked up a guitar when she was 7 and wrote her first song as a 9 year old. By age 14, Springsteen followed the paths of [Taylor Swift](#), [Faith Hill](#) and other favorites to Nashville, where she quickly landed a publishing deal.

Here lately, the lyrical depth and widespread relatability of everything from a fresh spin on hometown recollections ("Different When You're 17") to a tense back-and-forth about ill-advised love (the Roman Alexander duet "Trying Not To") have boosted Springsteen's online reach and upped anticipation for her upcoming summery slow-burner, "California."

"Something I love most about music, especially country music, is the way it connects people who may have never found common ground otherwise," Springsteen told [People](#). "It helps us realize that we all experience the same situations and emotions in one form or another. I love hearing a hook that makes me think, 'Wow that's exactly what I've been feeling, I just didn't know how to express it.' That's why I always try to be very conversational in the way I write; I try to show instead of tell, to paint a picture and not be too on the nose with my lyrics."

[Read More: Miranda Lambert Expands Her 'Family' With Goats Named Taco and Tuesday](#)

Sydney Mack



Some of the more enviable dues paid by Sydney Mack so far found her opening for the likes of [George Jones](#) and earning a ticket to Hollywood during the 2015 season of [American Idol](#).

Yet her biggest break came from something other than the Possum's final years as a touring act or [Keith Urban](#)'s stint as an *Idol* judge. It's the social media app [TikTok](#), not the usual [Nashville](#) suspects of the past decade or so, that deserves the most credit for helping Mack stand out in a crowded sea of promising singer-songwriters.

Thanks to TikTok, two blunt songs about breakups, "Don't Call" and "Pretty Boy," brought around 2 million new sets of ears to Mack's music while offering solace to those with similar past experiences.

She's further grown her online following with a newer song about the karma that often catches up with exes: her co-write with Keesy Timmer, Cassidy Lynn and Tony McVaney, "Medicine."

"We didn't want to write it from a super spiteful place, but from more of a 'happiness is the best revenge' place," Mack says in a press release. "This song has multiple layers-- not only is it about wanting an ex to understand the hell they put them through, but it's about finding happiness after heartbreak as well, understanding what you deserve and not settling for less."

Mack's heartbreak trilogy and another new song that's way more hopeful about romance, "[Dark Horse](#)," have gained high praise from country music influencers.

"Boy, was I impressed with what I heard... she has as good a shot as any I've heard," says country radio mainstay Bob Kingsley (as quoted in Mack's press kit). "Sydney has a great future in front of her."