

Galleywinter

20 Questions: Larry Joe Taylor

Larry Joe Taylor is one of the grandest success stories in modern Texas music. Taylor has transitioned from a regular 9-to-5er to a full-time good timer. He writes, performs, produces, and promotes his own special brand of music. His annual Texas Music Festival is approaching its 20th incarnation this April, and serves as the most prominent destination music festival for this scene of music. LJT, as he is also known, donates his time and talents to numerous causes and events. His support and guidance has been instrumental in helping to launch the careers of Pat Green and Cross Canadian Ragweed. He took time out of his busy schedule to give us some insight into his life and career. If you've never been to LJT's festival, check out question 7 to see why I regard it so highly.

-Brad

1. You always seem to have so many things and events going on at one time. What's new and exciting in the world of Larry Joe Taylor?

We do have a lot going on, thank God! The one thing I'm most excited about right now is the fact that we're doing our 20th Texas music festival in April of 2008. That one is so much fun because I get to see and hangout with so many old friends. Not only songwriters I've known for years, but fans we've had for twenty years. It's really nice to have everybody together at one time. We do have a couple of new things we are working on for 2008, but it's a little early to talk about them now.

2. Your annual festival in Stephenville is the premiere destination festival in the state of Texas each year. When you began with the first one, did you ever imagine it growing to the level it has?

No! I did the first one cause I didn't have any gigs in April that year. We didn't even call it an annual festival until #7! (laughs) We had about 100 people at the first one and over 30,000 at #19. The goals are the same today as they were 20 years ago. To turn as many people on to this music as possible.

3. Name association:

-Rusty Wier-My buddy.

-Tommy Alverson-Capital HONKY. Capital TONK.

-Pat Green-Way to go Pat.

-Jerry Jeff Walker-Belize.

-Brian Burns-Genius.

-Cody Canada-Great.

-Mike McClure-See Brian Burns.

-Roger Creager-Gotta go fishin'.

-Jason Eady-Voice.

-Ed Burlinson-Country.

-Susan Gibson-Sings all night long...like a bird.

-Terri Hendrix-Lloyd Maines.

-Walt Wilkins Yes.

3. Your music has a distinct island/Jimmy Buffett feel. How did you develop that? Was the inspiration from being land-locked in Texas and the Midwest? Or, was it something that just organically leapt from your consciousness?

I started hanging out on the Texas Gulf coast a few years ago and wrote a couple of songs. Gary P. Nunn recorded them, so I thought I'd go down and do some more research. That's when the coast hooked me. I met so many cool people who work and make their living either on the coast or off shore that I could write about them from now on and not run out of ideas.

4. You were a relative late-comer to music as a profession. When you were stuck in Kansas and other outposts, was music something that you always had in the back of your mind as your true calling? Or, did you sort of stumble into it?

I had a band in high school and played some in college but there was not much of a scene for singer/songwriters then so I got a job and then another job and ...well you know, another job. It's always been the same then and now. Not a day goes by that I don't think about words and melodies.

5. Rumors abound each year about surprise big names that will take part in the festival. These have ranged from Jimmy Buffett to ZZ Top to Willie Nelson. This will be year number 20 for the festival. Any big surprises for the line-up? What would be your dream line-up?

I've heard those rumors too! It's always been really cool to have an artist show up that wasn't on the bill. It's happened a lot over the years and has probably fueled some rumors. Dream line-up? That changes every year. We've had so many wonderful Texas musicians and songwriters over the years that it would be impossible to come up with my dreams acts.

7. Your festival is infamous for it's late-night campfire jams. I've seen everyone from Pat Green, Cody Canada, Jason Boland and Randy Rogers to Rusty Wier, Steve Fromholz and Gary P. Nunn jamming at those things. They are my favorite part of the festival. Describe the coolest campfire jam you've been a part of or witnessed at the festival.

This festival was built on campfire jams and they are still my favorite things to do.

I have this picture somewhere of a campfire jam in 1997. It was Joe Pat Hennen's campfire and I had been pickin' at another campfire so I got there late. Maybe 4:30am. There was Joe Pat, Rusty Wier, Doug Sahm, who had just showed up at the festival cause he heard it was cool, Guy Clark and a very young Pat Green. There were only about 10 other people there. We played songs till the fire went out and the sun came up.

8. Several acts have gone from nobodies to headliners due to your support. What acts are you most proud of watching make that transition?

Probably #1 is Ragweed. I met Cody Canada at #4 in 1992. He was 17 and was playing with The Great Divide. He told me later that it was that festival that convinced him to pursue music. CCRW first played 9 years later at #13. It's really been fun to watch these guys over the last 8 years and I gotta say that if there are 4 nicer guys in the music business than these guys I haven't met em. Pat Green was the first one that we got to see really take off and when he started taking off he brought so many new fans to this festival. Reckless Kelly will be performing at their 10th festival this year and those guys have come so far. Their performance last year was one

of my all time top sets in 19 years. Randy Rogers blows me away. Not only as a performer but as a songwriter. What I like about Randy is that he has so much respect for great songwriters like Gary Nicholson, Richard Leigh, Radney Foster and Kevin Welch.

9. You've recently taken on the role of record producer in addition to all of your other ventures. Is it harder to be the artist or the producer? What is your favorite part about both roles?

My favorite part of producing is taking a song and trying to arrange it like you think the songwriter heard it when he wrote it. That's the hard part. That's what I learned from Lloyd Maines "The Producer". I don't know about being an artist. I'm a songwriter. I love playing my songs live to people that want to listen.

10. Your music and festivals really promote songwriting above show. What made you want to really focus on the songwriting aspect? And, who are some of your favorite songwriters?

Songwriting is a craft. I've spent all of my musical life trying to hone my craft.

It's what moves me, it's what I like to talk about and songwriters are who I like to be around. The more I know about songwriting the harder it is to write one. I need to be around good songwriters to write good songs. I'm a big fan of a well written song. Favorite Songwriters? Guy Clark, Jerry Jeff Walker, Kris Kristofferson, John Prine, Richard Leigh, Joe Ely, Keith Sykes, Bob Dylan and Bruce Springsteen.

11. We here at Galleywinter have been proud sponsors of your festival for several years now. What is your view of modern media and technology in the music business?

I think it's great. I wouldn't be doing this interview 20 years ago. Then you had to be on a major label or have a lot of money behind you to make a record. Now anyone with a laptop can make a record and anybody with a website can promote that record. Now it's not who has the most money. It's who writes the best songs, makes the best record and works the hardest to promote that record that does the best. That's the way it should be. Technology has made the music business a little more of a level playing field for everybody.

12. Stories behind the following songs:

-Third Coast

A story of a compilation of a couple of characters I've met.

-Let's Pretend

Davin James and I wrote that about one of my favorite places, Port Aransas, TX.

-American Dream

I got the idea to write that when I passed an American Dream motor home on I-10.

It was broke down and I thought those people just woke up from their American Dream.

-I Gotta Get Out

I was walking through the house one day and Dr. Phil was on TV. I heard him say "your biggest problem is you can't get outta your own way"

-Times Square

My wife's sister was killed in a car wreck a few years ago. I always wanted to tell her how much I liked her but finally I was too late. That's when I came up with the ultimate day-late line. "I'm always in Times Square just

in time for New Year's Day... “

-My Home

I have a lot of friends that live on boats. I wanted to write something for them.

-Island Time

Gary P. Nunn and I wrote that one. There's just a feeling you get, or at least I get,

when you're on vacation and everything moves a little slower and a little easier.

I wanted to recreate that vacation feeling in a song.

-Lazy Days

I think I had spent a day or two around some really hyper and intense people and I realized that there are a lot of people that just don't know how to relax.

-Second Wind

I wrote this song about a friend, Jan Smith. She was in and out of the hospital for several years. Even though she was sick she was always in a good mood. Like she had just caught her second wind. I played the song at her funeral and while I was playing it I realized the song just took on another meaning. Jan had in fact finally caught her second wind. I wrote it in the months after 9/11 and there is a reference to our country trying to catch it's second wind in the aftermath of the attacks on our country.

-Headed South

I wrote this one with my friend Steven Fromholz. It was during a time when both of us were hanging out on the coast a lot. Steven was staying on a boat in Port A quite a bit. I was on the phone with him one day and he ask me what I was doing. I said I'm headed South again, he said “sounds like a song, I'll have a couple of verses written by the time you get here”

-Kamikaze Cowgirl

When I was in college, I went to a dance one time and saw the most beautiful girl I'd ever seen. When I ask her to dance she said “ Sure I'd love to dance, but not with you”. So, I made up a song about her.

13. Who do you feel is underappreciated as a singer/songwriter? Who do you feel is overrated?

Was Hank Williams underappreciated when he was alive? Is he overrated now? Sorry, I'm just not qualified to answer those questions.

14. What is the most daunting challenge when putting together such a large music festival?

That question should be directed to my son Zack. He is the guy that puts it all together, and he does a great job with it all.

15. You were a finalist in the “New Folk” award at the prestigious Kerrville Folk Festival in 1988. So many great names have come through that festival and gone on to be big stars. Talk a little bit about what an intimidating adventure entering that contest had to be. And, did doing well in that contest validate, for you personally, your decision to pursue music full-time?

Gary P Nunn encouraged me to enter the New Folk and it was a really fun experience. I would not point to the contest as a turning point in my musical career but, I would say that if I hadn't entered that year I would not

have hung out at the Kerrville Folk Festival for 10 or 12 days. That's when I first met Joe Pat Hennen. It's also when I got to know Guy Clark. That's when I learned how much fun campfire pickin' can be and why it is so important for songwriters to spend time with other songwriters.

16. Favorite touring memory of the following towns and clubs:

-Puffabelly's

-Third Coast Theater

-Executive Surf Club

-Texas Theater

-Love & War in Texas-Grapevine

-Gruene Hall

-College Station

-Dallas

-Ft. Worth

-Houston

-Austin

You know, there's never been a time when the bus pulled up in front of my house that I wasn't ready to get on it, and there's never been a time when it pulled up in front of the house that I wasn't ready to get off either. My favorite memory about all those places is , I got to play and sing some songs I made up for some people that wanted to hear 'em. For me, it just don't get no better than that!

17. Your son Zack, your wife Sherry and other family members are very involved with your career. Explain what it's like working with those close to you.

It's great. Zack started playing drums in my band when he was 9 years old and he has gotten to play with a lot of great songwriters along the way. He probably knows more about the history and future of Texas music than anybody I know. He and his wife Leigh Ann have an unbelievable work ethic. Sherry and I started working together because we didn't have enough money to hire anybody else. I wouldn't have it any other way now.

18. Rapid fire:

-Woodstock or Altamont? Woodstock.

-Hippies or Cowboys? Cowboys.

-Lakes or Oceans? Oceans

19. As a barometer of where people's musical taste and style fit in...I like to ask everyone...what's your favorite George Strait song?

"I Just Want To Dance With You"

20. How would you compare the music you're making with what the mainstream is cranking out?

I don't listen to mainstream!