

Festival History

Venues for singer/songwriters were almost non-existent 20 years ago. The advent of the Larry Joe Taylor Texas Music Festival and Chili Cook-off was an effort to provide a music friendly environment in which both the artists and fans felt welcome and on common ground. The early years found most patrons to be die hard veteran music fans from the 70's "outlaw" era or avid "chili cooks" who also happened to like original music. Steadily the festival grew and an increasing number of the early outlaw music fans began to attend, often with their young children in tow. To accommodate growing numbers, the site of this festival has moved from it's original location in Mingus, Texas to Thurber, Possum Kingdom, Glen Rose, Meridian, and now to a permanent home at Melody Mountain Ranch, a beautiful and spacious 380 acre spread located 5 miles north of Stephenville, Texas. Around year number 10, the children who had accompanied their parents in the early years were beginning to come of age. These young adults began bringing their friends and the crowd rapidly became a diverse mix of all ages and backgrounds. During festival number 11 or 12 we felt like everything was coming together for this genre of music. Acts like Pat Green were bringing in the college crowd and guys like Rusty Wier, Ray Wylie Hubbard and Steven Fromholz were helping bring the Progressive Country crowd out of hibernation. The lesser-known singer/songwriters on the bill had the opportunity to perform in front of these large and diverse crowds and develop their own fans. It was almost like the "summer of love". The older fans were cooking barbeque and chili for the young ones who had arrived with nothing but a three-day-supply of beer, and the young fans were digging the same music and breathing new life into a twelve-year old festival. The festival ultimately became a rallying point for the "new" original country music scene and reached a level of national recognition several years ago when *Performing Songwriter Magazine* ranked it as one of the Top Four Music Festivals in the state of Texas. The event increasingly gained a reputation for being the springboard for many talented but unknown singer/songwriters and bands as well as staging well known artists from the past and present. "Melody Mountain" seems a fitting final resting place for an event that has always continued traditions year after year of camping out, picking, singing and telling stories around a campfire and showcasing only the best original music in the nation.