

Galleywinter

19th Annual LJT Texas Music Fest Wrap Up

LJT's Texas Music Festival is the premiere festival event in our scene. I've been saying it for years and apparently more and more are listening to me and all the other purveyors of LJT goodness. I haven't heard exact attendance numbers but I think the tremendous weather and line-up brought out more folks than I've ever seen at LJT's. This year brings me to a decade of attendance and I enjoyed this installment more than any of the previous nine. I'm not sure exactly why that was either. It just seemed that all things considered I was in a Texas Music wonderland for three days. Perfect weather. A line-up that had no peer at a festival this year. My best friends all in one place. Old friends I hadn't seen in too long. New bands. Old favorites. No cell phone or computer for 4 days.

I want to thank Larry Joe, Sherry, and Zack Taylor, along with their entire staff for being such great hosts. They went out of their way to accommodate me and several other media outlets. It's a pleasure to cover the festival, sponsor the festival and enjoy the festival. I'm already looking forward to next year! After a round up of supplies and planning that began as we pulled out last year, below are the memories, ramblings and stories that stick out the most from the past weekend. It's a long read, so I hope nobody tries to read this in the bathroom. Without further ado...

Ed. Note: (more photos will be added as they trickle in)

THURSDAY



We continued our tradition of waking up at the crack of dawn and heading out to Stephenville. In the days leading up to the festival, I tried to eat as healthy as possible and increase my workout regimen so that several days of consumption and corruption wouldn't take too much of a toll. So, we had our last healthy, square meal of the week on Thursday morning on our way out of town. We hit up a breakfast buffet and it was just what the doctor ordered for my desired plan of being set up and imbibing by no later than 10AM. A soundtrack of **Ray LaMontagne, Lucero, Echo's Orbit Room, Ryan Adams, Reckless Kelly, Keith Gattis** and **Hayes Carll** primed our ears as we traveled to the gates of **The Texas Music Mecca: Melody Mountain Ranch**.

We arrived early enough that we didn't have to wait in line. As veterans of this festival we've learned when to hit the

road to avoid the long lines both coming and going. We've been in the same camping spots since the festival moved from Meridian to Stephenville. I love our section. It's a mix of **old hippies, college kids, middle aged folks, and just about everything in between**. Our next door neighbors are awesome cooks who provide us with some of the tastiest grub to ever come from a pit.



We set up another great compound this year full of tents, canopies, tiki torches, campfires, campers, trucks, SUV's, coolers and all your other necessities. The only thing **we were missing was our Central Freight "Happy Trails" RV**. It will be back next year though. Many folks came by looking to take pictures with it because it had become such a landmark of the festival. Our location is far enough away from the main stage to truly feel like you're camping out, yet close enough to have a short walk when you're ready to get into music mode.

The first show I hit this year was **Bonnie Bishop**. She, Pauline Reese and Susan Gibson have been flying the female flag at festivals across the region for years, and I don't know that I've ever heard Bonnie sound better. She seemed very comfortable with where she's at and where she's going. Her set was fairly well crowded for the time slot she had, and I enjoyed it immensely.



I took a break around this time to venture backstage and catch up with so many of my old friends that I don't get to

see often or at all anymore because their careers carry them all over the country. A certain very successful singer/songwriter knows he cheated **Justin Dickey** at badminton, he just won't admit it. I ran into **Kris Farrow** who now plays for Micky and the Motorcars after stints with Josh Grider and the aforementioned Bonnie Bishop. And like Bonnie, Kris seems to be feeling more comfortable with where he is with MMC. This was my first time to see him play with those guys and it was very refreshing. **Geoff Hill from RRB** told me he thought Kris added a really cool element to the MMC sound and I agree. It's as if his introduction to the band has given a charge to their chemistry and is allowing everyone to sound better.

A new addition to the festival this year was the **Tarleton Stage**. In years past, Tarleton sponsored the acoustic tent. This year, there was an actual acoustic stage built off the back of the metal building behind the vendors (sponsored by Palo Duro Records). The Tarleton Stage is now an elevated side stage next to the jumbotron on main stage (sponsored by Jack Daniel's) right. This new stage allowed for a greater number of bands to play for large crowds, quick changeovers between sets and exemplified LJT's continued attempts to expose new bands to new fans. On Thursday, I caught **Bart Crow** and **Kyle Bennett** on the Tarleton Stage.



After all the preliminary bands, it was time for one of the greatest hat tricks I've ever witnessed in a musical sense. Starting around sunset on this breezy spring night in the Texas Hill Country, back to back to back onstage were: **Jason Boland & The Stragglers**, **Stoney LaRue**, and **The Randy Rogers Band**. The past few years, **Ragweed** has been closing out Thursday nights, however due to scheduling conflicts they were unable to attend this year. The three bands that played in their stead more than capably filled their shoes. Boland was up first and he continues to impress me since he's cleaned up. His shows have been so much better over the past year. Like last year, I watched his entire set from the stage; partly from directly **behind Brad's drum kit** and partly from side stage left. If there is any doubt who the best working country band on the road is today, there shouldn't be after someone catches a JBS show. I would tell you which songs were highlights of the set, but there wasn't a lowlight except for the fact their set wasn't long enough (they never are at festival set-ups even though LJT's squeeze as much in as possible and more than any other fest).



Stoney hopped onstage next and as I said recently, what can be said about Stoney that hasn't been said already. He's developed into quite the entertainer and he's always been a first string picker and singer. The Arsenals, his band of top rate musicians get tighter and better each time I hear them. **Rodney Pyeatt** is the smoothest lead player in the scene right now. He makes it look too easy, which is a good thing. I learned that "One Chord Song" is better when sung along with by over 20,000 of your closest friends in a field. **Stoney's Willie impersonation** is still as great as it was in his acoustic days with his spot on "Blue Eyes Cryin' In the Rain" and the eruption that ripped up when they tore into the opening notes of "Oklahoma Breakdown" was goose bump worthy.

Next up were my boys, the Randy Rogers Band. A while back I detailed in their forum how we'd lobbied for years to get them on the bill at this festival. We finally got them on the bill in 2004. They got a bad afternoon slot and played to about 100 people. Each year since then their rise up the ladder of LJT's mirrored the rise they've had in all other aspects of their career. In hanging out with the guys before the show, they could feel the energy from the crowd and vibe already and you could sense that we were in for a great show. Randy spent the better part of the afternoon **riding around the campgrounds with Larry Joe Taylor on a John Deere Gator** and hanging out with the fans. By the time he came back and put his game face on, there was no doubt the sense of a good show was going to be confirmed from the first sting of JET hitting the PA system. **I've probably seen the band over 300 times and this was in the top three sets I've ever seen them do.** Ever. I watched this show from over Les's shoulder and I couldn't believe the crowd. It seemed to stretch for miles. If it's possible to turn a full country-rock band show in front of a festival crowd of thousands into a listening room audience, the RRB did so. Every single person was tuned in and turned onto what was going on. The guys started with "Still Here" as they've been doing lately and played a variation on the set list they've been doing post Dierks tour. Yet, even though the songs were the same, the emotion was not. It was awe inspiring. As I've posted, **it looked like Pat Green's "Carry On" video for two and a half hours straight.** Much like Boland, the band's set didn't feature anything that didn't work so I'll save highlights. Toby was filming from the stage and captured most of the coolest stuff for posterity sake, so hopefully we can find some of that online soon.



LJTs has become **infamous for the after-show campfire guitar pulls** that pop up all over the landscape after the main show is over. Main stage headliners play around a campfire at random campsites next to random amateur songwriters. These moments are always magic and happened this year again and again. Yet, another cool invention for year 19 was the addition of an official campfire concert stage sponsored by **Mandatory FM**. The folks at Mandatory FM were generous, gregarious and glad to help the music in any manner possible. **The Hollingers** are good people dedicated to bringing our favorite music to more people and should be applauded. I'd like to thank them for the courtesy they extended to me and the artists that they allowed at their stage. Thursday night at the Mandatory FM Stage was one of the times that cause legends to start at LJTs. The stage found Randy and Stoney coming off their Jack Daniel's stage triumphs to participate in one of the coolest song swaps I've ever seen. It was loose, off the cuff, fun and **lasted until around 4AM**. This stage is not amplified. They are playing right in front of an actual campfire. Everyone piles in with chairs and coolers. Everyone is quiet and respectful of the magic of the moment. Music as it's meant to be my friends. If you weren't there, you'll never know what you missed out on.

FRIDAY

Sleep is a precious commodity at LJTs. If you try to catch as much music as possible and fellowship with your friends as much as possible, you're probably not going to get much of it. And I didn't. I never went to bed earlier than 5AM or woke up later than 8AM the entire time. Between the official events, spur of the moment campsite jams, hanging out with your buddies and relaxing there's not much time for sleep.



Friday is usually the best day of the festival because you know you've still got another day to go and you try to cram as much fun into Friday as you can. The first couple sets I caught were at the Palo Duro stage, where I caught **Walt Wilkins** and **Jed & Kelley**. If you're reading this, then you probably already know how good Walt is. However, you may not know Jed & Kelley. They are a hip married couple from Memphis and have a great feel for southern roots music. If you get a chance, catch them on one of their Texas runs. Around this time, my good friend **Drew Kennedy** arrived. He wasn't scheduled to play until midnight on the Mandatory FM stage. This posed quite the challenge for Mr. Kennedy, as he had to stay in job mode and not let himself slip too much into the music fan at a music festival mode. He and I ventured all over the festival, hanging out with people and other friends not seen quite often enough. Early sets by **Ryan Turner** and **Rich O'Toole** on the Tarleton Stage were impressive. The sound on the Tarleton Stage was not the best at times due to it's tricky location and lack of sound checks for the bands playing. However, Turner, the consummate pro made it work. He sang a new song that he's just introduced to the set list that I didn't catch the name of because it's so new. I think it may be the coolest thing he's written and you should look forward to it at the next Turner show you hit up.



After Turner was done with his set, he, Drew and I headed over to **Chuck Taylor's** set-up so that they could do interviews and performances on 95.9 The Ranch. Chuck was set up with just a laptop, a mic and a dial up connection but it worked well. From there we wandered back to the stage area to catch **No Justice**. This was my first time to see the NJ guys live in a long time and they seemed to enjoy the large crowd enjoying them. When NJ was done we rounded the corner of the parking lot and ran into the Jason Eady band and the Stephen Pointer band. **Drew, Turner, Eady and I had a long, great conversation about the scene** and where we hope it goes from here. Jason was there a day early just to hang out and take part in the legendary campfire song swap scene. It is dedication like that which makes him one of the rising stars of our scene. Like Drew and Grider, he's got an outsider's view coming from Mississippi to our scene and he's in it for the right reasons. He's in it because he loves music and like so many of us he's concerned about where we are headed.



I missed **Mike McClure** who I was looking forward to seeing play and **Roger Creager** although I could hear bits and pieces of their sets from where I was hanging out. But, I made it in time to catch the guys who had the best set of the fest last year: **Reckless Kelly**. There's a reason why these guys get so much respect nationally and people fly from Vegas to Texas to watch them play one show and all that other good **Grateful Dead** type stuff their fans have been doing the past couple years. They're hands-down one of the best working bands in the United States today. Their songwriting and performing are close to peerless. New stuff, old stuff, fun stuff and serious stuff. They played it all and it was all as good as you've come to expect from RK. Like most other bands that play LJs, the energy of the crowd pushed Reckless to have an extraordinary performance.

By the time they wrapped up, it was over to the Mandatory FM stage for another late night of literally unplugged greatness. Drew was paired with **Brit Lloyd** for the first set and I think they both made many new fans. You already know how I feel about Drew's new music, so I'll talk about Brit. Brit is a talented singer/songwriter/guitarist out of the Corpus area. I'd compare his style to **Phil Pritchett**. This was my first time to see him solo acoustic and he proved to be as astute in this setting as he is rocking out in front of his Marshall stacks. Other people that played were **Matt Martindale, Ryan Turner, Jed from Jed & Kelley, Mike Mancy, Modern Day Drifters, Ed Burleson and some guys named Braun among others**. Again, quiet crowd, enjoying each other's company, their cold beverages and the music until near sunrise.

SATURDAY

Saturday began with a quick trip to the ice truck and a run to the **green Patty Melt vendor stand** for the best grilled chicken sandwich I've ever eaten. I don't know what they put on that thing, but that's my recommendation to everyone for next year, stop by and try it. The music started early today with the Palo Duro stage kicking off at 11AM and the **Mike Mancy Band** cranking out a full band set from Crazy Ray's **So Thread** sponsored electric campground. The Mancy boys had quite a good crowd and quite a loud, rockin' set going on when they had to turn it down due to their drowning out of the acoustic stage. I was bummed out because a great Mancy set at 11AM after a LONG night was like drinking Red Bull and coffee together. The energy and adrenaline they were putting out was waking everyone up and getting us ready to close out the festival in style.



Some neighbors of ours had their beer stolen overnight and when you're at a BYOB festival in a dry county this is a true emergency. Thankfully, **the true spirit of LJT**s came shining through as everyone in our area pitched in to replenish their loss from our stashes. Granted, we didn't give them our best beer, but when you're out of beer **Natty Light** probably tastes damn good. After Mancy, I mostly hung around our compound until the one show I never miss every year: **Rusty Wier**. Rusty is the Sultan of Texas Music and STILL the best entertainer working stages in Texas today and his sets at LJT's are usually one of the highlights of my festival experience. This year was no different.

This brings me to the set of the festival this year.

Los Lonely Boys.

Wow.

That's all I could say for hours after they finished. The Garza brothers from San Angelo laid the smack down on everyone. I'd never seen them live before and they blew my mind. Everyone I talked to kept saying the same thing. We all had this bewildered look on our face and could only say "Wow." Their harmony, stage presence and general musicianship were amazing. They came out grinding on some **Jimi Hendrix** and then tore through some of the best Texas blues to hit a stage since SRV left us. Speaking of **SRV** at one point, Jo Jo the bass player goes "This IS THE Texas Music Festival, isn't it?" They then proceeded to tear into a blistering cover of "Pride and Joy". Henry, the lead guitar player, was flawlessly amazing on his lead playing. Rounding out the trio was drummer, Ringo. For a three-piece band they crank out the jams like nobody's business. My favorite tune was their rockin' bluesy cover of **Stevie Wonder's** "Superstitious". This is real music is folks. Their experience on big stages and the barrooms of Texas combined to make them the perfect guests at the LJT's festival this year. I can't wait for the next time I see them. Absolutely blown away, can't put it into words how awesome they were. The first performance in years that **made me turn into a 14 yr old girl watching N Sync in 1999**.



After we finished recovering from the LLB, **Jason Eady** hit up the Tarleton Stage and got extra time as it took the crews longer to get the Jack Daniel's Stage ready. His set showcased his delta tinged bluegrass laced take on Americana. His band made the most of their short set and probably turned in the best performance from the Tarleton Stage all weekend despite the wind gusting so hard at points during their set that he later jokingly told me he was worried about falling off it.



Next up on the Jack Daniel's Stage was the hottest thing over the past year in our scene aside from Mr. LaRue, **Brandon Rhyder**. I've never seen Brandon perform in front of such a large crowd so I didn't really know what to expect. I talked to him briefly before he went on and he was very laid back and full of kind words about our work with Galleywinter. It had been quite a long time since I'd seen Brandon, a couple of months to be exact. The wind was really whipping by now and the sun was setting as a cool chill swept over the hills of Melody Mountain Ranch. Brandon's set was good, you could see the past year of finally headlining and cutting a live record coming out of him and his band during their show. He played all the favorites, and had one of the weekend's loudest crowd sing-alongs with "Man of Conviction".

Locked in the pocket with moments of sloppy and always loud was the legendary **Ray Wylie Hubbard**. RWH was joined by **Seth James** on lead guitar and they kicked things off with an especially rocking and greasy version of "Snake Farm", which they ended up playing again later in the set because it was so kick-ass. One youngster working security said "He's already played this song." I told him "RWH can do whatever the hell he wants." I took in this set from side stage and was surrounded by the largest contingent of other musicians I'd seen take in a show. Nobody is more respected in our scene than RWH and his set was proof why. **He epitomizes LJTs**. A mix of old and young, fans and artists alike, that keep building on what was started so long ago.

I left the main stage area at this point to hang out at some campfire jams. I hit one up in Section G and **I ended up playing my guitar for about four hours**. I played every song I knew and some I didn't. I hit up everything from **Billy Joe Shaver** to **Lil' Troy** and everything in between. I learned "Rockin' In the Free World" on the spot and "E minor minor minor D C" became a rallying cry for the rest of the night. After I was joined by **a Randy Rogers look alike** that promptly broke my strings, I didn't feel like changing them, and I ventured off to find some of the professionals doing their thing. I wandered up to the Mandatory FM stage and checked it out for a while. On this night they weren't having an official set, just a bunch of guys from all walks of life playing what they wanted. I caught Jason Eady at another campsite and he was playing with so many people I couldn't catch who all were there (thanks to Craig for the picture that cleared things up a bit).

About 3AM I headed back to my home base and found my crew still blazing a trail of glory. A huge **bonfire** was going on, **fireworks** were going off in our area, someone had a **Richard Nixon** mask on with **ostrich costume pants** all while Reckless Kelly blared from a radio. This would only not seem odd at LJTs.



I cannot stress how amazing this year was. The weather was perfect. The line-up was awesome. The times I had were even better and I'm ready for the 20th Annual as soon as I can get some sleep!