

LARRY JOE TAYLOR

Texas Music

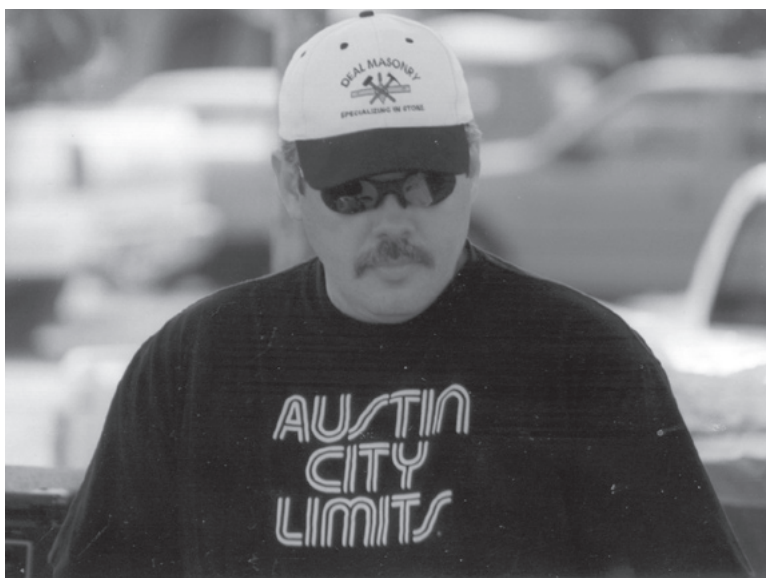


“OK, yeah, that’s good, but let’s try it one more time. Paul, loosen up the beat a little, and Rambo I’d like to hear a little more rockin’ guitar. Gary P, I like the pattern you’re playing, and Fishback just lock it in with Paul.”

The year was 1993, and I was in Willie’s studio at The Pedernales Country Club recording my first CD for Campfire Records. The guy barking the orders that day was Lloyd Maines. Lloyd had been a well-respected steel guitar player for many years. He lived in Lubbock, Texas, with his wife and two daughters (one of whom is now the lead singer of the Dixie Chicks, Natalie Maines) and worked at Caldwell Recording Studio for most of his adult life. He had been producing some records there for a while with limited success. Earlier that year he had gone to Austin and produced a reunion CD for The Lost Gonzo Band. The Lost Gonzos were Jerry Jeff Walker’s band in the 70s and had done several albums on their own throughout the 70s. The band included Bob Livingston, Gary P. Nunn, and John Inmon. When I heard that reunion CD (*Rendezvous*) I was blown away. Not only did I love the songs (not just because I wrote three

of them), but also the production was so different from anything I'd ever heard. When Campfire records asked me to do a CD on their label, I said I'd do it if we could have Lloyd Maines produce it. They said, "Who is Lloyd Maines?" The result of that recording session was *Coastal & Western*, and it still remains one of my best selling CDs.

Lloyd caught fire as a producer about that time. In the next five years or so, he produced CDs for Ray Wylie Hubbard, Robert Earl Keen, Chris Wall, Pat Green, The Great Divide, Charlie Robison, and so many more even Lloyd couldn't name them all. He was still living in Lubbock but did most of his producing at an Austin studio. Fred Remmert (Cedar Creek Studio) and Lloyd had worked together on the *Lost Gonzo* CD and really hit it off. Ninety percent of Lloyd's projects were being recorded at Cedar Creek Studio, and they were using many of the same musicians for these sessions. Radio stations in Texas were starting to play some of this music, and they were getting good feedback from their listeners. In the mid 90's on a trip from Port Aransas back home to Stephenville, I was listening to a radio station in Fredericksburg (KFAN). It was one of the first to play my music, and the same goes for a lot of Texas artists. I remember hearing six songs in a row all by different artists but all produced by Lloyd Maines. Now these six songs didn't sound the same at all, but there was definitely a common thread ... something you can't put your finger on; you can't define it or describe it. In modern music circles, it is simply referred to as a "SOUND." You can't describe the "Motown Sound," but you know it when you hear it. In any genre of music, there has to be some common thread that runs through it. This was the first time I even thought of what we do as a genre. Sam Phillips and Sun Records shaped the "Memphis Sound"; Buck Owens helped



Lloyd Maines

create the “Bakersfield Sound”; Bill Monroe is the father of “Bluegrass,” and I believe that Lloyd Maines was instrumental in creating the “Texas Sound,” the independent songwriter sound. Well ok, I’ll say it: “Texas Music.”

I don’t remember the first time I heard the expression “Texas Music.” I don’t think anybody knows for sure where it came from. It was probably used first by some songwriter performing in some corner of a smoky bar somewhere in Texas. Now this guy *probably* had grown tired of the mediocre-watered-down-pseudo-country-pop songs that were coming out of Nashville. He was *probably* playing a song he had just written to an audience of about ten people who were *probably* there celebrating because Edith’s divorce was final today. Now it would have *probably* been after about five or six of these home-grown songs that one of the revelers would have approached the songwriter and said “Play something we’ve heard before, damn it. Play ‘Achy Breaky Heart.’ What you’re doing ain’t country. What do you call that stuff anyway?” The songwriter would *probably* have leaned away from the mic to the left and a little forward, and with a twinkle in his eye and an omnipotent smile he *probably* said, “Well sir ... I call that stuff Texas Music,” and the patrons (being from Texas) all raised their Lone Star beers and Shiner Bocks and said, “Here’s to Texas Music.” Then at the end of the night the bar owner *probably* said to the songwriter, “We sold more beer tonight than we ever have. Can you come back next Friday night and play again? What do you call that music anyway?” So *probably* the next Friday night in the gravel parking lot of that smoky bar at the end of a long orange extension cord was a lighted sign with a flashing, yellow arrow. And on this sign were the words: “LIVE TEXAS MUSIC EVERY FRIDAY NIGHT.” Who knows, though, if the songwriter in the corner would have named it something else, would it have been as popular? If Edith had been a better wife, would there have been anyone there to ask what kind of music it was?

The point is Texas Music was not contrived by some corporation or put together by lawyers somewhere. Not one producer or one singer/songwriter started Texas Music ... it just happened. Two schools of thought explain the origin of this music genre: (1) the “Big Bang Theory” (a theory many new Texas Music fans believe that states that God created Pat Green, and on the sixth day He wanted music, so Pat played, and BOOM it was “Texas Music”) or (2) the “Theory of Evolution.”

Pat Green will be the first to tell you that he did not start Texas Music. When I first met Pat, he was still in school at Texas Tech. He was writing songs and playing a little. Lloyd Maines produced his first CD, and Pat graduated college. I remember playing in Dallas one night, and Pat showed up and took a seat on the front row. Several artists were on the bill that night, and when I finished my show, I sat down and visited with Pat. I asked him if he had his guitar with him, and he said he did. We went to an empty backroom where they had food and drinks set out for the artists. Pat played several of his new songs

for me there, and I remember asking him what he wanted to do in the business. He looked me in the eye and said, "Larry Joe, I don't want to go to Nashville. I want to make music here, and I'm going to be bigger than Jerry Jeff Walker." That was in 1995, and Pat didn't have a band or even very many gigs. I thought it was a bold statement, but when he said it, and the way he said it, I believed him. Pat continues to do well in this business and has done so much to promote Texas Music all across the country.

Now to the real theory on how Texas music started: "The Theory of Evolution."

I believe you can trace our roots all the way back to Bob Wills and Hank Williams and later on guys like Roger Miller, Tom T. Hall, and even Kris Kristofferson. Even though most of these guys are not from Texas, I believe they all helped shape the sound. They were all very independent and revolutionary. They were all certainly not made from the same mold as other "Nashville Stars." As far as I'm concerned, something was just so real about these guys in their writing and performing. They were some of the first to sing and write conversationally, using phrases that everyday people use, and that really appealed to me.

I guess, though, people who like Texas Music probably have one or two artists that they can point to and say, "That's who got me into this music." In the early 70s, I had grown tired of the country music that was on the radio and had started listening to stuff like The Doors, The Lovin' Spoonful, Bob Dylan, and Van Morrison. I was in college then, and one day I was at a friend's house listening to music, and he said, "Hey, have you ever heard of Willie Nelson?" I said yes and that I didn't care for him or the whole country music thing. He then said, "Haven't you heard, man? Willie's moved back to Texas, and he ain't playing that Nashville crap anymore?" He then pulled a new vinyl record out of its sleeve and put it on the turntable. It was *Shotgun Willie*, and I was so impressed with it that I went right to the music store and bought an eight-track tape of *Shotgun Willie*.

In the fall of 1973, it happened again. I was in school at Tarleton State University in Stephenville, Texas, and I had gone home to Brownwood for the weekend. When I did go home, I would try to meet up with high school buddies on Saturday night. At that time, you didn't have to call anybody or set it up to meet somewhere. You just went to the bowling alley, and everybody would show up sooner or later. Most of the best times were spent out behind the bowling alley. That's where you could usually see a fight or two, or find out whose girl friend was cheating, or whose fake ID worked that night, and listen to music. What I heard coming out of the speakers of Billy Stockman's 1963 Ford Galaxie 500 that night would change my life forever: "Hi Buckaroos, Scamp Walker time again. Gonna try to slide one by ya once more." Those're the first lines to "Getting By," and it was the first time I ever heard Jerry Jeff Walker's *Viva*

Terlingua album that he recorded in Luckenbach, Texas. Sitting in the passenger seat, I listened to the whole thing that night, and then bought the eight-track tape from Billy right then and there.

Jerry Jeff Walker was born in Oneonta, New York, and had lived in New York City; Key West, and New Orleans, before moving to Austin in 1971. He was twenty-nine years old, and after being arrested for public intoxication in the French Quarter, he had already met a “street dancer” by the name of “Bojangles” in the New Orleans drunk tank. He had seen some success with the song “Mr. Bojangles.” The *Viva Terlingua* album featured not only songs written by Jerry Jeff, but also by other young songwriters who would have a huge impact on this new music movement. Guy Clark’s “Desperados Waiting for a Train,” Michael Martin Murphy’s “Backsliders Wine,” and Gary P. Nunn’s “London Homesick Blues” (sung by Gary P. not Jerry Jeff on the album) would all become classics, but one song on the album would do so much more. When Ray Wylie Hubbard wrote “Up Against the Wall Redneck Mother” while living and performing in Red River, New Mexico, he really had no idea what he had done. When Jerry Jeff recorded it on this album, it would become the “anthem”... but the anthem for what? You had guys like Willie, Jerry Jeff, and Waylon who were making music that didn’t sound like Nashville, and they were putting on live shows that were rowdy and fun. You had a supporting cast of talented singer/songwriters like Guy Clark, Ray Wylie Hubbard, Rusty Wier, Steven Fromholz, and B.W. Stevenson who were starting to make a name for themselves. You had Austin, Texas, a city that claimed all of these guys and supported live music. You had The Kerrville Folk Festival, a new festival that would showcase not only these performers, but also would allow lesser known singer/songwriters to perform in front of large crowds and develop their own fans. And you had an anthem. The only thing missing was a name for the new music genre. Now wouldn’t it be nice if someone would have right then said, “I know, we’ll call it Texas Music”? Didn’t happen! It would have two different names then. Some called it “Progressive Country”; others called it “Outlaw Music.”

My brother Norice was living in Austin then and had probably bought every album of every performer in Austin at that time. I would plan trips to Austin as often as I could to hear live music. It was my brother who turned me on to guys like Guy Clark, Steven Fromholz, and B.W. Stevenson just to name a few. The hotbed for Progressive Country in Austin was the Armadillo World Headquarters. I was only there one time before they tore down what should have been an historic landmark for the Progressive Country/Outlaw era, but I remember seeing Steven Fromholz and B.W. Stevenson at the Armadillo World Headquarters. Rod Kennedy had started the Kerrville Folk Festival, and my first experience there was in 1973, the second year of this now thirty-two-year-old festival. I remember seeing Bill & Bonnie Hearne, Steven Fromholz, Michael Martin Murphey, Guy Clark and Jerry Jeff Walker. I remember that night so well

because although I was already hooked on the music, these guys set the hook a little deeper.

It seemed like just when, as one of my heroes and now friend Steven Fromholz used to call it, the “Progressive Country Music Scare” of the 70s was really exploding, I was leaving Texas to work for Continental Grain Company in Hutchinson, Kansas. That was in 1975, and I tried to keep up with the music through my brother because it was very hard to get any of the music there, and none of these guys ever played in Kansas. I now get emails from misplaced Texans looking for my music and wanting to know if we’ll ever come to Vermont, Kansas, or wherever. I can certainly relate to these folks.

My wife Sherry and I moved back to Texas in late 1979 along with our one-year-old son, Zack. Something had happened while we were gone. There wasn’t near as much music going on, and radio wasn’t playing these guys like before. Very few new albums were coming out of Austin then, and by 1981 or 1982 Progressive Country was pretty well gone. I really don’t know why, but I’m sure there are lots of reasons. I think the movie *Urban Cowboy* had something to do with it. After the movie came out, most of the clubs in Texas became line dance-meat market-cowboy hat (with a big feather in front)-wearing clones of the way Gilley’s was portrayed in the movie. Nobody wanted to listen to music in a club any more. Everybody wanted to learn to line dance, ride a mechanical bull, and look for love in all the wrong places.

By 1983, I was playing the guitar again some. I learned to play when I was ten. My brother had gotten a guitar for Christmas, and I would pick it up whenever I got a chance. I’m left-handed, but he wouldn’t let me reverse the strings and turn it around, so I learned to play right-handed. I had a band in high school and played some in college. When I lived in Kansas, I didn’t even own a guitar. When we moved back, I bought a cheap guitar and played at parties but mostly at home. I was working full time selling automotive engines, but I was playing more often and starting to write songs. I started playing in clubs in 1985, and I was singing a few of my songs, but mostly doing all those that I had learned back in the 70s. I played mainly in Mingus, Texas, then at a place called the Waterhole. D.A. Smith owned it, and we became friends right away. Most people had never heard of these songs I was doing, but pretty well every night someone would be there and when I was doing “Redneck Mother” or “London Homesick Blues” start hollering and singing along or dancing on a table. Then on my break, we would talk about Willie, Jerry Jeff, and Rusty Wier. These folks would come out the next week to see me again and maybe bring someone else, and I’d play “Redneck Mother,” and they’d start hollering and singing along or dancing on a table, and then I’d take a break, and we’d talk about Willie, Jerry Jeff, and Rusty.

I recorded my first record (a cassette tape) in 1985 for \$400.00 in a garage studio in Carrollton, Texas. The owner/engineer/musician was Jim Lamb. He

played all the instruments, engineered and mixed it, and made the cassette copies right there. I don't remember how many we sold. I'm pretty sure it was in the three-figure range, but more importantly, I had a demo of some of my songs. This would prove to be extremely important right away.

About a month after I recorded the cassette, I saw in my hometown paper that Gary P. Nunn was going to play in Stephenville. Now I had been singing one of his songs for a long time and was familiar with his voice from the *Viva Terlingua* album and some of the Lost Gonzo Band's albums. I really couldn't believe he was going to be playing in Stephenville because I hadn't heard his name or any of those guys names, for that matter, in what seemed like five or six years. The problem was I was playing in Strawn, Texas, at the Waterhole the same night Gary P. was in Stephenville. (Yes, it used to be in Mingus, but it had burned down, and D.A had reopened it in Strawn.) There was nothing I could do about it. Stephenville had a book and record store called The Cat and Candle, which was owned by Betty Heath. Betty was a big fan of the Progressive Country Movement, and she would order or try to order records for me. The morning after Gary P. played, I called Betty to see how the show went. She was very excited, and during the conversation, she told me what motel Gary was staying in. I drove to town, went to the motel, went in the lobby, and asked for Gary P. Nunn's room number. The clerk dialed his room. On the first ring I heard "hello." I recognized the voice as Gary's. Then silence. Now over the previous ten or twelve years that I had been listening to Gary P. and the Lost Gonzo Band and during the whole turn of events leading up to that moment, I had thought of a lot of things, but what I was actually going to say to him wasn't one of them. It seemed like about ten minutes before anything came out of my mouth, and when it did it was "Um ... uh ... hello." Then he said "hello" for the second time in a somewhat bothered tone, and I knew that I had to say something other than "hello" this time. So in a shaky, accelerated voice, I said, "Gary, you don't know me, but I'm a big fan, and I just wanted to talk to you, and I'm in the lobby of the motel." I'm thinking how stupid I just sounded, and the desk clerk is looking at me with that look that says, "You're an idiot, man," I hear the voice on the other end of the phone say, "OK, I'm just walking out the door to go eat breakfast next door. You can meet me there if you want to." I said, "OK. Bye." I put the phone down and with a newfound confidence gave the desk clerk a look that said "Who's the idiot now?" Gary P. and I visited for an hour or so that morning, and when we got ready to leave, I asked him if he would listen to my demo cassette. He said, "Sure," so I gave him one. I was thinking, well this guy's just being nice and trying to get away from me, and he'll throw that cassette at the Stephenville city limit sign on the way out of town.

It was about a month later when I got a call from Gary. He said he had listened to the cassette, liked it, and wanted to record one of the songs in the future. I have had some real highs, but none will ever compare to that moment.

I had just gone from being a fan of Progressive Music to being a songwriter of Progressive Country. That song was "I Feel a Party Coming On." Gary put it along with two more on his *For Old Time Sakes* album. He has since recorded around fifteen of my songs, and I must say he's done a great job of every one of them. We opened shows for him at D.A. Smith's Waterhole in Strawn on a regular basis and played some memorable Sunday afternoon shows in Mingus at the Whitehouse. Gary also took me to Terlingua for my first World Championship Chili Cook-off. I think that was 1986, and that's where I met the Renegades from Dalhart, Texas. The Renegades were a chili show team. I hung out at their camp and picked around their campfire for three days and nights. I consider them my first real fans and supporters. I went back to Terlingua the next several years, and the music really started picking up steam out there. People went for the chili cook-off, but a growing number went for the music.

In 1987 after almost fifteen years, I again attended the Kerrville Folk Festival. My brother Norice told me about a songwriter workshop that was going on during the festival. One of the songwriters featured was B.W. Stevenson. I signed up and went. I did get to hang out with B.W. some that week, ask him questions about songwriting, and pick around the campfire with him some. B.W. died later that year, and everybody who knew him in this business still misses him dearly. The next year I returned to the Kerrville Folk Festival as a finalist in the Kerrville New Folk competition. That is also the year I met Guy Clark (probably the most respected Texas songwriter of our times). By this time people were getting excited about some new singer/songwriters who were coming through Kerrville. Lyle Lovett, Nancy Griffith, Steve Earl, and Robert Earl Keen were drawing big crowds in Kerrville.

In Dallas about the same time, a community radio station was playing stuff from the Progressive Country era like Jerry Jeff, Ray Wylie, and Rusty, mixing it with the new stuff like Robert Earl and Lyle Lovett. They were on the air two hours a day during the week and had a different volunteer DJ every day. KNON was the first to play my music. They also were starting to pick up some steam. They didn't do advertising, but their listenership began to grow strictly from word of mouth. Roy Ashley was the DJ on Fridays and the self-proclaimed "Commander" of the Super Roper Redneck Review.

Not many gigs were to be found at that time, but things were starting to happen. I had this idea about putting together a thing that would be a cross between the Terlingua Chili Cook-off, the Kerrville Folk Festival, and Willie's Picnic. I wanted to include the fun-loving chili cooks, and since the only chili cook-off I'd ever been to was Terlingua, I just figured all the cook-offs were like that. I didn't find out until some years later that most chili cook-offs are done in a parking lot of a bank or something with no music, and it's over by 4:00pm, and everybody goes home. I loved the campfire picking at the Kerrville Folk Festival, but the whole thing was a little stiff for me. I had never been to Willie's

Picnic but had heard plenty of stories about it, and anyway, if you were going to do something like this in Texas, then of course, you wanted it to be like Willie's. In February 1989, I was looking at my schedule one day, and when I got to April, it was totally blank, not one gig. I had been talking to the folks in Mingus about doing a chili cook-off, and I figured it would be good for one gig in April. I met with them, and we decided to do "The Mingus Sprang Thang" the third weekend in April. They gave me a little budget for the entertainment, and I do mean little. I then called Marvin Wilson out in Dalhart, Texas. Marvin was one of the Renegades, and I knew he would pass the word on to all the chili cooks out there. Marvin also played the fiddle, and we had played around campfires in Terlingua for many hours. I knew we'd have a good campfire picking in Mingus if he was there. Out of sixteen years since having my festival, I think Marvin has only missed one or maybe two, and he continues to be a big hit around the campfires. I had met a songwriter from Denton at the 1988 Kerrville Folk Festival named Joe Pat Hennen. I called him, gave him the date of the "Sprang Thang," and he agreed to come. I then called "The Commander" Roy Ashley. When Roy got excited about something, he wouldn't stop talking about it on his radio show. He also contacted Ray Wylie Hubbard and Donnie Ray Ford, and they agreed to come out to Mingus and perform. (Yes, I know everybody has three names).

My band played on Friday night, and we had a good mix of chili cooks, locals, and KNON listeners. Saturday, Ray Wylie played with a thrown-together band made up of me, Marvin on fiddle, Donnie Ray on bass, and Zack Taylor on drums. Zack (my son) had just turned eleven. Zack played with Ray and Donnie Ray, and Joe Pat asked Zack to play during the set. Now Joe Pat and Zack are the only two performers, other than me, who have played at all sixteen festivals. Zack has not only played at all of them, but after graduating from Tarleton State University with a marketing degree, he went to work in our office and now runs the festival. Ironically, I missed most of Joe Pat's set. It seems that when I had looked at that blank April calendar and decided to put this gig together, I had forgotten about a gig that I booked on that very Saturday. I left to play the gig and returned to Mingus just in time for a few songs around the campfire. We had around one hundred people total at the first "Sprang Thang," and I couldn't have been happier.

Over the next year, Roy Ashley talked about our first festival every Friday on his show, and the chili cooks started a buzz about it, also. When we started planning the next one, I decided I wanted to do a live recording. The second year was a huge success, and we did the recording *Live From Mingus Texas* that featured five cuts by Gary P. Nunn, four by me, and one by Joe Pat Hennen. The only problem was, after two years we had outgrown the facility. Now that sounds good, but the facility only held around 300 maybe 400 people.

By 1991, Texas Music was growing in popularity. Robert Earl Keen was picking up a lot of college age fans, and Jerry Jeff was back on the scene and



Zack Taylor at the first Texas Music Festival

working more. Nashville had started to take notice of what was going on and did a TV show called *The Texas Connection*. In 1991, Jerry Jeff became the host of the show that featured Texas songwriters like Ray Wylie Hubbard, Gary P. Nunn, and Doug Sahm. We moved our festival to the ghost town of Thurber, and we doubled the crowd from the previous year. We didn't have the money to hire a lot of people then, so either Sherry, Zack, or I pretty well did everything. I was in charge of running the sound, introducing the acts, and making sure the bathrooms had toilet paper. When it was over on Sunday morning and people had packed up their tents and campers and gone home, Sherry, Zack, Marvin, and I grabbed trash bags and started cleaning up. I will say that, although Texas Music fans are probably the nicest group of people anywhere, they are not the neatest group. They produce a lot of trash. (At the fifteenth annual festival in 2003, we hauled off 75,000 pounds of trash.) This would not have been that bad, but I had stayed up and picked around the campfire pretty well all night. On Sunday, it was about ninety degrees when we started picking up the trash. I remember one tent left in the middle of the pasture that we were cleaning, and I was picking up some cans around the tent when a young lady all excited came out of the tent. She said, "Oh, you're Larry Joe Taylor, and I bought your album last night, and I'd like for you to sign it." I'll tell you ... it is almost impossible to act or feel like a rock star when you have to ask your fan to hold your trash bag while you sign an autograph.

We moved the festival again the next year to One Mountain Place at Possum Kingdom Lake. More radio stations jumped in and supported our

festival, which was then called "Pickin' at Possum." We would be there for three years before we outgrew it. Acts like Charlie Robison, The Great Divide, Ray Wylie Hubbard, Gary P. Nunn, Joe Pat Hennen, and Tommy Alverson played most of those years. Cody Canada of Cross Canadian Ragweed first came to the festival in Possum Kingdom. He was seventeen at the time and playing with the Great Divide. He told me ten years later that the festival made a big impact on him, and he said that's when he knew music was what he was going to do.

In 1995, we moved to Tres Rios Campground in Glen Rose, Texas. This was the first time we called it an annual event. We also gave it a permanent name *Larry Joe Taylor's 7th Annual Texas Music Festival and Chili Cook-off*. We were there for three years, and we saw young guys like Pat Green for the first time at Tres Rios. A real highlight was to have one of my songwriting heroes, Guy Clark, perform. Rusty Wier would become a regular, and Doug Sahm of "The Texas Tornados" would come just to hang out because he heard it was a cool festival. Doug died not too long after that, but he has certainly not been forgotten.



National Treasure Guy Clark, the songwriter's songwriter, playing around the campfires at the 1997 Texas Music Festival

When we moved to Meridian, Texas, in 1998, the words "Texas Music" were being thrown around a lot by radio stations and fans alike. Texas Music was becoming the cool bandwagon to be on. Everybody was saying "Screw Nashville. We want Texas Music." Sometimes I think for people to like something, they have to hate something else. I didn't really like Nashville either, but I thought some of the fans had become so militant about Texas Music that they were about

to march up I-30 through Little Rock, take I-40 through Memphis, and do one of those General Sherman things on Nashville.

During festival number eleven or twelve, a guy on a motorcycle had arrived late on Friday night. He was supposed to meet some people there who were camped. When he'd asked them how he would find their campsite, they said, "Just look for the Texas flag." Well, so many Texas flags were flying that the guy wound up driving around in the campground almost all night before he found his friends. It was also around the same time when I felt like everything was coming together for this genre of music. Pat Green was bringing in the college age crowd, and guys like Rusty Wier, Ray Wylie Hubbard, and Steven Fromholz were helping bring the Progressive Country crowd out of hibernation. The results were that you had twenty year olds coming to hear Pat and staying to hear Rusty, and here's Rusty just blowing these twenty-year-olds away. Then the fifty-year-olds who came to see Rusty stayed to hear Pat, and Pat all of a sudden has a bunch of new, old fans. Also, the lesser-known singer/songwriters on the bill performed in front of these large and diverse crowds and developed their own fans. It's starting to sound like the summer of love. Well, it was like that. 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.

After number twelve, Pat really got too big to play the festival at that site. Wait a minute! Had Pat really done what he said he was going to do? Was he really bigger than Jerry Jeff? Pat was doing well in the business, and he was sailing the flagship of Texas Music. In my opinion, Pat may someday be bigger than Jerry Jeff. We'll just have to wait another twenty-five years to find out. Success in this business is sometimes, although it should not be, measured by how many people an act puts in a place. Who puts more people in a place, Guy Clark or Cross Canadian Ragweed? Of course, CCR. Who's the better songwriter? Cody Canada (of CCR) will climb on top of the Luckenbach Dancehall with a bull horn and scream it: GUY CLARK!

Speaking of CCR, festival number thirteen was their first year to play on stage. They had been there the year before and played around the campfires. At number sixteen, they put on one of the most memorable live performances in the history of this festival. They continue to be one of the most popular bands ever in Texas Music, have recently secured a major label record deal, and may I add, that hands down they are the nicest group of guys I've ever met.

Number thirteen also brought another one of my heroes, and I do mean heroes. It was April 19, 2001, Meridian, Texas, 11:00pm . I was standing next to Abby Abernathy (our stage manager) right next to the monitor board. The lights came up, the crowd roared, and then I heard it: "Hi Buckaroos, Scamp Walker time again. Gonna try to slide one by ya once more." Suddenly I was gone, twenty-eight years disappeared, and I was back in the passenger seat of Billy

Stockman's 1963 Galaxie. Jerry Jeff Walker was playing the very song that had hooked me on this music twenty-eight years before on MY stage at MY festival, and everybody was going crazy. That's really the first time I felt it. This music and this scene that I had fallen so in love with in the 70s was playing out in front of my eyes, and I really had something to do with it. All the guys I called heroes in the 70s I now called friends, and I must be living a dream.



Jerry Jeff Walker and Larry Joe at Walker's 2004 birthday party

Since then we have moved the festival to Stephenville, Texas, and it has continued to grow. Last year we had around 18,000 people from over thirty-five states and several foreign countries over the four-day event. It's probably the largest songwriter festival in Texas. Does that make it the best? No, but I like to think it is. Sherry, Zack, and I have always done it with a passion for the music, and we take pride in bringing the best songwriters to the stages. Sherry and I have a great sense of this music's history, and Zack has proven that he has a vision for its future. I don't know where Texas Music would be without our festival. I don't even know if it has made a big impact. I don't know what the future holds. I do know there are some really talented young songwriters, so I feel good about the future. The one thing I know for sure is if the phone rings in my motel room and there's a shaky voice on the other end of the phone telling me that he's a big fan and just wants to talk that I ... better be ready for breakfast.