

**Larry Joe Taylor's 19th Annual
Texas Music Festival & Chili Cookoff - 2007**



Larry Joe Taylor's 19th Annual Texas Music Festival & Chili Cookoff held April 17th to the 21st was another outstanding outdoor music festival. Held at Melody Mountain Ranch, just north of Stephenville, this 5 day event is one of the best outdoor concerts in Texas, and each year it seems to get better - so don't miss the 2008 event. This year's review is going to take a little different twist and instead of raving about the music, which included some of the best Texas musicians, we are going to focus more on the camping and party atmosphere of this outstanding event which attracts over 20,000 people who are out listen to some good music and party.

Melody Mountain Ranch is the perfect place for this event. There are over 300 acres for music, camping, and partying - and this is one big party. The Ranch has 200 water and electricity sites and plenty of room for dry or primitive camping (no water or electricity - basically you park in a big field next to all the other campers). Years ago, Larry Joe had a "campsite selection party" where sites were awarded based on a lottery type drawing. When your number was called, you got to pick a site that you have first right of refusal on each year. Which means that all the water and electricity sites are taken each year by returning fans and if any do open up, they are hard to get.



It's a hoot to walk through the campgrounds and look at the various rigs, tents, and camping paraphernalia. You'll see everything from \$600,000 immaculate motor homes to a broken cot with a hole-ridden sleeping bag. Tents range from one room pup tents to multi-room tents with a screened in pouch.

And then there are the various 2 to 8 wheel sleeping accommodations - converted buses, trailers from the early 1930's, and motor homes that look like they are on their last leg. But none of that matters, after a full day and evening of music and drinking, most of this crowd could sleep anywhere and they usually do.

The campgrounds are host to a number of other fun events at all hours of the day and night. The partying is going on in the campgrounds at all times - it seems that quiet hour is around 7:00 AM (you have to stay up to see the sun rise) to 8:30 AM when everyone tries to get a little shuteye and get ready for another exciting day. Everyone is friendly and fun loving and will welcome you to join their party, conversation, game, or sing along. After the main stage music stops, we love to move from campfire to campfire and we always find some superb music. Most of the time you can find a campfire where some of the headliners are playing and they also like to move from campfire to campfire. Even semi professional bands will set up speakers and gather a crowd of fans.

At any time, as you wander through the campground you are likely to find:



- all sorts of different games - multiple variations of washers, horseshoes, different version of ladder golf, and bean bag toss
- fires of all shapes and sizes for cooking, marshmallow roasting, campfire sing-alongs, warmth, and socializing
- good aromas from a variety of different campground chiefs, want-to-be cooks, tails-you-loose cooks, or starving college students using some very creative cooking techniques
- music of all types from ghetto blasters, iPods, blossoming musicians, or others who should not attempt to sing or play an instrument
 - man's best friend of all shapes and sizes



If you get hungry and can't stand what's cooked around the campfire, or you run out of food, there are food vendors which serve BBQ, fajitas, patty melts, turkey legs, sausage, burgers, and more. Every Sunday morning for more than 10 years, the Wednesday Night Boys have been serving an excellent free breakfast of breakfast tacos, beans, coffee, and juice. What a great gesture on their part.



This event is BYOB (bring your own blanket, beach chair, and beer - and there is plenty of that). Attendees bring all sorts of contraptions to carry their chairs, coolers, girl friends, and other gear - some of these beer carts are pretty clever. For example, a pull wagon with three car seats mounted on it and an umbrella for shade; a little red kids wagon with off road tires and a custom made wood box on top; and a beer cooler with an gas engine. Although most everyone brings chairs, by the end of the evening 90% of the crowd is standing, dancing, and partying.



One of the other clever inventions that you will always see at Larry Joe's Festival are the beer bongs of all shapes and sizes. Guys and gals with bongs are very popular and always roaming through the crowd allowing others to try their bongs. We also saw multiple blenders made from weed whacker engines - how good is that!

Each year we also notice more and more hats of various shapes and sizes from fancy cowboy hats, to berets, to doo rags, to animal caps, to hats made from empty beer boxes. Costumes and weird outfits are also becoming more popular.

Sometimes we are having so much fun enjoying all of the above that we forget we really came here for the music. This year Larry Joe set up three stages for music. The main stage is in a huge open field with a backdrop of the surrounding country side. Around the perimeter are various food and merchandise vendors. The music started at various times on the main stage ranging from 7:00 PM on Wednesday to 2:00 on Saturday and usually lasted to around 1 PM. The main stage lineup included Larry Joe, Max Stalling, Delbert McClinton, Micky & The Motorcars, Jason Boland, Stoney LaRue, Randy Rogers, Ed Burleson, Two Tons of Steel, No Justice, Mike McClure, Roger Creager, Reckless Kelly, Tommy Alverson, Rusty Wier, Los Lonely Boys, Brandon Rhyder, Ray Wylie Hubbard, and Matt Martindale. All of the bands were outstanding. We particularly enjoyed Tommy Alverson's and Larry Joe's sets.



New this year, they set up another small stage on top of a big trailer next to the main stage. This stage kicks off the late afternoon music and has a band play during the changeover of bands on the main stage. Which means during the first few bands on the main stage, there is music as they change from band to band. As soon as one band finishes, the other stage music starts. This stage seemed to be home to some very good and upcoming musicians including: Bart Crow Band, Kyle Bennett Band, Rich O' Toole, Jason Eady, and Ryan Turner.

The third stage is setup in a semi grassy field. This small stage is covered and provides a much more intimate setting with a small audience (are most of the late night party people still asleep?) that is more serious about the music. The music starts on this stage around 12 or 1 on Friday and Saturday and concludes when the main stage music starts. There was an excellent line-up of Shake Russell, Steven Fromholz, Bonnie Bishop, Keith Sykes, Chuck Pyle, Michael Hearne, Jed & Kelley, Walt Wilkins, Blacktop Gypsy, Richard Leigh, Joe Pat Hennen, Deryl Dodd, Kevin Deal, Susan Gibson, and Davin James. This is the place to be to listen to some fantastic music without the distractions.



Each year, on Tuesday night, there are limited number of tickets available for Larry Joe's Campground Campfire Concert. We have never attended this event, but every year we hear that it was outstanding and the highlight of the event. This year Larry Joe, Gary Nicholson, Matt Martindale, and Davin James played around the campfire.

Each year the quality of the music get better, the crowd gets a little bigger, and the party never ends! If you like Texas country music, then this is a must attend event. The price is right at \$20 for one day, \$26 for two days, \$34 for three days, \$59 for four days. See you there next year!