

Tumbleweed Musicians Looking at Seaweed

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Tumbleweeds are taking a back seat to seaweed, where some Texas musicians are concerned.

“It’s the only place where you can tailgate and watch the surf,” Larry Joe Taylor said of Texas’ public beaches, upon which one can drive a pickup for miles. He used to record straight country-influenced stuff, but “then I wrote a couple of Texas beach songs, and people just went nuts.”

Taylor finished headlining a 4th of July Texas music festival at Port Aransas, which drew 5,000 people. It’s a definite go for next year, he said.

The self-proclaimed Parrothead (Jimmy Buffett fan) first recorded beach music with his ’93 Campfire Records release, ‘Coastal & Western.’ Last year’s ‘First Row, Third Coast ’ kept up the trend.

His new label, Boatfolk Records in San Antonio , is run by some rather secretive Parrotheads, Taylor laughed.

“There is a little trend of that (music) going around,” Jerry Jeff Walker said. “In North Carolina , and in Myrtle Beach (S.C.) they just call it ‘beach music.’ It’s easy, goodtime music. There’s a lot of R&B in it.”

Walker calls his latest album “country music from another country,” and it is: ‘Cowboy Boots & Bathin’ Suits,’ released this spring on his independent Tried & True label, was recorded at his home in Belize . It’s awash in songs with summertime titles like ‘Gringo in Belize ,’ ‘Barefootin’ and ‘Champagne Don’t Hurt Me, Baby.’ Guy Clark’s ‘Boats to Build’ is included, too.

“I just think, working in the studio, it’s like open-heart surgery,” Walker said of his decision to cut tracks at home instead of in a recording studio. “It’s not very conducive (to creativity) because you never play music like that.”

The recording itself represented challenges, said Jerry Jeff, admitting that his getaway island home since ’94 is actually a third-world country.

First, the electricity failed, as it often does there. Jerry Jeff called the electricity company, which promised to fix everything.

“In Belize , right away means possibly never,” Jerry Jeff chortled. “They said they’d bring in a new transformer – ‘right away’.”

Finally, Walker said, things improved the day the Gonzo Compadres arrived. They recorded first at a raucous club, then later at the Walker house for the quieter ballads.

They weren’t in the clear, though.

“It was down to the last two tapes, and all the electricity on the island went out again,” Jerry Jeff recalled. “There was an orange glow in the sky, and it was the electrical plant on fire. About two or three hours later, the electricity came back on. We got the album recorded between two electrical disasters in one week.”

Taylor said the seed of Texas-style surf sounds was actually planted decades ago.

“When you’re talking about Texas beach music, the guy that invented it is Guy Clark, with his ‘South Coast of

Texas' album," Taylor said. "On almost every one of his records, he's put a Texas gulf coast song."

Taylor has recorded Clark 's tunes, ' Mobile Bay ,' 'Supply & Demand,' and recently 'Laguna Madre.'

"The difference in Texas beach music, to me, is there's not nearly as much of a Caribbean , or Beach Boys, influence as there is more of a Spanish-Mexican influence," Taylor said.

He mentioned Robert Earl Keen's ' Corpus Christi Bay ' and newcomer Owen Temple's 'Wanna Wanna Beachfront Bar' as other examples.