

Larry Joe Taylor's

14th Annual Texas Music Festival & Chili Cook-off

By Miss Lana

After you've been to Meridian once (or four times in my case), you always get this feeling inside that's unlike any other when you're finally on your way to the next one. It's like the feeling you get when you're a kid on Christmas Eve and you know that Santa Claus is finally coming to town. It's an excited anticipation of something good to come. There is nothing like the sight of thousands of campers with Texas flags flying high and coolers full of beer being loaded for the trek to the stage.

This year was the 14th Annual and the best one I've attended yet. Why the best yet? Besides the fact that there is NO OTHER event that draws a crowd as big as this one, AND it is the one event of the year (in Texas music) that virtually draws ALL the music lovers from ALL over Texas and the nation...then there's the music...and much more. This year, Larry Joe added an extra night to the beginning of the festival keeping the attendees to 500 for this show. They fed the masses hamburgers as they arrived, and the acoustic show was started under the Tarleton State Alumni Tent by Larry Joe Taylor and Davin James. The headliner for this special show was the songwriting legend, Guy Clark. He was, without a doubt, my favorite of this festival. I was completely enthralled with him and his songs and now know why he is called the king of the songwriters in OKOM today. I mean, I always knew he was great, but after seeing him here up close and personal, it's almost like a religious experience...I did say almost.

I want to touch on some aspects of this event that you might not read about in other reviews (or maybe you have). The biggest aspect, as I see it, is the mix of people that are now attending this event on a regular basis. There are the old hippies and outlaw crowd, and there is the younger generation (college and early twenties crowd) that seems to grow in number every year. As everything else in the world, this festival has changed throughout the fourteen years of its existence and is continuing to change. With change comes good and bad, and it's no different here. With the larger crowds comes more trash, more noise and more "kid stuff". On the other hand, we must realize that these kids are the future for OKOM. And for the most part, they are fairly well behaved considering how much they've had to drink and the party atmosphere that is in the air. The thing that bothers me the most about it is that there has been a lot of stealing from camps in the past two or three years, something that never used to happen in the earlier years. I'm not saying it's the kids who are stealing, but there seems to be more of it going on now. There is an occasional fight, usually in front of the stage when its packed full of kids like sardines in a can. Even one of our local deejays got punched up by the stage.

But even with the growing number of people every year, there is still something very special about Meridian. Getting together with friends, some whom you only see once a year at this event, sharing what you have with strangers, meeting new friends, petting a puppy, watching a toddler dance, camp fires and guitars, the sound of laughter coming from a camp site far away...someone sleeping off the night before by the river, an abandoned two week old kitten being bottled fed, a surprise birthday party, getting a sick dog to finally eat something, a limousine with longhorns on the front and a beer tap coming out of the gas tank, dune buggies, golf carts, motorcycles, one artist in total awe of another, couples in love...this festival is all of this and more. With this festival comes a spirit that is shared by all who are there. This year it was cited as "The Texas Woodstock", but I think that was already used for Willie Nelson's picnic. I say we call it "Larry Joe's Big Ass Party". Whatever we call it...

This event is more than music...it's three days and nights of sharing and enjoying what Texas, the Texas music family and living in a free country are all about. It's where the "to each his own" attitude is adopted by most unless it is considered harmful to others. Yes, this festival is special, and it always will be no matter how big it gets. We can always sit in camp and say, "remember when..." and now it's different, but it's still very special. So

many memories of these festivals will always be a part of me, and I can't wait for the next one.

Miss Lana

Written by Lana Hughes, May 2002

The following is an interview conducted via e-mail by Miss Lana with Larry Joe Taylor in June of 2002. Thanks, Larry Joe, for a great festival and your talents.

ML: If you had to describe the 14th Annual LJT Festival in only one word, what would it be?

LJT: "WOW!!"

ML: What was the official attendance this year?

LJT: There were somewhere around 12,000 there over the four days.

ML: Is that a record?

LJT: That is the most people so far.

ML: What was the best thing about this year's festival?

LJT: I thought the music was the best yet.

ML: What was the worst thing?

LJT: I think that under age drinking is a big problem, and I think it was too crowded around the stage. These are two things that we're working to correct for next year.

ML: What was the funniest thing that happened at the festival that you know about?

LJT: I'm still laughing about a joke that Charlie Robison told me but I can't tell you what it is.

ML: What would you tell the festival goers if you had the chance, because here it is (the chance).

LJT: I've always said that there is as much entertainment in the campground as there is on stage. Anyone who just comes for the stage concerts is missing a lot. To get the whole thing, you have to camp.

ML: Rumor is that 70+ people were arrested during the 4-day festival and the majority was over 40 years old. Is that true?

LJT: I don't know what the numbers were or what age group. There were only a couple of arrests on the festival grounds. The rest were driving related. I wish people would not

drink and drive. That's one reason we started this in the first place so you could go hear music, camp and not have to drive. The sheriff's dept. works with us very well. As long as you are in the campground, you can do pretty much what you want (within reason) but when you get out on the road that's a different story.

ML: What are your feelings about the older/newer generations that attending the festival? Is it really creating a problem like some fans are saying?

LJT: In both groups there are a few that create problems. That has been a complaint since the first one in Mingus TX. There are some things we will do to try and make it better for both groups. When we started this thing 14 years ago, there were not very many people who were even aware that there was alternative music. It was my goal then to turn as many people as possible on to this music, and that is still my goal. I believe so

much in this concept of "music by the seat of your pants" and the freedoms to create any type song you want to. We (Texas Musicians) have tried to create songs that have no musical boundaries. You'll hear influences of country, jazz, rock, blues and reggae. Older/newer generations have said, "Yes we like that." We all have worked so hard for so long to find an audience for this music, and I will not be the one that tells one generation or another that they can't come and listen to it.

ML: Another rumor is that one of the hard drives used for the live recording crashed. Was that data recovered and when do you expect to release it?

LJT: Yes, we had a problem with one of the hard drives. It had all the music from Friday night and all day Saturday on it. We were able to recover the data. We'll have #14 out around the first of the year.

ML: Tell us how the LJT Fest in Meridian and "Island Time" differ besides the location. What makes "Island Time" a special event in its own right?

LJT: This will be the 5th Island Time festival this year in Port Aransas. I started it because I like the coast so much. It is a much smaller festival and is more laid back. We do it in several different venues on the island and there's a lot of time to go to the beach or what ever you want to do.

ML: What are your plans for the near future? New CD? Anything new on the horizon for Larry Joe?

LJT: We just completed a live acoustic CD called "Port A to Port B". We recorded it along the Gulf coast in small listening venues. I like it because we were able to do a lot of my favorite songs that I've written that we don't get to do as a band. It will be in stores in August. I have been doing some writing and have plans to go in the studio in November to do a new record.

ML: What would like to be remembered most for when you've departed for that bigger gig in heaven? (weird question, huh?)

LJT: I don't know. I guess I 'd like to be remembered as a good person.

ML: If you had to name one person in the music industry you admire and respect the most, who would it be and why?

LJT: There are so many, but I guess the one that sticks out the most is Guy Clark. Guy helped me a lot songwriting-wise, and I don't guess that he has ever written a bad song.

ML: What is the most surprising thing about Larry Joe Taylor that most fans don't know?

LJT: I'm left handed.

ML: Any plans to change the location of future LJT Festivals?

LJT: Well, we've had five different locations in 14 years so I could see it happening.

ML: Your staff does a great job of security at the festival, yet there are still some problems with theft and a few fights that break out. What is your thought on this and is it getting worse every year?

LJT: We do have a great staff. We have a large security force of uniform and t-shirt

security, but we also have security that you never see unless there is a problem. There have always been those problems, and realistically, there will always be problems. I know that most people would not leave their lawn chairs and ice chests in their front yard at home unattended, but they do at the festival. Any time you get 10,000 people together you're going to have problems. We spend a lot of time every year trying to correct those

problems. We want the festival to be as safe and as fun as it can be.

ML: When you retire, where will you live?

LJT: Retire from what? This is not a job. We just built a new house on our place in Huckabay so we'll be here, but I can't stay away from the coast for too long.

ML: Is there a venue you haven't played that you would really like to play?

LJT: It doesn't matter where I play as long as people listen. I really enjoy what I do, and I hope it shows. I've already done so much more in this business than I ever dreamed of.

I am such a student of music and songwriting, so it continues to be fun to create new music. I don't think I'll ever get tired of that.

Editor's Note: Larry Joe Taylor also hosts a cruise in winter. Visit his website for all the details. [Larry Joe Taylor's Web Site www.larryjoetaylor.com](http://www.larryjoetaylor.com)