

The Toastie Coastie Larry Joe Taylor Goes Coconuts

Road House Magazine

My first exposure to Larry Joe Taylor came through a listener's request on my second or third shift on KSYM's Third Coast Music Network, back in 1995. The CD's title "Coastal & Western" (his first) was also an apt description of his style.

Fast forward a few years to 1997 and a Wednesday afternoon phone call from Steve Smith, owner of the late and much lamented Good Vibrations music store/art/performance space. He wanted to know if I'd mind Larry Joe Taylor and his buddy Joe Pat Hennen dropping by the KSYM studio on their way to Port Aransas, with their guitars of course. Not being a total idiot (at least not ALL the time!), I told Steve to send the beach-bound troubadours right over.

The resulting on-air live set and spontaneous verbal goofiness was one of those incredible, magic audio adventures that make college radio in general and the Third Coast Music Network on KSYM so unique.

Now let's jump to May 5th, 2000 to catch up with Larry Joe Taylor at Carlsbad Tavern, touring in support of his new CD, "Heart of the Matter," with a crack band: his son Zack Taylor on drums, Bobbie Rambo sitting in on lead guitar, Mark Fishback on bass, and Chris Schlotzhauer on guitar and lap steel.

After the show Larry Joe and I borrowed Carlsbad's tiny office for the interview that follows. Being a gentleman, Larry Joe offered the lone chair to me; I refused. He was the one who'd been performing all night, so I made him take the chair. Because of the space limitations and only one place to plug in the tape recorder, I was forced to sit on Larry Joe's lap so the tape could pick us both up. (Either that or I'd had to kneel on the floor in front of him. Since the Monica Lewinsky thing, we figured the lap would appear less compromising!)

Debbie: When was your first trip to the coast?

Larry: I think I was six years old. My brother and I loved it. My mom and dad hated it because we camped on the beach and sand got in everything. Mom said we're never going back. I think I was 18 before I took my second trip to the coast.

Debbie: Was that your first trip to Port Aransas?

Larry: I think so. I fell in love with it. 12 years later when I finally went back, nothing was like I remember it when I was 6 years old. I've been going back ever since. I used to just go once a year, for several years. But since I've been writing songs about the coast, now I go almost once a week. I have a boat that I'm moving down there; it's a 27' sailboat.

Debbie: Ohhhhh!

Larry: I've been on the waiting list to get a slip down there for almost a year.

Debbie: Do you have one now?

Larry: Yeah. I just got one. I wanted to be in the city marina, though.

Debbie: Is that the one at Robert's Point?

Larry: Yeah. There are other slips, other places, but I turned those down. It's going to be fun. I can't wait to get down there. I can only go down for 2 or 3 days at a time. I can handle this boat myself.

Debbie: Can you live on the boat when you're there?

Larry: Actually you can sleep 5 or 10 on the boat, or...

Debbie: (Laughs) Or more, if you're really cozy! You can stack the 4 or 5 deep!

Larry: What I like about the boat is it has this great cockpit, where you can mix rum and cokes, sit there on the boat and act like you know what you're doing.

Debbie: Have you ever sailed in the Gulf?

Larry: Not by myself. I'm not great at it, but yeah, I've been out several times. Some over night stuff. I love it. It's like the last frontier. It's really scary when you get 30 miles out and you have to depend on your own navigational skills. I don't have gps or anything.

Debbie: You have to do it the old fashion way.

Larry: Yes. I have a \$20 sexton bought at Wal-Mart. How accurate can that be?

Debbie: What's her name (the boat)?

Larry: You know, I'm changing the name. I wrote this new song, called Coconuts.

Debbie: I like that. I played that on my show this last Wednesday. I got about 4 calls on it.

Larry: Great, great! So, I'm changing the name to Coconuts.

Debbie: Did you learn to play the guitar on your own or did you take lessons?

Larry: Unfortunately, on my own. I should have taken lessons. I'm left handed and my brother got a guitar for Christmas when I was about 7 or 8. I had no idea that you could turn them around left-handed. So I learned right-handed. I think that's been a drawback for me, too. I should have learned to play left-handed.

Debbie: How old were you when you started playing?

Larry: I think I was twelve. I had a band in high school. And then went to college, I played a little. When I got out of college, all I wanted to do was make a lot of money. I got married, moved up to Kansas and had this great job. Actually, I didn't even own a guitar for 5 or 6 years. Then one day (this is kind of a long story), I quit my job, moved back to Texas and got a guitar, and decided this is what I should be doing. I think I was 35 at the time. My wife said, "You probably ought to do something with this." I said, "It's probably going to take 5 years before I can do anything, really get a music career going; then I'd be forty." And she said, "Well, in 5 years, how old are you going to be if you don't pursue your music?" (Laughs) I kind of got started late in life, writing that is, and had some limited success. But I'm proud of what we've done. A lot of my heroes have recorded some of my songs. Rusty Wier just wrote a song about Port Aransas that he had me come in and produce and sing on. Rusty is like God to me.

Debbie: Okay, so what was the first song you wrote?

Larry: The first song that I wrote that really stuck with me was Uncle Bud. I thought it was pretty good. It's been recorded several times, and been on some compilation CD's in Europe. It's a special song to me. I contribute a lot of my success to Gary P. Nunn because he saw these songs he liked and started recording a lot of them. He really got me started. Then some other folks noticed what I was doing. I'd have to say Gary helped me a lot.

Debbie: He's a pretty good guy to have in your corner. How is it to write with Gary?

Larry: You know, we wrote several songs together. We wrote Roadtrip, Out on Time, Gulf of Mexico. He and I

actually wrote two or three songs in one night. We wrote Roadtrip and If Not Now, When? We had a great time writing together. He would do the music and I would do the lyrics. We stayed up late one night, almost all night, and the next morning just edited it and finished it up. It was a lot of fun writing with him.

I'm writing with a guy now, Davin James, who wrote a lot of stuff that Gary P. recorded, like Guadalupe Days. He and I co-wrote four songs on my last record. He's a good writer, really musical, too. In fact, we wrote Coconuts together.

Debbie: Coastal and Western is what you call you style?

Larry: Yeah, I kind of coined that phrase a few years ago. The other phrase I like to call it is Texarribean.

Debbie: How did your Chili Cook-off in Meridian get started?

Larry: It was myself, Joe Pat Hennen, Ray Wylie Hubbard, and about 50 or 60 people back about 12 years ago in Mingus. I think we had 19 cooks at the first one. 12 years later, Ray is still there, Joe Pat is still there, and we had 29 acts on stage this year. More than 8,000 people showed up for this one. It's something ... I did the first one because I didn't even have a place to play, so I kinda created this gig for myself. Now, I'm able to introduce new acts to 8,000 people sitting out there. It's kind of neat.

Debbie: Do you do all the planning for this yourself?

Larry: Yes, we've added some people. There's someone in charge of the vendors and someone in charge of cooking for the musicians. I still book all the acts. They're acts I like. If I'm going to do it, and spend the money to do it, then I'm going to hire the acts I enjoy.

Debbie: Do the bands campout and stuff?

Larry: That's one of the fun things about it. All the bands campout and pick around the campfire afterwards. We wrote a campfire song last Friday night. It was Rusty Wier, Davin James, Tommy Alverson, Ed Burleson, Joe Pat Hennen, some others, and myself. That's what it's all about. The premise of the whole thing is not just what happens on the stage, but what happens around the campfires. It's different from the Island Time Festivals. Those are pretty laid back and are mostly a one-day thing. But this is a three-day event with intense music all the time. Everybody camps right in front of the stage.

Debbie: What is the country like around there?

Larry: We do it right on the Bosque River. It's probably 2-3 feet deep. We're on the bend of the river with big pecan trees.

Debbie: Have you done much on the web?

Larry: We probably do more on the web than anywhere. We do a weekly newsletter of where we're going to be, and a couple of thousand people log on to it. We work on our web site constantly, and I usually communicate on the web more than anywhere else. I don't know what we'd do without it.

Debbie: It's really changed the landscape of the music business. Musicians have a lot more power to direct their own careers.

Larry: The web has given us worldwide exposure. We get orders from everywhere, literally.

Debbie: What countries, other than the U.S., are your strongest markets?

Larry: Well, Germany is real good. England is good, also. Island Time was a huge line-dancing hit there.

Debbie: Excuse me?

Larry: In England, line dancing is really big. We just sold a tremendous amount of the “Coastal & Western” CD’s with Island Time on it. And they have these Line Dancing Clubs. We got so many e-mails, and it’s like, God, can’t it be anything but line dancing.

Debbie: I have to take a moment to absorb this! I mean, I don’t know how to line dance, I’ve never done it, and I try to avoid places where it’s done.

Larry: I hate it. Line dancing causes brain damage.

Debbie: Is that what’s wrong with all these people? It’s funny, I remember when I was growing up, you’d tell people you were from Texas and they’d go “ooooh”. And now Texas is the coolest place to go.

Larry: Isn’t it great? There are so many radio stations playing Texas music. Ten years ago you wouldn’t have heard it on any radio station, they just wouldn’t play the stuff. It’s not just Texas; it’s all across the U.S. I just hope I get my house built, and everything paid off before it quits.

Debbie: Well, you’ve always got your sailboat to live on if your house doesn’t work out. I guess that’s ... all.

Larry: Ah, Debbie? You might want to put your dress back on now.