

Inventor of Texas Beach Genre to Perform

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Times-Record News

May 19, 2000

You're lazing on a hammock that's swaying with the Padre wind, a bottle of dewy Corona in one hand and some Shiner Bock in the other.

A crab shack shimmers like a mirage just off the dock in the background. The seagulls are cackling, the fish jumping, the tar-like balls from the offshore oil rigs collecting, the catfish frying the hushpuppies rolling.

Ahhhh. Now THAT'S the life.

It is at least for Larry Joe Taylor, who will perform Thursday night at Graham Central Station. The man - the purveyor of country music meets beach combers-has his head out of the sand when it comes to Texas beach music.

Larry Joe, after all, would counter the claim that the Beach Boys make about wishing women all could be California girls.

Larry Joe has done what Jimmy Buffett did for Florida and the Beach Boys have done for California . Only he's done it for Texas , known more for its variety of cacti and horny toads, armadillo and tumbleweeds, searing summers and dab-blasted droughts than it is for its beaches.

It's somewhat of an irony for a guy from Huckabay , Texas , nowhere near the coast, to have created such a seemingly off beat genre.

"It's real easy to write songs about the Caribbean, but there are not that many songs about the Texas Gulf Coast," said Larry Joe, from his "little farm" just outside of Stephenville, about 70 miles southwest of Fort Worth. "We used to go down to the beach and take Beach Boys CDs, and maybe a Jimmy Buffett CD. Every time you go to the beach, you want to hear this kind of music. But it's all about Florida and the Caribbean ...I started writing them for fun, then I started hanging out down there."

That's when Larry Joe refined this hybrid called Texas beach music. In fact, in that regard, he's the master of his domain. Look in his ice chest of songs and you get the picture: "Why Don't You Meet Me Down in Corpus," "My Kind of Day on Padre," "Shrimpin" and Skrimpin'," and "Corona Con Lima."

They weave the kind of state of mind that Larry Joe learned to appreciate as a more-than-sometimes visitor to the Lone Star coast - particularly his favorite coastal town, Port Aransas.

"I spend a lot of time down on the Texas Gulf Coast , "he said, trying to make the trek to the coast at least once a month. "I just got a sailboat and I'm fixin' to move down there."

At least that's the plan for part of the year. Becoming a full-time resident, Larry Joe says, is fraught with the danger of turning him into a full blown beach bum.

"I couldn't live down there. I just couldn't work," he said of all the distractions afforded by the sun and sand.

Larry Joe makes the Texas beach genre his own by sailing a boat of reggae with a country music slant.

"It's got steel guitar in it, for one, and you gotta have a little country twist to it. It's probably more lyric

oriented...It's more traditional country instruments playing with a reggae beat," he said.

And though not quite down with the Beach Boys harmonies to this musical sand castle

Larry Joe's latest CD, "heart of the Matter," released in February, doesn't make many waves as far as trying to explore the depths of other musical souls.

It offers more of the same country reggae sound that has made him so well known – famous enough to attract the attention of Jerry Jeff Walker, Gary P. Nunn, Joe Pat Hennen and Tommy Alverson – Americana artists who have all recorded his songs.

Lloyd Maines, steel guitar aficionado who's known more these days as dad of the Dixie Chicks' Natalie Maines, produced the CD.

"He's one of my best friends I know," Larry Joe said. "He's produced every one of my CDs. We call him the pope of Texas music...When we get in to the studio he knows what I want to do. He can read my mind."

Larry Joe also gets help from Rusty Wier and from Terri Hendrix, with whom he does a duet with called "Two Steppin' on the Beach."

"She was the first one that came to mind. Terri's got such a wide range with her voice, and she can sound like different people. We wanted her to sing like Sissy Spacek trying to sound like Loretta Lynn. And she did it."

Outside of his own music, Larry Joe likes to gather his compadres once a year in April for a rousing Texas music festival in Meridian . This was the 12th year for Larry Joe's Texas musical fest, which attracted about 7,000 people and 25 songwriters.

"Obviously we're doing something right," he said of Texas' music scene, which is often ignored by mainstream radio, possibly because its more "lyric-oriented" style doesn't often fit the mold of the typical three-minute radio song. "Actually more and more (radio stations) are playing our kind of music – the Americana chart. We claim it as Texas music."

Larry Joe said "There's one difference in our kind of music. A lot of the pop-country is controlled by Nashville , and it's almost like most of the Texas guys don't want to give up anything to do that."

If they're like Larry Joe, they're just happy to break open the Corona , squeeze a lime and take in the rays wherever the boat takes them.