

A Legend Revisited

Jerry Jeff Walker reminisces on traveling, songwriting, living in Texas

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The year is 1960 and a young man has just graduated high school. He is determined to see the world, so he decides to hitchhike across the country. Little does he know that he is on his way to becoming one of America's musical landmarks.

Singer/songwriter Jerry Jeff Walker, who will play Sunday, August 30 at Hurricane Harry's in College Station, has touched audiences across the country and even as far as Leningrad. His unique sounds of funk, rock, country and folk are expressed in songs such as "Mr. Bojangles," "Desperados (Waiting for a Train)," "Pissin' in the Wind," and "Up Against the Wall."

"There's an earthiness to my music," Walker said. "Most of my songs are about real people," he said. "I think I've accentuated the fact that it's okay to be yourself and be proud of it and that's what I try to talk about and also the little things that go on in your life."

Walker, who is 50, has been playing his music for 25 years and in that time he has put out 23 albums. "We play a variety of songs," Walker said. "We don't just stand there and beat one after the other that sound the same. We've been playing this stuff for 25 years and there is just a mixture of stuff in it. I've had people come up to me and say 'I don't like country music, but I like what you do.'"

Walker said most of his songs are about his travels and the interesting people that he has met along the way, which have included everyone from the local bartender to Nolan Ryan. "They say if you live in Texas long enough Jerry Jeff will write a song about you," Walker said. "I get around to everybody eventually."

Walker lives in Austin with his wife Susan, who is his manager and runs their record label Tried & True. "She pays all the bills and I dream up all the songs," Walker said. "We book our own gigs, we're our own travel agency and publishing company. It's a cottage industry as they say. We have about five or six people in the office and when the U.P.S. guy comes up he just drops off our mail and then he uses my bathroom and leaves. It's real casual."

Walker said he enjoys living in Austin because of

the unique blend of people. "It's a real pretty city, and I like the people because it has the college people to support what you do," Walker said. "It's a real vibrant community and there are some really neat people walking around here."

Behind Walker is his current recording band, Gonzo Compadres, which is made up of different musicians from his previous bands.

Walker said all members sing and play, and the song lyrics come from not only Walker, but sometimes even his friends. "Its got to be something I can get my hands on and say yeah, that's something I would have done or would have said," Walker said. "If it's something that maybe I would have said then I do the song," Walker said. "If its not then I write the ones that kinda fill it all in. That's usually the criteria."

Walker and the Gonzo Compadres average about ten dates a month and they have played everywhere from Texas' oldest dance hall, Gruene Hall, to Carnegie Hall. "I play it all," Walker said. "It doesn't really matter, I mean once people are listening and the mood is right, you just play."

Walker said he like to go back to places like Gruene Hall and Luckenbach to record songs. "It's always fun to have some kind of memories about the recordings besides just the business of it," Walker said. "I like getting lost in the place that I'm recording. So I like the fact that the setting takes over and we just play."

One thing that has not changed in Walker is his dream of seeing the world. "I get lots of magazines, mostly Caribbean and around the world types. I always pull things out of the travel section to show Susan, and I always tell her, 'We gotta get there, we just have to go.'"

Walker not only travels, tours and keeps his business management straight, but he also is the host for Texas Connection. This television show is shot in Austin and focuses on local events and musicians. "We're two years into it and I think it's doing okay, I mean the fans like it," Walker said. "We try to let the local singers and songwriters come up for interviews, but mainly we just let them play. This is the first time we've had a host and I guess they just want to give it more of a Texas feel."

Getting across a Texas feeling is something Walker does without even realizing. Fans from all over



Jerry Jeff Walker brings his unique blend of country music and storytelling to Hurricane Harry's this Sunday night.

the world feel as if they know Walker personally. "I've always said I probably driven have of my fans home personally," Walker said. "I used to go home with all of them in the 70s, but I got a little tired."

Walker said one of the main reasons for his success is due to his music taste.

"I'm always liking songs," Walker said. "Whether it's country, rock, or folk, I mean if it's good music I like it. I don't just stick to one type of music, I like it all."

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