

Joe Ely – Bio

Joe Ely was born in Amarillo, Texas on February 7th 1947 and lived “about half a block from Route 66” till he was eleven, at which time his family moved to Lubbock, Texas. His parents owned a piano, so there was always music in Ely household, although according to Joe the music tended to be associated with “church gathering.” The youngster took violin lesson in second grade, and some four years later was tutored on pedal steel guitar for a short time. Eventually Joe turned to the guitar and from that point on, never looked back. By his mid-teens he was playing in local clubs, his influences a mix of early rock ‘n’ roll [Bo Diddley], country [Jimmie Rodgers] and blues [Robert Johnson].

In High School he formed lasting friendships with Jimmie Dale Gilmore and George “Butch” Hancock. By his late teens he was played in clubs in Dallas/Fort Worth and Houston, and eventually ended up “almost broke and without a guitar” in Los Angeles. Like Woody Guthrie, Ely spent a couple of years *riding the rails* between California and Texas. In 1970 he worked a summer with Joe Papp’s New York based Shakespeare Theatre Company and toured Europe with them. Later, in New Mexico, he joined the Ringling Brother Circus and tended horses, a period that gave rise to his “The Indian Cowboy.” Three months later Ely quit and began scufflin’ around once more. By late 1971 Ely was back in Lubbock living in a house on 14th Street, with some like-minded individuals. They included Messrs. Hancock and Gilmore, plus saw player Steve Wesson, and mandolinist Tony Pearson. The Flatlander’s took their name from the local topography. Although they made a number of recordings during the short spell they were together, it wasn’t until 1980 that British based imprint, Charly Records, released **“One More Road.”** The song collection, which contained Hancock and Gilmore penned originals, but none by Ely, had been cut at Shelby Singleton’s Studio in Nashville in February 1972. A decade later Rounder Records issued the disc in the States titled **“More A Legend Than A Band.”** According to *that legend*, The Flatlanders were late additions to the bill of the first Kerrville Folk Festival in 1972. In subsequent years they would occasionally return to the Festival for a *reunion set*.

When The Flatlanders split up, Joe formed a band that included Lloyd Maines [pedal steel], Jesse Taylor [guitar], Steve Keeton [drums] and Gregg Wright [bass]. That line-up recorded Joe’s self-titled debut album for MCA, which was produced by Chip Young, and the ten songs were penned by Messrs. Ely, Hancock and Gilmore. Ponty Bone [accordion] later joined the band. **“Live Shots”** was recorded in England where Ely toured with The Clash. The American version of the album contained a 7”, 4 track EP. **“Hi Res”** an explorative album that featured Austin based jazz band Passenger, and is the only Ely recording never to be issued on CD. For a time Ely worked with guitarists Charlie and Will Sexton, and then formed another band featuring David Grissom [guitar], Davis McLarty [drums] and Jimmy Pettit [bass]. That aggregation recorded a quartet of albums beginning with **“Lord Of The Highway”** and ending with **“Love And Danger.”** Grissom departed to work with John Mellencamp and, Ely an astute judge of lead guitarists, recruited Ian Moore. **“Lord Of The Highway”** and **“Dig All Night”** were released by Hightone in the States and by Demon in the UK. Beginning with **“Letter To Laredo,”** Ely has employed sidemen *old and new*. Jesse Taylor, Lloyd Maines and David Grissom have contributed to the sessions, alongside new pickers like Rafael Gayol [drums] and Gary Herman [bass]. Ely’s guests have included Bruce Springsteen, Messrs. Gilmore and Hancock, and Raul Malo [Mavericks]. **“Live At The Cambridge Folk Festival”** was recorded in 1990 during Ely’s solo appearance at England’s premier summer folk festival.

In 1998 Ely teamed up with Los Lobos alumni, David Hidalgo and Cesar Rosas, as well as Freddy Fender, Flaco Jiminez, Ruben Ramos and Rick Trevino, to record the Tex-Mex influenced collection **“Los Super Seven.”** The disc subsequently won the 1998 Grammy for “Mexican-American Record Of The Year.”

The trigger for the second-coming of The Flatlanders was the inclusion of their **“South Winds Of Summer”** on the soundtrack album for the movie, **The Horse Whisperer** [1998]. In the Spring of Y2K The Flatlanders played gigs in twenty U.S. cities. *“We started in Texas and played about five or six places. Then we went up to Chicago, Minneapolis and Detroit. We couldn’t have asked for a better reception.”* The band undertook subsequent Stateside tours, and in 2002 issued their sophomore disc **“Now Again.”**

In this multi-media age, Joe Ely is a multi-media artist. Late last century he took the part of Petrified Paul in the yet to be commercially released, Dwight Yoakam movie **“South Of Heaven, West Of Hell”** which starred Billy Bob Thornton, Bridgit Fonda and Peter Fonda. Ely has performed in a number of plays written by Kimmie Rhodes and Joe Sears, including **“Small Town Girl”** and **“Hillbilly Heaven.”** In 1994, at the Lincoln Centre in New York, Ely took the male lead opposite Jo Harvey Allen [Terry Allen’s wife] in a production of **“Chippy – Diaries Of A West Texas Hooker.”** Currently ready for publication is Ely’s

journal/diary “**Ripened, Seasoned and Salted**” featuring “day-to-day events on the road, all the way back to before I was travelling with a band.” Wild About Music, an Austin, Texas gallery that is oriented toward musicians who do art, put on a show of Ely originals in Y2K.

Ely re-ignited his solo career with “**Streets of Sin**” which was released by Rounder Records in the early summer of 2003. The Flatlanders’ third album and second recording for New West Records, “**Wheels Of Fortune**” was released in late January 2004. The fourteen tracks included new songs as well as material drawn for their extensive, individual song catalogues. In the early summer of 2004, The Flatlanders issued a sixteen-track live collection, recorded in Austin, Texas on June 8th 1972 at *The One Knite Dive and Tavern* on Red River. This old recording came to light in 2003, and the original tape was subsequently purchased by Messrs. Ely, Gilmore and Hancock, and was then released on CD by the New West label. Ely appeared on the third Los Super Seven recording “**Heard It On The X,**” which also featured vocal contributions from Rodney Crowell, Lyle Lovett, John Hiatt, Raul Malo and the late Freddy Fender [d. 2006].

Early 2007 saw the appearance of two new Joe Ely solo recordings. Released by Ely’s own label Ride ‘Em Records the studio recording “**Happy Songs From Rattlesnake Gulch**” featured new material, while “**Silver City: Pearls From The Vault, Vol. 1**” featured songs dating from the early/mid nineteen seventies. Formerly titled “**Ripened, Seasoned and Salted,**” in early March 2007 University of Texas Press published Ely’s diary “**Bonfire Of Roadmaps.**” Two spoken word CD’s, extracts from “**Bonfire Of Roadmaps,**” were scheduled for release in early June. Respectively titled “**Iron Rhinos**” and “**Xpedition Mpossible**” they never appeared, and neither did the album “**Loretta**” – touted on Ely’s web site as ‘the earliest appearance of the Queen of Fine’ – it was scheduled for an August 1st 2007 release. Mid-March 2008 did see the appearance of a disc credited jointly to Joe Ely and accordionist/backing vocalist Joel Guzman. The thirteen-song “**Live Cactus!**” was recorded at the Cactus Café on the campus of the University of Texas in Austin, and featured a number of previously unrecorded songs.

Discography :

with The Flatlanders : “**One More Road**” [UK] [1980] aka “**More A Legend Than A Band**” [USA] [1990] ; “**Now Again**” [2002] ; “**Wheels Of Fortune**” [2004] ; “**Live ‘72**” [2004] :
with Los Super Seven : “**Los Super Seven**” [1998] ; “**Heard It On The X**” [2005] :
Solo : “**Joe Ely**” [1977] ; “**Honky Tonk Masquerade**” [1978] ; “**Down On The Drag**” [1979] ; “**Live Shots**” [1980] ; “**Musta Notta Gotta Lotta**” [1981] ; “**Hi Res**” [1984] ; “**Lord Of The Highway**” [1987] ; “**Dig All Night**” [1988] ; “**Live At Liberty Lunch**” [1990] ; “**Love And Danger**” [1992] ; “**Letter To Laredo**” [1995] ; “**Twist In The Wind**” [1998] ; “**Live At The Cambridge Folk Festival**” [1998] ; “**Live At Antone’s**” [2000] ; “**Streets Of Sin**” [2003] ; “**Happy Songs From Rattlesnake Gulch**” [2007] ; “**Silver City: Pearls From The Vault, Vol. 1**” [2007] ; “**Live Cactus!**” [2008] :

Arthur Wood.

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