

# Kerrville Folk Festival 2010

## MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND



"Welcome Home" sign at main gate into Quiet Valley Ranch campground.

### DAY 1 - THURSDAY MAY 27

When it's Whitsun in the United Kingdom, it's Memorial Day weekend in the United States, and time once again for the Kerrville Folk Festival which this year celebrated its 39th consecutive year. As much as it is a music event the Kerrville Folk Festival is a family reunion, and the sign at the campground entrance reads: 'Welcome Home.' For eighteen-days and 24/7 the festival's Quiet Valley Ranch becomes a self-contained functioning community. It's appropriate therefore that Joe Jenks, a 2008 Kerrville New Folk Song Contest finalist, and compere of this year's first official event—the Ballad Tree Song Session on Chapel Hill—opened proceedings by performing a new composition titled *Home*. An open air service is held on Chapel Hill each Sunday, hence its name. Sadly, the Ballad Tree, a once sturdy oak, was struck by lightning just before the 1993 festival and within a few years died.

A handful of regional performers were present including recent Wildflower Music & Arts Festival Song Contest winner Grace Pettis, who performed her recently composed, traditional-sounding ballad *Yellow Apples*. Later she sang *Abilene*, a song that warrants the description astounding. Carrie Elkin was also present. A few weeks away from recording her fifth solo album, Elkin performed the spiritually-inflected *Lift Up The Anchor* followed by *St. Louis*. Cards on the table, in my book Grace and Carrie are already mainstage performers. Both aspiring Austin-based musicians, Chris Jamison's *Road To Ruin* is worthy of mention, while Brain Douglas Phillips' trump card was his powerful baritone voice. Mainstage

performers who contributed to the Ballad Tree's informal in-the-round format included James Durst and Jack Hardy.

Mainstage has begun at 7pm for the past handful of years and the first artist, Brooklyn, New York-based Ana Egge, mainly performed material from her 2009 release *ROAD TO MY LOVE*. She also performed *Fairest Of Them All*, which Slaid Cleaves included on *UNSUNG* (2006), and encored with the title song from her 1997 debut *RIVER UNDER THE ROAD*. Next onstage was 1977 Kerrville New Folk Song Contest winner George



Grace Pettis performs at Ballad Tree Song Sharing on Chapel Hill.

Enslé, followed by vocal harmony trio Big Wide Grin. Prior to the evening's headliners Micky and the Motorcars, the similarly five-piece Austin Lounge Lizards delivered a typical high-energy set of musical mayhem and lyrical mirth. The Lizards have just released their 30th Anniversary DVD.

Hailing from Stanley, Idaho, but based in Austin for close on a decade, Micky Braun is the band's lead singer. The Motorcars are, his guitarist brother Gary—their older siblings Willie and Cody helm Austin band Reckless Kelly—plus Kris Farrow (guitar), Mark McCoy (bass) and Shane Vannerson (drums). With

a catalogue of five albums and an exhaustive touring schedule, their set merged original material with some astute covers. The latter included Dylan's *Girl From The North Country*, a truly passionate revision of the late John Stewart's *July You're A Woman*, and *Hickory Wind*. They encored with an extended version of Paul Simon's *Mrs. Robinson* and called back for a second time merged the 1950s country classics—Harlan Howard's *Heartaches By The Number* and Melvin Endsley's *Singing The Blues*.

### DAY 2 - FRIDAY MAY 28

In an early May e-mail Waterbug Records founder Andrew Calhoun urged me to check Joe Crookston and he wasn't wrong. Best I can establish at this point, Ohio-bred Crookston has released five albums the most recent being *FALL DOWN AS THE RAIN* (2004) and *ABLE BAKER CHARLIE & DOG* (2008). Launching his set with *I Sing/Lay It Down Tonight*, when he announced that he was currently based out of Ithaca, New York one person in the audience cheered and raising his arm Joe intoned: 'Thank you very much.' His finely-detailed *John Jones* recalls the era of the underground railroad, while stunned audience silence

followed Joe's announcement that during the nine years he lived in Seattle—'I spent a year in jail.' Pausing, he added: 'working with detained youths.' *Freddy The Falcon* poignantly recalls one wayward youth's words: 'So I sneak me a pencil, you got to swear not to tell, And at night I draw the falcon on the walls of my cells,' which is followed by the repeated: 'Flying like this gets me out of here.' I have to say that every darned song Joe Crookston delivered was a keeper.

It's always great to see John Flynn and he did not disappoint.

Opening with *Go Wake A Heart*, a call to harmoniously reach out to one another, he followed with *The Prodigal Father* that features the neatest lyrical twist I've heard in years. The humorous *Chicken House* line: 'Dog dies, man hurt, chicken house burns' was inspired by a newspaper headline. Furthermore proving that songs remain living entities, 'Please twitter or text' has been added to *Two Letters*, a song from John's 1997 self-titled album. Flynn encored with *Old Paint*, a song Chris LeDoux covered. Introducing the song he revealed that while the mode of transport appeared to be equine, in truth it was penned as a



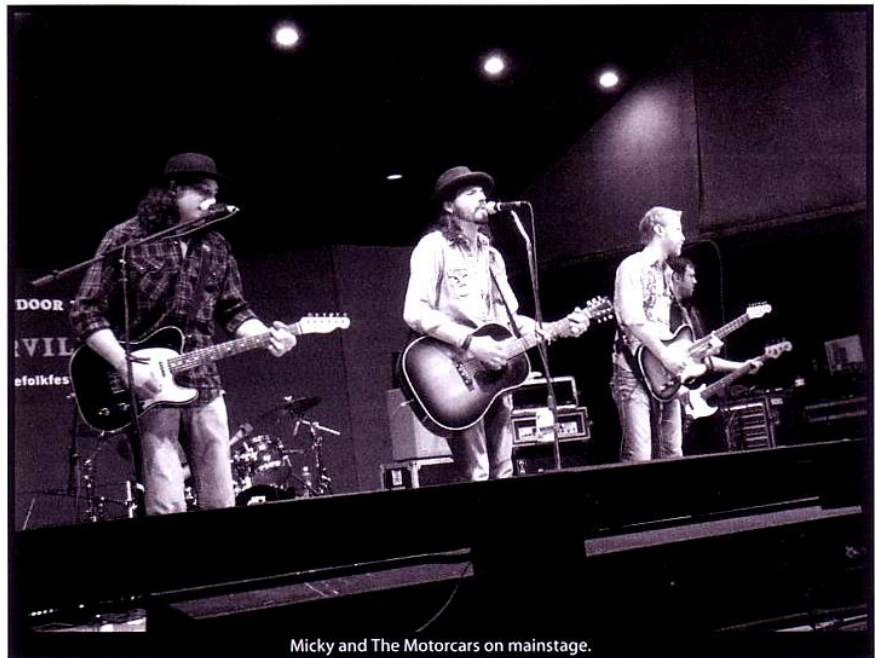
tribute to his old truck.

It's all been said about Sara Hickman, a million times over. On occasions, she can be dynamite, and for the current Texas State Musician of the Year this was one of those nights. Sara was supported by a strident sounding quartet composed of Jon Sanchez (guitar), Dony Wynn (drums), Gray Parsons (keyboards) and Mark Addison (bass)—producer of her latest release *ABSENCE OF BLAME* recently reviewed in *Maverick*. Having opened with *Broken* she was joined on vocals by her older daughter Lili for *Size 6 Dress* a cautionary tale about plastic surgery. Accompanied by a vocal cast of family and friends, Sara's rendition of the Grace Pettis' *Love Is There* will long remain in my memory as a 2010 festival moment.

After a short set my Ashville-based Chris Rosser, festival favourite Tom Prasada-Rao delivered a typically rhythm-driven set, and the second day was closed by Randy Rogers and Brady Black, his fiddle playing sidekick.

### DAY 3 - SATURDAY MAY 29

Saturday kicked off at noon in the campgrounds at Threadgill Theatre with the first day of the two-day annual New Folk Songwriting Contest. It was compered as usual with aplomb and a deal of humour by the legendary Steve Gillette. Sixteen musicians performed the two songs they submitted, before a panel of three judges—hit songwriter Susan Gibson, movie star/musician Ronny Cox and 1993 New Folk winner Tom Prasada-Rao. Sixteen musicians perform at the same time tomorrow. At the same venue there followed a two-hour children's concert which opened with a high-energy set from the Sara Hickman-led trio Family Time Rocks, followed by Ellis Paul—aided by



Micky and The Motorcars on mainstage.

Don Conoscenti (guitar) and Radoslav Lorkovic (accordion)—and finally, John Flynn.

They 'grow their own crops' at Kerrville and Saturday evening's bill began with the mainstage debut by 2008 New Folk winner BettySoo. The evening's acts proved to be heavy with electric guitar aficionados, Texas legends Will Sexton and Jeff Plankenhorn forming part of this talented Asian American's band alongside Joshua Zarbo (bass) and BettySoo's husband Dave Terry (drums). Her eleven-song set included the New Folk entry *Never The Pretty Girl* and Dylan's *Buckets Of Rain*.

Austin based trio porterdavis delivered an energetic set of blues tunes, and were followed by the Burns Sisters—Marie, Annie and Jeanie. The girls were aided by Radoslav Lorkovic (accordion), and episode two of guitar heroes in the form of Andrew Hardin and John Inmon. Taking turns on lead vocal, in a harmony rich set the Ithaca, New York-based trio kicked off with Marie's *Wild Flower Honey*, and included Leonard Cohen's *Democracy*, Big Bill Broonzy's (*When Things Go Wrong*) *It Hurts Me Too*, Ella Jeanie's song for her daughter, and they encored with the anthemic Annie Burns/Annie Tate co-write *God Made Woman*.

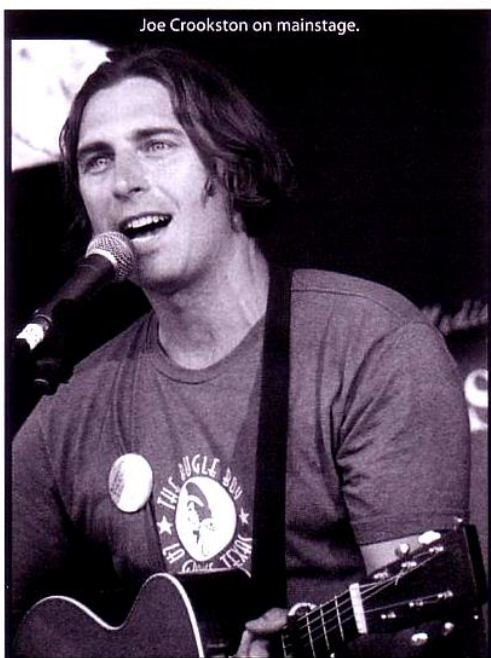
Jam band Eclectica preceded Saturday's headliner Jimmy LaFave. Over the years I've seen a number of musicians support Texas born/Oklahoma bred LaFave, who recently released the retrospective *FAVOURITES 1992 -2001*. That said, Jimmy's current band surely qualifies as one of his finest with Radoslav Lorkovic (keyboards, accordion), Bobby Kallus (drums), Glenn Schuetz (upright bass) and one of only two

guitarists in the world that I would pay money to go hear—the totally unique John Inmon. Having introduced his band and added: 'Let's start and build to a dull roar' LaFave opened with the ballad *Never Is A Moment*. That dull roar became apparent on the third offering, Fats Domino's *I'm Ready*, which included a truly man possessed keyboard outro from Radoslav. LaFave's set also included his 1987 New Folk entry *Only One Angel*, Dylan's *Just Like A Woman* and accompanied by the Burns Sisters he encored with Dino Valenti's *Get Together*.

### DAY 4 - SUNDAY MAY 30

On my score sheet, Day 1 of New Folk 2010 threw up five potential winners. In a quality field it was hard to place a hair between some entrants, and a further half-dozen winners surfaced on Sunday. The six 2010 winners were announced partway through the evening concert, namely Jon Brooks (King City, Ontario, Canada), Dan Colehour (Nashville, Tennessee), Andy Gullahorn (Nashville, Tennessee), Kate Klim (Boston, Massachusetts), Kim Richardson (Mountain Home, Arkansas) and Michael Troy (Fall River, Massachusetts). Five of the foregoing six were on my list of eleven.

Hailing from Builth Wells in Wales, Jack Harris was a 2005 New Folk winner before majoring in English at Oxford University. He launched his mainstage debut with the melodically syncopated and lyrically sensual *Red's On The Bed* from his Eric Taylor-produced debut album *BROKEN YELLOW* (2006). Joined by Radoslav Lorkovic (keyboards, accordion) he performed *Oast Houses*, a quintessential rural English song portrait, and followed with the new numbers *Easter Morning*, *Potato Flower* and *Big Umbrella*. Jack's *Girl With A Hay Rake*



Joe Crookston on mainstage.





The Indigo Girls with guests – L. to R. Terri Hendrix, Amy Ray, Emily Saliers and Lloyd Maines

confirms that he's a gifted writer in the mould of Nick Drake, and he closed with an intricate and adept rendition of J. J. Cale's *Magnolia*.

Where the underlying theme on Saturday evening had been appearances by accomplished guitar slingers, many of Sunday's performers hailed from Georgia and in two cases, specifically, Atlanta. Jack's mentor, Eric Taylor, is one of the latter, although he has resided in Texas for much of his life. Taylor began with *Carnival Jim and Jean*, and as the final chords faded, with a wicked twinkle in his eye, he added ironically: 'Thought I'd start with a happy and jumpy song to get you in the mood.' Taylor is currently honing a play that merges narrative and song, and from that project he whisked the audience back to 1971 and the Old Quarter in Houston. A woman who, year-long, sat beside the Quarter's warm popcorn machine—'In summer we thought she was messed up'—would repeatedly request Townes Van Zandt sing: 'a happy song,' to which Townes would retort: 'These are the happy songs.' Van Zandt's *The Highway Kind* followed and joined by his wife Susan Lindfors (backing vocals), Eric performed *All So Much Like Me* and *Whooping Crane*, the latter recently covered by his friend Lyle Lovett. Handing his guitar to his wife, Eric departed and joined by Jack Harris, Susan performed the Box Tops 1967 US number one pop single *The Letter*.

Atlanta-bred Caroline Aiken delivered a stirring set of rowdy blues and tender ballads. Then it was Terri time! Terri Hendrix was supported, as ever, by Lloyd Maines (guitars) plus Glenn Fukunaga (bass) and John Silver (drums). Having delivered *Wail Theory*, Terri's musical merging of two Dorothy Parker poems, which appears on her new album *CRY TILL YOU LAUGH*, she performed the high energy *Slow Down*—a contradiction in terms of its title. Hendrix's set also included *The Spiritual Kind*, *Found The*

*Lions*, *Wallet* and she closed with *Hole In My Pocket*.

The Indigo Girls much anticipated hour-long Kerrville set—a crowd of Woodstock proportions filled the Quiet Valley Ranch arena—began with Emily Saliers taking the lead on *Hammer And A Nail*. During their ten-song set, which included *Second Time Around* and *Fleet Of Hope* from last year's POSEIDON AND THE BITTER BUG as well as familiar fare like *Galileo*, they were joined on a couple of occasions by Lloyd Maines (lap slide guitar) and Terri Hendrix (harmonica, backing vocals). When Amy Ray departed the stage at one point, Emily was joined by their early career mentor Caroline Aiken, and the pair performed the latter's *Another On The Rise*. Encoring with *Salty South* from POSEIDON, the Indigo Girls ended their Kerrville debut.

## DAY 5 - MONDAY MAY 31

Memorial Day normally witnesses a winding down in the crowd size and this year was no exception. Having taken the stage Dalis Allen, the festival's producer, general manager, empress and mainstage compere, enquired if there were any service veterans in the audience. A number stood up and with each Burns Sister paired at a microphone with, respectively, Radoslav Lorkovic, Ellis Paul and Don Conoscenti, the crowd rose to its feet and joined them in singing *The Star-Spangled Banner*.

The previous day Jon Vezner (guitar, piano) had performed in Morocco, on a bill with BB King and Elton John. Joined by long-time friend and co-writer Don Henry (guitar, mandolin), despite Vezner's obvious jet lag, they

delivered an engaging set peppered with co-writes familiar or rarely heard (for example, respectively the poignant *Where Have You Been?* and the baseball themed *The Show*), as well as pitching in songs penned individually. Regarding the latter, Henry delivered the pathos filled *Harley*, while Vezner aired the Quiet Valley Ranch inspired *Welcome Home*. The pair encored with their *Beautiful Fool*.

Airing material from his new album, *THE DAY AFTER EVERYTHING CHANGED*, as well as familiar classics such as *Alice's Champagne Palace*, Ellis Paul, accompanied by his buddies Radoslav Lorkovic (piano, accordion) and Don Conoscenti (guitar) and on a couple of occasions by the Burns Sisters, encored with *Take All The Sky You Need*. BABY O!, Brooks Williams' new album, was recorded in England. A lighting-fast blues guitarist he drew on songs for that disc and encored with the familiar *Old Blue*.

The Waymores are, respectively Don Henry (Willy Waymore), Sally Barris (Sister Waymore) and Tom Kimmel (Pops Waymore). Where the second evening had thrown up Joe Crookston as a quality act, the ten-song set by this recently formed trio of Nashville-based writers most definitely left this scribe wanting way more. Their debut album is scheduled for an autumn release, and one of the songs they performed, *All Kinds Of Kinds*, is currently available on their web site as a download. Headlining the final night of the festival's first weekend was the three decades young Denton, Texas-based polka band Brave Combo. Led by vocalist, Carl Finch (guitar, piano), and featuring a three-piece brass section, plus bass and drums they delivered a toe-tapping set that drew on practically every known genre of music.

Music continued for another thirteen days on the Quiet Valley Ranch. That said, there's no substitute for being there and experiencing what remains the finest folk songwriter festival on Earth.

**Arthur Wood**



Bobby Kalus, Radoslav Lorkovic, Glenn Schuetz, Jimmy LaFave and John Innnon on mainstage.