

RAY WYLIE HUBBARD – A Career Overview, Part 1

Ray Wylie Hubbard first saw the light of day in Hugo, Oklahoma on Wednesday 13th November 1946. The town lies a mere ten miles beyond the North Texas state limit. While Ray Wylie's early years were spent in the state of his birth, by his teens the Hubbard family had crossed the border. He attended Adamson High School in the Dallas, Texas suburb of Oak Cliff. *"Michael [Martin] Murphey, (the late) B. W. Stevenson and Larry Groce all went to the same High School. When I was a junior, Michael was a senior, B. W. a sophomore and Larry a freshman. Michael was a member of a folk group, the Dallas County Jug Band, so I got in with that scene and formed my own trio. The late John Vandiver was in Michael's band. We mostly played assemblies. There was also a coffeehouse in Dallas named **The Rubiyat** and I started gigging there. Artists like Jerry Jeff Walker and Ramblin' Jack Elliott would come through town."*

By his mid-teens, Ray Wylie was the proud owner of a Martin D-18 acoustic guitar. In subsequent summers, Hubbard would travel to the resort of Red River, New Mexico with his trio. The other protagonists in Three Faces West were, Rick Fowler and Wayne Kidd. *"It was kind of Kingston Trio stuff, only a little deeper than that. We cut an album by ourselves and pressed up about 5000 copies that we sold at our gigs. Our big thing was, Michael Murphey would give us his new songs. He would write a song like "Five O'Clock on a Texas Morning," then call us up and let us hear it."* During those summer evenings, Three Faces West performed in a family night club, and spent the daytime manning the Jaycee tourist information booth, staging mock gun fights or driving holidaymakers around local places of interest. When term-time rolled around, Hubbard headed back home. He went on to major in English at the University of Texas at Arlington.

You will have noted in the previous paragraph, that Hubbard acknowledged Michael Martin Murphey as a major influence on his songwriting. As for penning "Redneck Mother," still probably his best known song, Ray Wylie recalled *"I don't know how that song came about. I began it when I was up in Red River in a place called the D Bar D. Originally it was kind of a pretty song. My bass player started playing for Jerry Jeff and sang "Redneck Mother" for him. I'd formed the Cowboy Twinkies by then. I didn't have a second verse, so Jerry Jeff called me on the phone from the studio. I made up a second verse on the phone, so the song makes no sense whatsoever. The thing is, it's one of those songs where I can sing it every night without difficulty. If it had been a song like "Feelings," I couldn't sing that every night. If it was a real serious song that I was known for, then I could get bored with performing it. It's a lot of fun to sing and it's nice that people know me for it."*

Jerry Jeff Walker included the song on his 1973 album **"Viva Terlingua,"** although the album liner title was "Up Against The Wall Red Neck." Other artists who have covered the song include, Bobby Bare and New Riders of the Purple Sage. *"The Cowboy Twinkies were together for quite a while, and we eventually got a record deal in 1974. We opened a bunch of shows for Willie Nelson, just because he liked us. I found most of the members of the Twinkies when I was up in Red River with Three Faces West. Terry Joe "Buffalo" Ware was playing in a rock n' roll band called The Blades at that time. At the end of that summer, a guy called me up and said he had a gig for a country and western dance. I'd never done a dance before, because I'd always done folk music. I told him I could get a band, because the money he offered was pretty good. I called "Buffalo" and he said he could get a drummer and a bass player. That was how the Twinkies were formed, in about 1972. The way we eventually got our record deal, was that we'd gone down to Austin to a place called Pecan Street Studios. We used Chet Himes who went on to engineer the first Christopher Cross album. The one that won the Grammy. It cost us about \$15,000 of our own money to cut the album and we sent a tape of it to a number of people. Atlantic, Discreet [the late Frank Zappa's label] and Warner Reprise made us offers. We eventually went with Reprise. Originally Bob Johnson was going to produce it, but that didn't work out. Finally we decided on Michael Brovsky and went to Nashville to cut the record. We figured that if Brovsky could make Jerry Jeff sound good, then we'd sound like The Beatles. Can you put a ha, ha in there."*

Following on from that *tongue in cheek* comment, Hubbard went on to give the following assessment of the only Twinkies release, *"The producer, the engineer, the musicians were very talented, very good people but it wasn't the album we wanted to make. I loved the album we cut in Austin by ourselves."* Half of the ten tracks on **"Ray Wylie Hubbard & The Cowboy Twinkies"** were penned by Hubbard, with another three co-penned, respectively, with Rick Fowler, Jimmy Johnson and Twinkie, Terry Joe "Buffalo" Ware. A *live* rendition of the

opening song on the album "West Texas Country Western Dance Band," appeared on the 1974 **"Live Highlights"** album from the Kerrville Folk Festival. Hubbard's former band, Three Faces West, also feature on the disc.

Ray's next recording, a solo set titled **"Off The Wall,"** appeared on Willie Nelson's ill-fated Lone Star Records. The latter outlet was briefly part of the Mercury/Phonogram group of labels. *"Willie Nelson called me up in January of 1978. His deal with CBS was due to run out in September that year. Polygram was courting Willie, because he was getting real hot. They even offered him his own label. He asked me if I had anything recorded, as he needed something out in around a month's time. I told him that I had a bunch of demo tapes from four or five-year old sessions in Tyler and Austin. Over the next two weeks, I collected those demos, remixed them, cut some new material in two Dallas studios, shot the album cover and sent the lot to Polygram in Chicago."* The disc was released that summer, along with Lone Star titles by Cooder Browne, Steven Fromholz, Bill Callery and the Geezinslaw Brothers. That September, Willie signed a new contract with CBS and the whole Lone Star project fell apart. Now titled "Redneck Mother," *that* song opens the set and is featured along with half a dozen other Hubbard originals or co-written compositions.

During the following year, Ray Wylie, supported by John Inmon, Bob Livingston and Donny Dolan, appeared on the Kerrville **"Live Highlights"** recording performing "Hello Early Morning." The foregoing musicians formed the core of The Lost Gonzo Band, at that time. Since Hubbard's previous album had consisted of recordings made at a number of Texas studios, it only seemed natural that he pursue that technique further. Prior to that year's Kerrville appearance, Hubbard cut three songs "live" at the Paladium in Dallas, Texas [on April 14th 1979, to be exact], while the remaining material resulted from sessions at January Sound in Dallas, plus Austin studio's, Wink Tyler and Hound Sound. Titled **"Something About The Night,"** and released by the Renegade label later that year, the ten track recording was co-produced by Hubbard and his band. Paul Percy replaced Dolan on drums, for the album. The closing cut on **"Something About The Night,"** was "(The Last Recording of) Redneck Mother (Ever)." For Ray Wylie, the song was proving to be both, *his salvation* and *his cross to bear*. Then again, it was *putting bread* on his table. The album was mixed at Austin's Hound Sound, originally built and owned by the equally legendary, Willis Alan Ramsey. The 1982 Kerrville **"Live Highlights"** recording featured Ray Wylie performing "Dallas After Midnight."

Recorded at the long-gone Soap Creek Saloon in Austin on June 29th 1984, and featuring his latest band, The Love Wolves, Ray Wylie's next recording was appropriately titled **"Caught In The Act."** This album marked the birth of Ray Wylie's uniquely named record label, Misery Loves Company. *"A friend and fan of mine named Gary Allen, who is an estate agent down in Rockport, asked me if I had any live tapes. I told him that I didn't. He'd just sold two condominiums and bought a Mercedes. According to what he said, it had the best stereo system in the world. He asked me how much it would cost to record a good quality cassette of one of my shows. We set the thing up properly, with a mobile recording facility. After Gary got his cassette, we decided to press up 1000 copies of the recording in vinyl form."* The ten-track recording includes covers of David Halley's "Hard Livin'," Ben E. King's "Stand by Me" and four Hubbard composed originals. Though he doesn't appear on this recording, Halley was a member of Ray Wylie's road band for about a year.

Arthur Wood

Kerrville Kronikles 04/95, 10/95 & 07/01

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RAY WYLIE HUBBARD – A Career Overview, Part 2

Last week we covered the years 1946 to 1984, and journeyed with Ray from Oklahoma to Texas to New Mexico before he finally returned to the Lone Star state. Ray had just released the live recording "Caught In The Act", and a couple of years later his adopted home state celebrated its sesqui-centennial.....

Originally released on cassette only, to commemorate the sesqui-centennial of the birth of the state of Texas in 1986, **"A Tribute to Texas Music"** was recorded live at a concert held in the Austin Opera House on April 1st

that year. An augmented version of this charity recording, which first appeared on the SJM label, resurfaced in 1989, on the Tomato label. Country music contributors to both releases included Asleep at the Wheel, Mickey Newbury, Alex Harvey, Eliza Gilkyson, Rusty Wier and of course, our hero. While Hubbard's only contribution to the original tape was his "Texas Is A State of Mind," I'll leave you to guess which *anthem* was appended to the subsequent vinyl release.

Although he continued to gig within Texas on a regular basis, almost a decade passed before Hubbard's next solo set appeared. **"Lost Train of Thought"** was the title of Ray's sophomore disc on the Misery Loves Co. imprint. As Hubbard related to D magazine's Chris Tucker in 1993, *"Over the years, I kept doing the same thing and expecting different results. During my late 30's, I got divorced. My father died. Nights of drinking for fun turned into days of drinking to maintain."* In 1988, with the help of a 12-step recovery programme and the assistance of his second wife, Judy Stone, as well as a great deal of moral support from similarly afflicted musician friends, including the late Stevie Ray Vaughan, Hubbard broke his chain of dependency. He met Judy during one of his regular shows at Poor David's Pub in Dallas. *"Everybody was in a real goofy mood that night. I can't remember anything I said, but I went off on some real tangents and Judy liked it. She walked into my gig the next night and started grinning, and I started grinning. It just felt right."* They were married in 1989 and their son, Lucas Cole was born during the summer that Hubbard released his fifth solo recording, [if you count the Cowboy Twinkies disc, that is]. Self-produced, with "Buffalo" back in the fold on lead guitar, Hubbard composed all eleven cuts, including two co-writes with his old compatriot. Willie Nelson shared the vocal on "These Eyes," while "Wanna Rock and Roll" was destined to appear on Ray's next studio album. One thing was certain, Ray Wylie emerged from his [self-imposed] recording hiatus, as a vastly more mature songwriter. Let's explore the reasons. If quitting drinking involved a 12 step plan, three other significant events occurred in his life during the late eighties, that resulted in Hubbard's career rising *phoenix like* after going nowhere for two decades. Once sober, two books in particular, further aided his ongoing recovery. In James Allen's **"As A Man Thinketh"** Ray found the line, *"Fear and doubt are the things that limit us,"* while in Rainer Maria Rilke's **"Letters To A Young Poet,"** a similar line appeared - *"Our fears are like dragons guarding our most precious treasures."* So fear was the issue, and it lay hidden and took many forms. Fear lay in the prospect of relinquishing his dependence on artificial stimulants. Fear manifested itself in a reluctance to explore new boundaries as a writer. One by one, Hubbard defeated them. And that third factor? Unashamed, and for the first time in his life, at the age of 43, Ray took guitar lessons. The result - *a few well-chosen words and some new guitar chords* helped shape the complete songwriter.

"Loco Gringo's Lament," was released late 1994 by the now defunct San Marcos, Texas based label, Dejadisc. At the time of its release here's part of what I wrote about the disc in the Kerrville Kronikle, *"In a headlining capacity, "Loco Gringo's Lament" only brings Hubbard's tally of solo recordings to six, spread over two decades. Hardly what you'd call prolific, but then there have been years of darkness as well as light. That apart, I was once privileged to see the guy perform – at Kerrville circa '86, supported by Mr. Paul Percy and a single snare drum - and he was a hoot as well as being, musically hot. One of the festival highlights. Where "Lost Train Of Thought" was the opening gambit of his revival as a musician, this new set of twelve tunes marks the consummate return of a renaissance man. Aided by a Brian Hardin/Lloyd Maines' production, supported by a swathe of Austin's top flight acoustic players and not forgetting his guitar pickin', Oklahoma bred Twinkies buddy, Terry "Buffalo" Ware, the real power lies in Hubbard's mostly self-penned material. The lyricism displayed by this one time English major is stunning. The lessons learned during his renegade years are transferred to the characters portrayed in the opening pair of cuts. The Oklahoma gambler in "Dust Of The Chase" and the lover in "Just To Hold You." Hubbard jousts with his dark years in "Didn't Have A Prayer," while the light at the other end of the tunnel finds optimistic expression in "After The Fall." The title cut was penned following the premature death of a young Dallas based musician. You can probably figure out how and why, from the lines "Tempted by a thousand pleasures, Foolish comforts for the soul." To paraphrase the closing cut - Ray Wylie Hubbard is "The Messenger." Heed what he has to say."* Reviewers welcomed **"Loco Gringo's Lament"** with almost universal approval and, virtually overnight, the pace of Hubbard's career leapt from first gear to fourth. The fast lane beckoned, and this time, Ray wasn't going to let the aces he held slip through his fingers. To reinforce in Hubbard's new-found popularity, Dejadisc reissued **"Lost Train Of Thought"** the following year. Sadly, the label closed its doors to business in late 1996. Following a stint with Koch, the Dejadisc owner, Steve Wilkison, currently oversees the operations of the Nashville based Eminent Record label.

Throughout his career Ray Wylie has been supported by some of the finest Texas musicians available. If there is one thing can be said about, "**Dangerous Spirits**," his 1997 debut for Rounder/Philo, it is that the solo stars *came out to play in droves*. Vocal support on his next Brain Hardin/Lloyd Maines production came from Tish Hinojosa, Jimmy LaFave, Lucinda Williams, Sara Hickman and Kevin Welch. Tony Joe White played acoustic guitar on "The Last Younger Son" while Dead Reckoning recording stars Mike Henderson and Kieran Kane provide stringed support on a couple of cuts.

Supported by a five-piece band that included Steve Bruton [guitar], Paul Percy [percussion], Chris Maresh [acoustic bass], Lisa Mednick [accordion, vocals] and Lloyd Maines [steel guitar], Hubbard recorded and released the ten cut "**Live At Cibolo Creek Country Club**" for his own label in 1998. Continental Record Services [CRS], the European arm of the Rounder empire of labels, subsequently released the disc to that market, later that year. On the Misery Loves Company liner the closing track was described as "The Obligatory Encore." I guess by now, I don't need to explain further.

Returning to the studio with Lloyd Maines, Ray co-produced the resulting 1999 release, "**Crusades Of The Restless Knights**." "**Dangerous Spirits**" and "**Crusades**" further consolidated Hubbard's emergence as a writer of quality material. He began touring on a national basis Stateside, and from the mid-nineties onward, he has regularly toured in Europe. Early July 2001 witnessed the release of Hubbard's first recording of the new millennium, "**Eternal And Lowdown**," his third Rounder/Philo disc Stateside. This eleven-track, blues flavored concoction features ten Hubbard originals and was produced by longtime Lucinda Williams sideman, Gurf Morlix. A review of the disc appears elsewhere in this publication.

One thing is certain, Hubbard has evolved into a fine autobiographical songwriter – he appears to recall his *dark years with clarity, and clearly advises no one to succumb to the temptation to go there*. I would however fail miserably in this insight into the world of Ray Wylie Hubbard, if I did not comment on his stage presence. Physically he may be tall and gangly, but his personality fills each and every stage he stands upon. What we're talking about here, is one hell of an amusing individual - a raconteur, no less - as well as a gutsy performer and classy songwriter. His approach to performing while consistently humorous, can also be tongue in cheek, and just when you think that he's made to many amusing comments, he'll sing a lyric that drains you emotionally. Ray employs the skill with precision perfect timing.

While researching this piece, I happened to peruse a map of Texas, and what should I notice but a lake and a town located on the East side of Dallas. The lake is named Ray Hubbard, while the town of Wylie lies on its western shore. A few years ago our hero lived in a Texas town that goes by the name of, Poetry. Don't you begin to wonder sometimes???

And finally. **Austin City Limits** is now in its 26th consecutive season of broadcasting. To date, it has abjectly failed to feature Ray Wylie Hubbard. With each passing year, and certainly since 1994, that omission becomes more glaring. Is there anyone out there listening.....????

Arthur Wood

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