

## Jimmy LaFave talks about his latest album "Texoma" - Part 1

*The interview with Jimmy LaFave took place in a quiet corner of the main foyer of the Y.O. Ranch Hotel, Kerrville, Texas on the morning of Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2001. Many thanks to Mark Shumate at Bohemia Beat and Val Denn for making the arrangements.*

***Considering your family history, Texoma is a pretty neat name for an album. I know there's a Lake Texoma. Is that where the title came from..***

Well, it's Texas and Oklahoma, that is where the lake thing came from, because it's on the border of the two states. There's even a town named Texoma. That happens a lot in the States.....cities and towns that are near the state line will take their name from both states, like Texarkana.....Texas, Arkansas and Louisiana.

***Who came up with the idea for the album artwork.***

I took the photos and I kind of had that dual-state idea.....then this really great guy named Bryan Peterson came up with the packaging. He's actually a really famous graphic artist.....he has a book that you can buy at Amazon.com [ED. NOTE The book is titled **Using Design Basics To Get Creative Results**]. He works out of Dallas and does a lot of major corporate stuff. He just wanted something to do that got him out of doing that type of stuff. He's used to big business accounts, and he loves music, is also a musician and has his own record. I met him when he designed a poster for this fundraiser. They called all the big graphic artists in Texas, and gave each one a different song.....like a Joe Ely song, a Robert Earl Keen song, and told them to interpret the song in a poster. He took one of my songs.....*The Open Road* and interpreted it. I really liked what he did. I don't remember, but it all kind of fell together somehow. He said, *"If you need your record designing, I'll do it."*

***Was this the first album cover he had done.***

Well, he did his own album cover, but I think this is really his first commercial cover. His album was not really a commercial release.

***You have really covered some odd songs on Texoma. Why did you decide to cut San Francisco.***

Because I had a keyboard player from Tulsa, Jim Downing, who played with us occasionally back when I lived in Oklahoma. He, at one time, was room-mates with Scott MacKenzie. Everything on the album kinda relates to Texas or Oklahoma, even if it is a skewed thing. I've always liked that song, and thought it had a good melody. I don't know.....I think the lyrics.....I understood that we got some E-Mails from Europe, and I think the record label there, Munich, wanted to leave the song off the European version. They said that the song was like a joke in Europe. It was a novelty song, with hippy dippy lyrics.

***But I suppose the song was a novelty from the viewpoint that, at one stage, it was a massive hit and that is often the kiss of death for anyone who tries to cover it at a later date.***

Well, you know it was a John Phillips song.....from the Mamas and Papas. The lyrics, if you've ever been to San Francisco, I think they really capture the city.....even now, it seems to me.....some of the lyric *"there's a new generation, with new expectations"* like we expect more out of our Government. It's kind of speaking out against the George W. thing and stuff. Like *"hey there's a new vibration,"* and *"people in motion."*

***Taken from that angle, I suppose what you have to do is forget about the period that inspired the lyric.....and take it purely as a reinterpretation of an old song.***

Yeah. The same thing happened with *Walk Away Renee*, when we did that, because a lot of people thought it was a sixties bubble-gum hit.

***Well we're talking about one of my all time favourite songs now.***

It was also a one hit wonder thing too. Just like *San Francisco*. When we cut both songs we tried to do them differently. We reinterpreted them.

***Where did you find the Gretchen Peters song On A Bus To St. Cloud. Did you have her album.***

No. Actually, I first heard that song flipping through the television channels one time. I heard Tricia Yearwood's version of it, so I rushed out and bought Gretchen's record. It shows the songwriter on CMT here. That's actually one of the things I do like about Country Music television network, because maybe I'll only like one song over a whole day, but at least if I like that song, it lists the songwriter. So I got Gretchen's record, and now I've got her new record [ED. NOTE. Gretchen's old album was titled **The Secret Of Life** while her new set is self-titled]. That's just a great song and I kinda thought it was a bigger hit for Tricia. Recently, I got to meet Gretchen in person, when we played The Bluebird in Nashville together, and she said the song only got up to like # 68, so it never really was a hit. She said she really liked the way I had done it, and that I had put some life back into it again. She thought the song was history. When I started doing it a year or so ago, whenever, I could tell immediately because people started requesting it. Then David Webb had the idea to insert the little Bill Staines instrumental tune, *Wind River Turnaround*, at the beginning. I'd always had him play that song, because I liked it, and sometimes I'd feature him playing it, on the piano, during shows. On Trish's record, and then on this little mix tape I had in the car, I had spliced on some other music from the soundtrack of this film called **The Way West**, that kind of segued into *St. Cloud*. Trish's record does it a little bit, where she has this string thing at the beginning. David and I were on the same wavelength, about the segue thing. Both melodies were in the same key, so we just did it.

***Britain is represented by Alvin Lee of Ten Years After. Were you a closet air guitarist in the sixties.***

I bet everybody in High School, at that time, had *Rock And Roll Music To The World*. He was like, the guy back then. That's another song, when I started thinking about it, on the original.....on his version he sings something about Texas.....on his intro. I kind of rewrote the intro and yelled out the names of a bunch of cities.....Dallas, Houston, Austin, Texoma. Made my own little intro part. On the original Ten Years After record he's saying something about "*we played rock'n'roll down in Texas.*" I get the vibe that he's saying "*the people said not to go there, but we had a great time, and we're going back again.*" That was kind of the Texas connection there, because he sang about Texas in *Rock And Roll Music To The World*.

***So were you a closet air guitarist in the sixties.***

Oh yeah. Yeah.

***I never realised till you mentioned it onstage last night, that Jimmy Webb was born in Oklahoma. The Moon Is A Harsh Mistress is a Jimmy Webb classic, so I guess the state of his birth is the connection.***

Yeah, yeah. I like a lot of Jimmy Webb's music. One of my favourite albums of the last ten years is his **Ten Easy Pieces** record. His version of *Galveston* is like totally.....it shows you like, because that was a pop hit for Glen Campbell.....[Jimmy sings the opening line] and I think people only really thought about the sea. If you hear Webb's version you realise it is about the Vietnam War. It's about a soldier. It's about somebody really missing home. One of my all time favourite versions of a song, is him singing *Galveston*. If you're really into Jimmy Webb there's a great article in the current issue of **Oklahoma Today** magazine. A ten-page article Greg Johnson did on Jimmy Webb with photos. He lists the ten greatest Jimmy Webb covers of all time. Arlo Guthrie did *Oklahoma Nights*. There's even a seventeen-minute version of *By The Time I Get To Phoenix* that Isaac Hayes did.

***My first real recollection of Jimmy Webb is when the Fifth Dimension covered his songs.***

And he was writing those songs when he was twenty-one years old. *By The Time I Get To Phoenix, Wichita Lineman* all that stuff.....he is a complete genius. He's playing Oklahoma this month, and I think they have just put him in the Oklahoma Music Hall of Fame. There's actually a stretch of I-40 through Oklahoma where, when you first come into the state, Roger Miller was born in that town, next town was Jimmy Webb's birthplace. A few towns up is Garth's hometown. Then a few towns more is Kevin Welch's home, then the next town is where Woody Guthrie was born. It's like a music highway through there.

*to be continued*

Arthur Wood.  
Kerrville Kronikles 10/01

1520 Words.

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## **Jimmy LaFave talks about his latest album “Texoma” - Part 2**

*This week Jimmy continues talking about the songs he recorded for Texoma.*

***The Red Dirt Song. There’s a reference to Dylan in the first verse. Was that deliberate.***

Yeah, yeah, just a little fun reference. That song came about because David Webb was living down in Tallahassee and he brought me back some Tupelo Honey. They make it from the Tupelo tree, down in the swamps. About a week later I was up where Bob Childers lives out in the woods and they had made some Persimmon wine, with some Persimmons they had on the property. So “persimmon wine, tupelo honey”.....the whole idea kind of took off from there. I was kinda thinking of some red dirt memories in Oklahoma. I’m probably happier when I’m just hanging around Oklahoma, than anywhere in the world.

***The song, Woody Guthrie. Do you think it is one of the most important songs that you’ve ever written.***

I guess it could be. His music just means so much to me, like the song says, I thought I would write something. That’s what came out.

***Because you are such an active supporter and fan of Guthrie’s music, was it a hard song to write.***

It kind of came.....that’s a good question. It kind of came easy in a way, because I knew what I wanted to say about him. It was hard too.....it was hard, in a way, to do that song because some people might listen to it and think it was a little bit over the top. Like “*God, that’s too nice. Come on, that’s too sweet.*” It was just something I wanted to say, about the way I felt.

***I had the impression that after Billy Bragg and Wilco collaborated on some of Woody’s lyrics, that you were going to undertake a similar collaborative project.***

Actually around that time, was when Nora was really.....before a lot of other things popped up, including the Smithsonian thing she had to spend about a year of her life getting together. ....she had said “*Maybe I’ll come down to Austin and we can start something. I definitely have in my mind this album that would have you and Joe [Ely] and Butch [Hancock] and Ray Wylie Hubbard doing some of my dad’s songs.*” She came to our show in Toronto. As a matter of fact, that’s where I think part of the idea came from. She heard all of us.....Kevin Welch was on the same show, and Tom Russell. She said, “*You know there’s this thing that you guys from that part of the country have that’s just real distinctive. I know my father’s music came from that. I think we should do something.*” So she said she would come down to Austin sometime and we would search around for a studio and find some people to play on it. Then Slaid Cleaves did that song of Woody’s [ED. NOTE. The song is titled *This Morning I Am Born Again* on his year 2000 album **Broke Down**]. He didn’t know Nora and I put him in touch with her, and she really loved his version. Betty Elders even did a version of the same song that Slaid had the idea to put the music to. I think Betty actually did it before him, so that song lyric of Woody’s really jumped out at a lot of songwriters. Then the Red Dirt Rangers did one titled, *Cadillac Eight*. She knows that people down here are really.....she knows Greg [Johnson], and she knows that there’s a big.....she has never actually been to the festival yet [ED. NOTE. This is a reference to the Woody Guthrie Free Festival which has taken place in Okemah during July, for the last four years], but she knows what is going on down here. I think she got kind of side tracked by some other stuff she was doing. Before she does the Austin record, she wants to do this other one with people like Rickie Lee Jones. She says it’s on the cards for Austin, it’s just a matter of when everybody is available and stuff. Of course she had to put of the second volume of the Billy Bragg stuff. Like I say she has some songs saved for different artists, and she’ll eventually get there.

***The song This Glorious Day.....it’s a new Jimmy LaFave epic.***

[Laughs] I actually wrote that song, driving up through the Oklahoma Panhandle. Through this little stretch.....you are almost in Texas, but you’re not, then you cut up through New Mexico and come in through Trinidad, Colorado. Kind of a back road, up there. It was a really nice day. Also I was thinking of.....just writing something in that vein. My mother runs a gospel singing kind of thing, every third

Saturday in Oklahoma. Out behind her house, there's a little barn that my dad built. She has people come from round the country, and local people.

***Is this gospel choirs.***

Like gospel bands. And solo people. Some people that actually just sing to pre-recorded tapes. Some people pull up in a bus with the whole Southern gospel thing. As a matter of fact, the last time I was there, there was a black couple staying.....a brother and sister gospel duo from Harlem, down recording a record in there. Just a whole combination of different genre's of gospel music. So that song had a little bit of a gospel vibe. She's been doing it for the last five years or so.

***You cover Greg Jacobs' Patient Man on Texoma. Am I correct in thinking that Greg Jacobs is another Okie songwriter, like Bob Childers. Does Gregg record for the Binky record label.***

Yeah. Greg has a brand new record out. He gave me a copy two weeks ago and it has some great stuff on it. He's another guy that came out of that whole Stillwater scene, where I met a lot of people. He's a schoolteacher now in Checotah, Oklahoma and only plays, you know, when school is out. Then he'll go do a little tour. He went up to Oregon last year.

***You have a song on Texoma titled Poor Man's Dream. I think I'm correct in saying that the words "poor man's dreams" turn up in the Tom Russell song Blue Wing, and that the album featuring that song is titled Poor Man's Dream.***

It probably is.

***You worked on Tom's new album, Borderland. Did you meet him at a Folk Alliance Conference.***

The first time I ever met Tom Russell was at the Winnipeg.....no, the Regina Folk Festival, way, way back in something like 1993. Maybe, 1994. Him and Andrew. I've known them since then from the circuit, and now we have the same booking agent. As a matter of fact, Andrew is room-mates with David, my keyboard player. Then Tom moved to Texas. He asked me to come in and do it. It worked out good and I really love that song, and I like that record. Gurf produced it, and he's an old friend. We had a really great gig in Chicago earlier this year, where we shared the bill. We did about forty minutes together where we sang Tupelo Honey, White Freight Liner Blues and a bunch of other stuff. It was totally ad lib and the crowd was really good that night. Tom is an interesting character. He's one of the best storytellers I've ever met. He can tell you great stories about being a musician on the road.

***What do you think of Texoma. Do you feel it is the best album you've ever made.***

Possibly so. I think I like it the best, I don't know why.....maybe because it's the newest one. There's just something about it that I like. It brings back a lot of good memories too, because it got David [Webb] and Larry [Wilson] back together on the record, and I had Eric [Hansen] play drums. He's my favourite drummer that I've ever played with. He's an Okie and still lives in Stillwater, and plays locally there. Actually I spent a little more time than I usually do on most records with this one, and it probably paid off. I had time to think about the recordings a little more.

***You said earlier that you don't care if you cover some other writer's songs, as opposed to your own material. The mix here is almost 50% your songs and 50% covers.***

As I say, some songs should just be heard. Even if it is not a song that really.....for instance, *On A Bus To St. Cloud*, that song should just be heard. A song that great should not be on the Country Charts with Tricia and then it's gone. A song like that should live on. A lot of people love that song and it brings out something in them.

***A year ago when I saw you play the River Pub in San Marcos, you played The Moon Is A Harsh Mistress, and I thought that's going to be a great cut on the album.***

As a mater of fact, I'll probably end up doing some other Jimmy Webb stuff.

Arthur Wood.

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