

EAST TEXAS MUSIC - An Interview with Songwriter - Randy Brown



ETX Music: Thanks for coming today and taking the time to answer some questions.

Thanks Nathan. It is totally my pleasure. I'm ready to go if you are.

ETX Music: Randy, first tell us the basics, who you are and what you do.

Well, my name is Randy Brown. I am a solo singer songwriter playing my own songs to whoever will listen. I play primarily acoustic guitar in several tunings to keep it interesting as well as using various partial capos to keep me and the audience from getting bored. I also play mandolin and typically do a couple of songs on mando during each show. Sometimes I have sidemen sit in if the venue and the pay are sufficient to support that. However for the most part it is me and my guitar.

ETX Music: Randy, what is your music background?

First let me get this out of the way. I am 61 years old. I am no longer a young or even middle aged guy. So as you might guess I have been at this for a long time: playing music since I was 10, writing songs since I was 14 and playing in public since I was 15. I started out with the popular stuff on the radio; Herman's Hermits, the Beatles and such. Once I started writing I moved over to following Dylan, James Taylor and the singer songwriter crowd. I graduated from high school in 1970 and started playing the college coffeehouse circuit in Dallas and around North Texas doing mostly original songs and a few odd covers. My wife Barb and I married in '73 (yep, 40 years ago) and we moved to East Texas in 1974. There was no music scene here except country music in those days so after a couple of years of musical drought, I squared my shoulders and started a 12 year career as lead guitar player in series of C&W cover bands. I can honestly say I have played every bar, VFW, cut-n-shoot and American Legion from the Red River to Lufkin and from the Trinity to the Sabine. One or two had real chicken wire across the stage and I think there might have been a nudist colony gig in there somewhere too. But that is a much longer story. I can say I never enjoyed it much, we were only flesh and blood jukeboxes and original music wasn't appreciated. If you couldn't dance to it they didn't want to hear it.

I quit the bar band business in the late 80's because I wanted to spend more time with my family instead of playing 2 or 3 nights a week. After a few years of working through a writing dry spell I finally started writing again and released a now out of print cassette release called Time & Luck about 1990. That got me working in earnest and I soon fell

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in with several other songwriters in the East Texas area. I got to be good friends with John DeFoore, Miranda Lambert & Kasey Musgrave's guitar and songwriting teacher teacher, and we ran a concert venue together in Mineola for several years called the Piney Woods Pickin' Parlor. I got to know lot of great songwriters who played there such as Billie Joe Shaver, Ray Wylie Hubbard and Tom Paxton to name a few. John and I met a cellist, Dirje Smith Child's from Athens about that time and formed an all original folk, swing, jazz trio called Jealousy Motel. We were together for 8 years, played all over the Arklatex and produced 2 CDs, Jealousy Motel in 1997 and We're Gonna Ride in 2001. We called it quits in 2003 but remain close friends. I embarked on a solo career as a singer songwriter in 2005 releasing a CD, *Dream Big* in 2007 and it's follow up, *But Wait, There's More* in 2013. I retired from a real job in 2012 and started touring nationally a couple of times a year. I just got back from a tour, playing dates in Oregon (Portland, Bend, Beaverton) and Seattle Washington. It was a successful tour in that for a change I pretty much broke even and expect to head back there next fall. I am also planning a tour to Florida this spring. Sorry, like I said up front, I am old so a lot has happened and it takes a while to tell.

Oh almost forgot, along the way I have won several songwriting contests and gotten national recognition from 2 very prestigious contests; Kerrville Folk festival and the Rocky Mtn Folks Fest. A little recognition goes a long way to keep you plugging away writing or does for me anyway.

ETX Music: What image do you think your music conveys?

I do my best to portray the spiritual seeker that I am in real life. I was raised in a very conservative Christian church but no longer view myself with any religious or even philosophical label. I am closer to an agnostic explorer than anything else. Meaning I don't have any answers, only questions. I love ideas, I like to take those ideas, dissect them and turn them over in my brain then turn them into songs with heart as well as mind. Something I personally think is missing in a lot of music. I refer to myself as a Performing Philosopher. I think that is pretty accurate. Not ever gonna be top 40 I know, but as Popeye says "I am what I am".

ETX Music: What is the most exciting thing happening for you right now or in the future?

I just submitted my music to Pandora radio and was accepted in less than 24 hours. Which according to what I have heard about lead times there is pretty incredible. I can't wait to have a Randy Brown Channel to listen to. Seriously, Pandora is very useful in helping find other artists that are similar musically. Particularly in other parts of the country or the world. By following them I can figure out where to play while on tour.

Also for the last 4 years I have been writing for Piney Woods Live, an arts publication out of Longview. I have a monthly column there called the B-Side of Music. I had never done anything like it before and I was asked to write an article about the music business. I wrote an article about taxes and the gigging musician, sent it in and forgot

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about it. A month later I get a call wanting to know where my column for that issue is. Nobody told me it was a column. So I wrote another and have been doing it ever since. A lot of fun and very rewarding. My columns are published as a blog on my website - <http://brownrandy.com>

ETX Music: Where have you performed?

I have stood on a lot of stages so far and hope to stand on a lot more. But, to be honest there are a few I hope to never see again, like the chicken wired ones. I love places like the Pineknot in Nacogdoches. John Hazelwood and his volunteers have done a fantastic job supporting every possible genre found in east Texas. The folks who come there love original music and really listen. Songwriters love listeners. But I have to say, my very favorite venues, hands down are house concerts. I go to someone's home, they invite 30 or so friends, I play a show for them, hang out and sell CDs and product. I meet the coolest people like that and make the best money too. Some of my hosts have even become great friends.

ETX Music: How did you come up with BrownRandy?

I call myself BrownRandy on my website because there are a lot of Randy Browns out there. Soul singers, Texas country artists, reverends and basketball players to name a few. I play a game in the car where I read signs backwards. My wife suggested I use BrownRandy since I do weird stuff like that anyway.

ETX music: Who writes your songs? What are the main themes or topics for most of your songs? Do you think these topics will change over time?

My music is 100% original. If I don't play my own songs then no one is gonna hear them.

I tend to write about the things that interest me personally and as a 61 year old my interest are different from a 20 something. I currently write about the intersection of science, philosophy and religion. Not everyone's interest I know but I write what I love and I love ideas so that is what I write.

What was that last question? Oh yeah, I remember. What I write about has changed as I have matured and aged. When I was young I wrote about the normal stuff you hear on the radio but as I have gotten older my interests changed and so have my songs. I expect I will writing more about mortality and nursing homes in the future. [he laughs] But seriously, I have to write about where I am in life. Our perspective changes as we age. For me it is write what I know or at least think I know. You know?

ETX Music: What has been your biggest challenge as a performing artist? Have you been able to overcome that challenge? If so, how?

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My biggest challenge as an artist and performer is keeping myself interested and engaged. I know that sounds funny but I have a very short attention span and I find if I can keep myself interested everything else works. I would also mention that finding venues where folks listen is also a challenge. Especially when what I do as a writer can be a little intellectual at times. Not where a lot of music focuses.

ETX music: What advice do you have for people who want to do what you do?

If they want to do what I do they should have their head examined. But seriously I know what you mean. Follow your heart. Do what excites you and your audience will find you. Most importantly is that you can't please everyone so you might as well please yourself. I guess that is a Rick Nelson quote but true none the less.

ETX music: Thanks for taking the time to talk about your career. Any parting words for our readers?

Thanks right back at you, Nathan. It was a pleasure. Parting words, well let me see. I would leave you with the words of a famous German philosopher, Goete. They are the words I do my best to live by. He said "Whatever you can do, or dream, begin it. Boldness has genius power and magic in it!". For me that says it all for me. Do what you love and love what you do. You can check out my music, travels, where I am playing and my blog at <http://brownrandy.com>. Look for me on my Facebook page Brownrandy and on ReverbNation too. Thanks again!