

Jerry Jeff Walker: A Biography

Written by

Monday, 24 October 2011 08:15

An icon of the Austin Country Outlaw scene that sprang from the central Texas area in the '70s, Jerry Jeff Walker started with humble roots.

Born Ronald Clyde Crosby in Oneonta, New York, on March 16th, 1942, Walker grew up around the local square-dancing scene where his grandparents would play piano and fiddle. As a teenager, he played in a local band called the Tones, but found himself kicked out when the group was signed by a label as the studio wanted a studio musician to fill his place. Disheartened, Walker finished high school and joined the National Guard. This wasn't to last long - he went AWOL and traveled the country, busking with a ukelele to keep himself fed. He played along the east coast from New York to Florida, eventually making his way out west to Texas then California. By 1966, he had taken on the stage name Jerry Jeff Walker and the guitar as his primary instrument. He spent some time making folk music in the Greenwich Village area of San Francisco, forming a band called Circus Maximus, but eventually settled in Austin as a solo artist. It was around this time he recorded his most famous album, *Mr. Bojangles*.



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Walker found himself an integral part of one of the most popular and influential music scenes of 20th century America. He was playing along other music icons such as Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, and Townes Van Zandt. He was also backed by the legendary Lost Gonzo Band, which featured country music legends Gary P. Nunn and Bob Livingston. Walker commanded such respect among his peers that he was even mentioned by name in a little song called "Luckenbach, Texas" - which just happens to be one of the greatest songs ever written about Texas! Walker, who never technically had a #1 hit, still managed to be one of the most influential musicians of the era - he even was the one to introduce then-country-artist Jimmy Buffett to the beaches of Key West, inspiring the young man to take a drastically different route with his musical style.



Jerry Jeff married his wife Susan in 1974 and had two children, Django and Jessie Jane. Unlike most of the men in the Country Outlaw scene, he managed to stay faithful and is still married to her to this day. Towards the middle of the 1980s, Walker became disillusioned with the mainstream scene and went independent, with Susan as his manager, under the label name "Tried and True Music". He tours under this label, even today. Still headquartered in Austin, he

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even has an annual birthday bash at the Paramount Theater just down the street from the Texas state capitol building.



Although Jerry Jeff Walker wasn't a Texan by birth, he is certainly a Texan by trade - and he sure got here as soon as he knew what he was missing. He truly is a Texas music icon. Listen on Thursday, October 27th, to hear some of the best live cuts of his performances here in Texas on Jon Garrett's *Live in Texas* program at 7 PM - right here on KBEC 1390! You can find more information about Jerry Jeff at his website, www.jerryjeff.com