

Kickin' it old-school songwriting

David Lee comes back to Texas with its love of true country music
Mary Jane Farmer, Scene In Town

YOU MIGHT FIND HIM ON A RIVER BANK, fishing pole in hand and keeping good company with his dad and namesake, the original David Lee. Or you might find him on a stage, belting out the songs he has either written or co-written now or during his 24 years in Nashville.

Either way, singer/songwriter David Lee is enjoying his return to his native Texas, having settled in the Texas Hill Country.

David doesn't regret his time in Nashville — why should he? He's been recorded by such Nashville hit makers as Tim McGraw and Faith Hill ("I Need You"), Alan Jackson ("You Go Your Way"), John Michael Montgomery, George Strait, Montgomery Gentry, and beaucoup others. Closer to home; another Texan, Cody Johnson, has recorded David's "Me and My Kind," and "Cowboy Like Me."

This fifth-generation Texan talked about the changes in today's country music, which contributed strongly on his decision to move himself and his family back to Texas.

He was driving to meet his dad so, together, they could "drown some minnows," in other words, do some bass fishing together. It's a highlight for him, getting spend that time with his dad, who taught him even more than about fishing — Dad taught him about life, and David got his introduction into the music scene through his dad's music. Dad has since become David's No. 1 fan.

Early years

"I HAD MY OWN BAND from the time I was 18 until I was 24, and got tired of singing cover songs for drunks. I wanted to sing my own music, and felt like Nashville was where I needed to be."

That was in 1993. Very soon after he got there, he began co-writing with Chris Stapleton, who he described as a "kid out of college and who was writing with Tim DuBois' son, Chris DuBois." One of that trio's songs "Kickin' It Old School," is featured on David's newest CD, *Bringin' Hip-pie Back*.

The writing process began, for them, David said lightheartedly, with a premise, an idea. "Chris started talking about bars and about the County Line Club and knife joints... Chris had also played with bands. And we just started reminiscing and I thought

about bringing old school, a throwback to the old days of progressive country movement. And the song was born.

David's also written with Bridgette Tatum, who has written hits for today's top 'country' stars including Jason Aldean, and together she and he wrote "John Wayne" for the new CD. "She and I were talking about the issues we (the nation) seems to be having with Illegal immigration," David said.

"I grew up around dad's foreman, Jose. Dad put me on the job site and I learned and spoke Spanish from those 14 Mexican men. This song is about Jose, and about those guys, who gave me a solid work ethic. It's my favorite song on this CD, probably our next release."

And there's another top hit-maker, Wynn Varble, who not only co-pens songs with David, but also travels and performs with his buddy. On this CD, they wrote "In My Bones," with lyrics like "You creep way down deep in the corners of my mind. You twist and you turn like a poison ivy vine."

He's written with both of the late Jerry Max Lane's brothers, Tony and Mike Lane. "I am a surrogate brother."

Return to Texas

"BESIDES MY FAMILY, THE reason I came back to Texas, was because the music industry has changed," David Lee said, candidly and boldly. "There used to be a reverence and respect for songwriters. I couldn't even imagine being in a room with Harlan Howard or Guy Clark, but Nashville got to a place where the young guys have come in and kicked us older timers to the side. Dean Dillon told me," David continued, "If you are going to stay here, you've got to forget everything you know about songwriting." But I am true songwriter, and I didn't get into this for that. I had a good run, it's been great, and some of my best friends are still there. Nashville had been good to me. But, I could hear that same voice saying 'Go back to Texas,' where



He is scheduled to perform at Love & War in Texas, Plano, on June 23: David Lee

you found your music.' I had no idea what I would do once here, I've kind of let God steer me in everything, and it's always led me to follow my songs."

He continued, "Our whole industry has disrespect for songwriters and gets only lip service from Congress. It's not what it once was, and it never will be again." He noted the changes began about 10 years ago.

"I started seeing industry change, and heard people talking about the Internet, and not the industry. We were so far behind the tech industry, which was building million-dollar companies. Now, the philosophy is to just give the music away. BMI was cutting our payments and the money was going down. When I got to the end of my publishing deal, I sold everything within three months. Others have called it a day and left Nashville as well.

"I'm not giving myself away,

continue to pour my heart and soul into the industry and have songs buried in dusty catalogues for 25 years. I can sing them now. I have an audience and people sit there and listen. It's vindication for all those hours writing by myself."

David still has the access and connection, he explained, and knows that when he writes a commercial song, he can get it marketed. "But I don't want to write that stuff, about pickups and girls on creek banks. I felt hollow, like a music whore. I want to explore other aspects of my soul, and find another way to write a generic idea."

He added, too, that a lot of the writers in Nashville, who are creating hits for today's artists, don't like the songs they have to create.

"But most of them are scared for their jobs. Nobody in Nashville likes country music, creating music they hate for money."

Performing

IN EARLY MAY, WYNN VARBLE and David Lee performed together in, of all places for such hit-writers — the American Legion in Van Alstyne. It was a return engagement for them, and both men were excited to make that return visit to play for true country fans. David's dad and other family were in the house. Packed house, and oh, the stories the two men told — they kept the house alive and, alternately, heart-happy and teary-eyed with their music.

David said he got the idea for the CD title cut song, which he made up all by himself, when his daughter walked in dressed in complete hippie attire. "My grandfather hated hippies, he was a soldier, but my dad was kinda hippie."

The song embodies all the good, fun stuff about the hippie movement, "turquoise rings, and old blue jeans, and peace signs on their car..."

There's another aspect of Texas music and Texas lifestyle he's fond of. "Texas radio has been fun."

Country music songwriters just want to write true country music, and David Lee is among those who just wants to continue his craft. David is back to the basics, back to singing and performing his true country music. Back to Texas.

David Lee is scheduled to perform at Love & War in Texas, Plano, on June 23, along with another true country long-timer, Gary P. Nunn. For more information, go Online to DavidLeeMusic.com

David decided, he said, to write 100% country songs. "If somebody likes it and cuts it, great."

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—DAVID LEE