

Jarrood Birmingham... Bull rider, Musician, Country boy.



by: Deric Garza

I've had a copy of Jarrood's Live and Kickin' It album on my iPod for sometime now. Granted, I had never met him before, I assumed he was very much a good 'ol boy, country musician. I would never have known how true that was until I was able to chat with the man himself and find out just what Jarrood Birmingham was all about.

Where do you come from? I grew up in Calhoun County outside of Port Lavaca TX...Did a lot of ranch work growing up. My grandfather was a musician.

I heard you used to do some bull riding, how did you get into rodeo? I actually started youth rodeo when I was about 10 years old. It was always something I had an interest in and I still raise bulls here around the house. I pretty much have been a part of rodeo longer than I haven't. That was kinda my first love in life.

What got you to make that transition from bull riding to musician? I rode saddle bronc horses too. I love all parts of rodeo. People always tend to cling to the bull-riding end of it, but I rode broncs and enjoyed the ranch work, working cows and stuff also. I just kinda grew up wanting to be a cowboy. That's all I wanted to be. But anyways, I had a string of surgeries from '95 to 2000 that were major, major surgeries by any means that you put it. I had a knee replacement, had a bunch of plates put in my face...just a number of things happened and then I decided instead of getting my left shoulder pinned also, my right one was already pinned, I decided I was gonna take, about nine months to a year off to let everything heal. In the meantime I just started playing music. And then, the music just kinda took over that aspect of it. I didn't quit rodeo, the music just kinda took over. It became the dominant part of my life...and here we are today

What similarities, if any do find between the rodeo world and the music business? Travel. (pauses... laughs...) That's about it. A lot people say its an adrenaline rush...being on stage is an adrenaline rush, yeah...it is, but that's more of a rush of creating something, writing a song from scratch and getting people to buy it. But the rodeo aspect is more of doing something your not supposed to do...you know... something you're not physically supposed to do. It's a different deal. But, I'm glad that I went through that because I know what its like to work for nothing. If you show up somewhere in the rodeo world and you don't do your job, you don't get paid. And so going into with that angle as a musician, I never expected anything from club owners or venues or people. It was more me going in to do what I was supposed to do, and if I did it, I got paid. I'm glad that it happened that way...that that was the angle I went. I had always played the Chris LeDoux type deal. I had always played guitar and wrote songs for people and my buddies and I have a strong love of cowboy music. Its kinda funny you know, Chris is an influence, a great influence of mine. I think he was one of the first people, when you talk about story writers and stuff like that, people don't really think about Chris LeDoux but if you go back and listen to the old stuff, that's what that was... I enjoyed that and that's kinda how I learned to write music. And the sound that kinda moved me was always the Waylon Jennings and Hank Jr. sound, and I think in 85 or 86 I saw a Hank Jr. concert at the Summit, man... something just snapped in me that I knew that that's what I wanted to do...I wanted to be an entertainer.

What would you say was the hardest aspect to overcome in the transition from bronc and bull rider to musician? The fact of not knowing what to expect every night, and having to get used to that, was probably the biggest issue. In the rodeo world you know what your going to do every night and the crowds aren't dependent on you, per se, your going there to do what your supposed to do every night...the music world is a little bit different. It was overcoming what am I doing wrong if there's not 500 people here? It must be me. And accepting that and trying to change and fix whatever that is. I think that was the biggest obstacle to me.

What is the mission statement of Jarrood Birmingham as a musician? I said this before; I'd just like to be the voice of the common man. I think that's what country music to me was based on. When you look back to the field workers and hobos, through out the history of our nation, that that's kinda what country music was. And I realize that its become a more urbanized world, but I still think you cant lose touch with the common people...we're not all GQ and soap opera people, there's a lot of us that have to get up at 6 in the morning and get in an old beat up truck and go to work and we don't want to, or have to go buy a bag of dog food at Wal-Mart.... and to me

that's what Americana is, and I think that that's what country music 'oughta be...it 'oughta reflect the common people. That's pretty much my mission statement...its to stay grounded in the fact that, I'm a blue collar individual, that's all I've ever been, I'm a country boy. There's a lot of people out there like me, and id like to be the voice of 'em.

#1 Bull rider in the PBRA or #1 video on CMT? - Which one would I rather have? (pauses) That's tough. That's not something I can answer real quickly, because, either or would be great for me to be honest with you. But I figure it's all about stages of life so I figure at this stage in life I'd rather have the number one video because that's where I am in life. Had you asked me ten years ago, that'd be a completely different situation. As long as I used either one well and used for something good to come out of it, then id be ok.

So just how "country" is Jarrood Birmingham? Well, I must admit, this wasn't the complete interview. Midway through our conversation, I asked Jarrood what people would find in his CD player, or rather what he was currently listening to on his iPod. Jarrood candidly answered, "iPod? What's an iPod?", and chuckled. "I've seen them in airports, but I don't have one". He also told me a story about how he used to have his booking agent snail mail hardcopies of his email to him. Jarrood likes to keep things simple, and it works for him. And why, you ask, was this part left out of the interview? Well the irony of the situation is that during this part of the interview, my computer malfunctioned and I lost part of the recording of the interview. Looks like Jarrood might be onto something. **DG**

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