



Billy Joe Shaver



Billy Joe Shaver may not be a household name, but his songs -- including "Good Christian Soldier," "Willie the Wandering Gypsy and Me," and "I Been to Georgia on a Fast Train" -- are country music standards and his reputation among musicians and critics is that of a true legend.

One of the best synopses of Billy Joe Shaver's upbringing is his own song, "I Been to Georgia on a Fast Train." When he sings that "my grandma's old-age pension is the reason that I'm standing here today," he ain't kidding. The "good Christian raising" and "eighth grade education" -- not to mention being abandoned by his parents shortly after birth, working on farms instead of going to high school, and losing part of his fingers during a job at a sawmill -- are all part of his life story. "I got all my country learning," he sings, "picking cotton, raising hell, and baling hay."

Shaver did a quick turn in the Navy and worked a series of nowhere jobs before trying his luck in Nashville. After several back and forth trips between Texas and Tennessee that gained him no response, he appeared one day in 1968 in Bobby Bare's Nashville office, where he convinced Bare to listen to him play. Bare ended up giving him a writing job.

Shaver recorded one song for Mercury, "Chicken on the Ground," which went nowhere, but soon his songs began to see the light thanks to Kris Kristofferson ("Good Christian Soldier"), Tom T. Hall ("Willie the Wandering Gypsy and Me"), Bare ("Ride Me Down Easy") and, later, the Allman Brothers ("Sweet Mama") and Elvis Presley ("You Asked Me To"). Shaver's real breakthrough, though, came in 1973 when Jennings recorded an album composed almost entirely of Shaver's songs, *Honky Tonk Heroes* -- largely considered the first true "outlaw" album.

Shaver's debut album was *Old Five and Dimers Like Me*, produced by Kristofferson and released by Monument in 1973. Along with the title track, it contained the now-classic Shaver songs "Willie the Wandering Gypsy and Me" and "Georgia on a Fast Train." In 1976 Shaver recorded *When I Get My Wings*, and followed it up a year later with *Gypsy Boy*. Johnny Cash recorded Shaver's "I'm Just an Old Lump of Coal (But I'm Gonna Be a Diamond Some Day)" in 1978, a song Shaver wrote just after he chose to give up drugs and booze and turned to God for help.

Shaver switched labels again, this time to Columbia, in 1980, and recorded three more albums during the next decade. After a few years out of the spotlight, Billy Joe returned once again in 1993. *Tramp on Your Street*, released on Zoo/Praxis, featured his son Eddy on lead guitar and Billy Joe's own raspy but loveable voice, and was quickly recognized as one of the strongest and hardest country records to hit the shelves in many years. Shaver toured regularly over the next few years, and recorded a live album for Zoo, *Unshaven*, in 1995. *Victory* followed on the New West label in 1998, with *Electric Shaver* appearing a year later. The rock-oriented *Earth Rolls On* appeared in spring 2001. His next three albums were all released by Compadre Records, *Freedom's Child* in 2002, the emotional *Billy and the Kid* in 2004, and *Real Deal* in 2005.

Shaver continues to perform and record his music, and is revered by a new generation of country music outlaws.

Song Highlights

"Good Christian Soldier"

Bobby Bare, 1971 • Kris Kristofferson, 1973

"Bottom Dollar"

Jerry Lee Lewis, 1972 • Mike Auldridge, 1974 • Billy Paul, 1997

"Old Five And Dimers"

Billy Joe Shaver, 1973 • Tom T. Hall, 1973 • Waylon Jennings, 1973 • Willie Nelson, 1985 • Jerry Jeff Walker, 1991

"Honky Tonk Heroes"

Waylon Jennings, 1973 • Willie Nelson, 1976

"Willy The Wandering Gypsy And Me"

Tom T. Hall, 1973 • Waylon Jennings, 1973 • Chris Ledoux, 1974 •

Tex Ritter, 1976 • Dan Crary, 1993

"I Been To Georgia On A Fast Train"

Billy Joe Shaver, 1973 • Commander Cody, 1975 • Tennessee Ernie Ford, 1976 • Johnny Cash, 1982 • Willie Nelson, 1985 • BR5-49, 1998 • Cory Morrow, 2001

"Ride Me Down Easy"

Bobby Bare, 1973 (#11) • Waylon Jennings, 1973 • Jerry Lee Lewis, 1973 • David Allan Coe, 1977 • Seldom Scene, 1978

"You Ask Me To"

Waylon Jennings, 1973 (#8) • Elvis Presley, 1975 • Billy Joe Shaver, 1977 • Jack Clement, 1978 • John Hartford, 1987 • Alison Krauss, 2003

"Black Rose"

Waylon Jennings, 1973 • Willie Nelson, 1985 • Scott Walker, 1997 • Rodney Harden, 2003

"I'm Just An Old Chunk Of Coal"

John Anderson, 1981 (#4) • Stonewall Jackson, 1981 • Johnny Cash, 1982 • Roy Bookbinder, 1998 • Willie Nelson, 2001 • Lewis Family, 2002

"Tramp On Your Street"

George Jones, 2001