

JOHN REY REED *Music Story Telling*

Songwriter • Guitarist • Vocallist



How long have you been in the musc business?

I grew up in Oklahoma City where in the 10th Grade I joined my first band “The Chosen Few”. We did all the cover music of the era like Grass Roots, The Stones, The Doors, James Brown. We hooked up with Ronnie Kay, a DJ from WKY Radio. DJs sponsored bands to travel around the state in support of their shows. We played sock hops, proms, and dances. There we were, 15 years old and touring the state.

I can only imagine how hooked on music you were? When did you come to Texas?

I moved to Austin 1971 to go the University of Texas. My dad worked for Texaco and about halfway through my sophomore year at UT my parents were transferred

to Tripoli, Libya. My brother and I went there for Christmas and I stayed for about 6 months. The next six months I hitchhiked around North Africa and Europe, guitar in hand. It was exciting; I played everywhere I could. I returned to Austin and formed



the band “Hand To Mouth” with an old friend JoeEddy Hines and Buick McCain and Jimmy Pettit. We were a Fusion band and played at the legendary Armadillo World Head Quarters. We changed directions and started a new band called “Shoes” When we called it quits I went solo and started playing folk music.



HAND TO MOUTH

Popular rock to fusion to folk? That’s an interesting series.

I was in the Kerrville Folk Festive Songwriters in 1978 and 1979. I didn’t win either but a couple of years later I hosted a friend of mine, Lyle Lovett, at the Kerrville Folk Festival. I showed him the ropes of the festival and the songwriters contest. As you know, Lyle went on to sign a major record deal.

Well, all I can say for that is thank you for showing him around!

After that I formed the “Octave Doctors” with Woodie Lawson on bass, Paula Helene, vocals and Paul Anstrum on guitar. Later, Jimmie, JoeEddie and I formed the “Skeltones” and added Paul Percy who had played with Jerry Jeff and the Dixie Chicks. We finally split because we’d have 10 gigs booked and have to cancel 8 because one or more of them would be on the road.

The Octave Doctors



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After “Octave Doctors” I joined “American Jukebox” and went on the road for about 4 years. We were a 4 piece rock band with 3 singers and 5 dancers. So from 1987 to 1991 I toured the US visiting each city for about 6 months at a time. I’d been playing since I was 22 and for 16 years I was in bands on the road, so it was really the best job I ever had. I joined the American Guild of Variety Artists which meant I got a per diem and regular salary. It was at that time that I met my lovely wife, April, and got married, I adopted her daughter, Jasmine, and got a publishing deal.

Is that what convinced you to move to Nashville?

I signed a publishing deal that led me to move to Nashville. To make a long story short, I had returned to the Kerrville Folk Festival and at 2 in the morning, as I was heading back to my tent, half drunk, when I passed by the campsite of Jimmy Dale Gilmore. He said “We’ve known each other for years and I’ve never heard your music.” I played 3 or 4 songs and he said his manager, Mike Crowley (and

Dolly Pierce), was starting a Publishing Company called Bee Cave Music in Nashville. Mike called me and asked me to meet him at Butch Hancock’s store, “Lubbock Or Leave It”, and I signed my first publishing deal. I was really excited. I had a new family and I didn’t really want to be on the road anymore and here we were heading to Nashville to write songs!

Let’s talk about songwriting and what your experience has been co-writing in Nashville.

Since I’ve been in Nashville I’ve written 60-70 maybe 80 songs. After collaborating with different writers I came to the conclusion that I wasn’t that great as a co-writer. It’s hard to meet someone for the first time and be creative. But I did learn a lot and became a much better songwriter. In a typical session you meet your “partner” and start by sharing your inner thoughts and hear theirs, each of us plays a couple of songs, we mash some words together and throw out a title, and usually some music. I found it very hard to be brilliant on the spot like that. After a couple of weird experiences I just decide to write for myself.

The way I write is pretty natural. My song “Learning To Drive The Truck’ is a good example. I went to a publishing company owned by Ken Vessy and met with Doug Day, a friend of mine from Austin. I got to the second verse and had written “Grandpa sat in the shotgun seat, looked at ease as he could be, handed me the keys without a word, and watched me start up the Old Ford!” and Doug said “Stop the tape right there. That wouldn’t happen.” I said, “that IS what happened. My Grandpa took me out in his ‘48 Ford truck and that’s how I learned to drive when I was 12.” Doug said, “That may have happened, but he would not have handed you the keys. They would already have been in the truck because all farmers leave the keys in the truck.” I thought that was really picky, but he was right. That really woke me up about lyrically making everything work and being authentic.

Fame has eluded me for years now but I’m still here and playing for fun. I write songs because that’s what I do and who I am. Honestly the best thing that music gave me is my life. From meeting my wife and our daughter to all the incredible people that I’ve met through music.

