

TEXAS JAMBOREE

Starline Rhythm Boys Livin' The Honky Tonk Life

Jason Shields

I connected with Danny Coane of the Starline Rhythm Boys, who hail from the Northeast, via email. I had some prearranged questions for him, and he was kind enough to answer them for Texas Jamboree. Their new CD is a good one, and I suggest you pick it up, while your at it get the CD before it, it is a good one too!

Texas Jamboree: When did the Starline Rhythm Boys start?

Starline Rhythm Boys: February, 1998. Our slappin' bass man, Billy Bratcher (he'll be 40 this year!) had just come off the road from working for Wayne Hancock across the U.S. during 1997. He'd always wanted to work with me. I'm 54 and been playing professionally since 1963 - a lot of bluegrass, country, honky-tonk and rockabilly. Big Al Lemery (age 50) has also been playing for many years. Billy and Al were in a rockabilly band, Buck & The Black Cats, for a number of years and I had a rockabilly band, The Throbulators, during the '80's, which toured around the East and Canada. Anyway, me and Al had some time, so Billy invited us over to his place to just pick and sing some. Well, it was just beautiful, like magic - just came together perfect, especially Billy and my rhythm (slap bass and acoustic guitar) and me and Al's vocalizing (not to mention Al's fine Tele pickin'), so we decided to put this drummerless trio together and get it out there.

TJ: What influences brought you fellas together?

SRB: Well, we all like a lot of the same stuff - old school country, honky-tonk, rockabilly, bluegrass - also blues, 60's Brit stuff, surf. Billy and Al like a lot of 70's harder rock and some punk, which is not my thing. Billy is a jazz fan and I'm real big on western swing.

TJ: How many shows a year do you estimate you fellas do?

SRB: Oh, probably a hundred or so. Mostly weekend work as we all have day jobs and families. Each of us has played full-time, on the road at various points in our careers, but, as you know, it's a hard way to go to make a living. We're not really in a position to hit the road full-time now, but I think this band could easily do it and get a tremendous response - things could get even bigger. We work a lot and make some pretty good money locally, so that's fine right now. We'll probably go out and do some spot festivals once or twice a year - we were invited to the huge Green Bay Rockin' 50's Festival this July and did a show there - got a very good response.

TJ: What was it like working with Sean Mencher?

SRB: What can I say? Sean's the best all the way around. #1, he's a great, personable guy. Obviously, a killer guitar picker and superb musician. But he's also excellent in the studio - really listens and understands. He's like some of the old recording directors who didn't tell you what to do, but worked with you and got you to listen to their ideas and concepts - and Sean has come up with some good ones. I would add that he's 100 plus percent behind The Starline Rhythm Boys. We appreciate everything about him.

TJ: What do you see in the future of the Starline Rhythm Boys?

SRB: We'd like to get out there a little more - expand the field of play because we really have developed a lot of interest and fans from far away. We get word all the time from overseas and around the country. I'd like to get our music out to more people, especially all our great original songs written by Billy Bratcher. He's really developed into quite a writer; he's definitely his own man with his own style.

TJ: How did the candy bar come about?

SRB: Now, there you go - our lead man and Harmony King, Big Al Lemery - he works some at a local chocolate factory, Lake Champlain Chocolates. They produce a top of the line product with distribution all over. Al came up with



the concept of "The Starline Rhythm Bar - Best by Far" and let me tell you, it's a BIG hit! They flew out of our hands at Green Bay. I assume you've seen the label, Jason, and should know that it's real quality. Deke Dickerson was impressed and you know his high standards.

TJ: what other merchandising have y'all done?

SRB: No T-shirts for this band! (although we probably should do some) - For our last CD, 'Better Luck is a Barroom Away' (Tin Town 215) we did an old-style flip book of the band playing a small bar stage, with me walkin' the bar and Billy rollin' on the floor with his bass. It was another BIG hit! Fans who couldn't get out to the honky-tonk to see us would stay home an' drink-and just keep flippin' through the book! Again, Deke has one on his table at home in Burbank and told us it was real popular there. We've sold out and none in production right now.

TJ: If you could be on the ultimate 'Tour of the Stars' what five artists/bands would you like to tour with?

SRB: Boy, that's a hard one, Jason, 'cause there are so many. I mean I wish I could have toured with a lot of now-deceased stars! But I guess we would say, Buck Owens (if he still had the old Buckaroos), George Jones, Merle Haggard, Bill Kirchen and Billy Lee Riley. Actually Bill and Billy Lee would work with us - they both gave us endorsements on our CD's. I should also mention High Noon, because it would be real interesting since we're both drummerless trios, but have a completely different sound and style. Then, there's Wayne "The Train", Deke, King Memphis and The Raging Teens - all friends and I'm sure we'd tour well together.

TJ: What kind of future do you see for the style of music your doing?

SRB: Bright - Many folks are sick and tired of the "hot, new country" that's put on them and are really refreshed to hear what we're doing. The problem is the Country Music "Industry" (it's not just a business any more) and Commercial Country Radio is fighting our music all the way - unless it becomes popular again and then they'll want a piece of the action!

TJ: What differences have you encountered since the release of your first CD and this new one?

SRB: A lot more response, especially since we bulk mailed our new CD to all the FAR jocks - and I think our appearance at Green Bay helped. Also, I'd add that Hep Cat, our distributor, gave us two 'Spotlights' in their last catalog, which probably will have some impact. We really appreciate distribution by Hep Cat and our CD's can be ordered both on-line and by toll-free phone from them.