

Lyric Spotlight | January/February 2010

By Doug Waterman on January 7th, 2010



Jan/Feb 2010 Amateur Lyric Contest Entrant

Matthew Hoggatt

“21 at Normandy”

When did you begin writing songs? How often do you write these days? What’s your day job? Where do you play your songs for people?

I started writing songs in 2005 a few days after Hurricane Katrina. Ironically, my first song was also about Hurricane Katrina. I still play that song at local bars, clubs and coffee houses where I gig. I try to write a little everyday, but mostly at nighttime. I am a detective at the police department in my hometown during the day and the boss won’t allow guitars in the office.

In your bio, you say: “I was raised along the same stretch of sand that Jimmy Buffett walked in as a kid and played in the bayous and woods of south Mississippi. Depending on what day it was, I was either a pirate, a cowboy or a soldier.” Who are some of your songwriting heroes and influences?

Obviously, Jimmy Buffett was, and still is, a strong influence on my music. I would not be a songwriter today if I had not discovered his music as a child. The other heroes that live in my iPod and my heart are Chris Knight, John Prine and Todd Snider, to name a few.

Your lyric, “21 at Normandy,” feels very in tune with the post-war emotional struggles many soldiers experience—whether it be burying the memories or forming addictions as coping mechanisms. What inspired the song? How did you go about tackling the writing?

I wrote this song with my relatives in mind that served during World War II. They made sacrifices back then that many people today would not even consider as options. Unfortunately, some of these people brought the war home with them. This song is for them and all the other vets out there. I found that the topic came to me easily. Maybe it's because I am a former soldier myself, or maybe it's because I knew the subject needed to be written. Either way, I hope people like it.

Do you write for yourself or with an audience in mind, or both?

I write sometimes for myself, and sometimes for an audience, but my goal is to get a song cut. Maybe then I could buy a tag for my wife's mini-van.

If any artist could record one of your songs, who would it be and which song?

Trace Adkins, “When War Wasn't War.”

What are you working on now?

I just co-wrote a song with my friend Leroy Young called “When War Wasn't War.” It talks about the differences between the game of war we played as kids, and the war our country is fighting today. I found that the subject of this song is truer now than ever before. I get older everyday, but our soldiers are getting younger. You can hear the song at www.matthoggatt.com.

Are you more of a lyric or melody-focused writer? Why do you think that is?

Without a doubt, I am a lyric-based writer. I only know a handful of guitar chords, but I can talk all night long—just ask my wife. I guess that's why I like co-writing with a strong melody-based writer. It gives a chance for both people to shine at what they do.

Is there a song that, in retrospect, made you want to begin writing songs? What is it about the song that gets to you?

“Tin Cup Chalice” by Jimmy Buffett is a song that I wish I wrote. I guess I just relate to the scenery so well. I have played it for a few years now, but each time I play it or hear it, I remember the days not so long ago when I first picked up a guitar and a notepad and tried to tell a story that other people would like.