



MIKE RUNNELS

Who's the mystery man of Texas country under the black hat and behind the dark sunglasses that brings the soul and spirit of country music's past alive for a new era? It's singer, songwriter and guitarist Mike Runnels.

Over the course of four albums of true C&W and rural Tex-Mex, the music created by the Austin-based Runnels recalls "the days when country music was at its purest," hails *Music News Nashville*. He comes by his authenticity honestly, born and raised in the Golden Triangle of East Texas that has been ground zero for some of the finest country artists since George Jones emerged from the area's piney woods to become a musical legend.

With his albums *Top of the World*, *One More Time*, *Don't Tell Candy* and most recently *Jukebox Boulevard* on his Lucky Penny Records label, Runnels has earned critical acclaim and radio play across North America and Europe. In 2006, his single "It's Up To You" was a Top 20 hit on the European Country Music radio chart, spending 20 weeks on the chart alongside some of the top acts in American and Europe.

As Nancy Montgomery of *Music News Nashville* notes, "Runnels takes us back to a time when country songs were stripped down to their bare essence and simply told the story of love lost, love found and love betrayed. No hidden messages, no political angst, no 'cooler than thou' showmanship. Just good and solid honky-tonk songs from a guy who has a knack of recreating the sounds and styles of such classic singers as Jimmie Dale Gilmore, Faron Young or Porter Wagoner." And on his latest single release in early 2009, "Last Date," Runnels pays tribute to piano legend Floyd Cramer on an original song that echoes the indelible instrumental standard of the same title that was a #2 pop hit for Cramer in 1960.

"I spent my first 18 years in Beaumont, Texas," says Runnels. "That gives me the right to play country music, and it's where I first learned what makes for the best country music." Although he's from the first generation of his longtime Texan family that was not raised on a farm, Runnels' country roots are still planted deep in the rural Lone Star State soil and musical tradition.

"All my uncles were cardboard cutouts of Merle Haggard and George Jones," Runnels explains. "Everywhere I went as a kid, country music was on the radio and playing in the car. I guess it seeped into my consciousness, and then later it just sort of genetically kicked in."

Like many youths of his day, Runnels was a rock'n'roll fan as well as an avid dirt bike racer until he got his first guitar in his late teens and music took over as his prime passion. Moving to Austin after he graduated from high school, Runnels honed his musical and songwriting talents. If rumor is to be believed, the mystery man was spotted playing with and then fronting popular bands on the Austin and Los Angeles rock and punk scenes, releasing albums, EPs and singles that were well received by music critics and radio in the U.S. and Europe.

Then one day in the early 1990s while living in L.A., Runnels decided to check out the B-side of a cassette in his collection that he thought was blank. "I stuck it in the tape deck and pushed play, and it was George Jones, 'The Race Is On.' It was like in those movies where someone gets struck by lightning and they change bodies with a cat. It was like bam! The minute I pushed play, it just hit me," he recalls. "I then went out and got his greatest hits and listened to nothing but that for a good year. What is this? It's so fantastic. I get it."

In 1995, Runnels returned to Austin and, thanks to the tutelage of Texas country singer-songwriter Jamie Lee Bradford, refined his gift for writing genuine country songs. Hooking up with producer, bassist and multi-instrumentalist as well as artist in his own right Ron Flynt, he began recording albums and releasing them on his Lucky Penny label. Working with such noted players as Grammy winner Floyd Domino (known for his piano work with Asleep at the Wheel, Merle Haggard, George Strait and others), steel guitarist Herb Steiner (whose credits include playing and recording with Linda Ronstadt, Alvin Crow, Michael Martin Murphey, Jerry Jeff Walker, Johnny Bush, Gary P. Nunn and a host of other notables), guitarist Andrew Nafziger (whose credits include work with Kelly Willis, Bruce Robison, Ray Wylie Hubbard, Marcia Ball and many more) and other top Austin players, Runnels quickly garnered note in the U.S., Canada, Europe and Japan. Reviewers and radio programmers here and abroad have praised his "good and solid honky-tonk songs" as "wonderful," "perfect," "assured," "extremely listenable" and "just the music we love."

Runnels has been favorably compared to many of the legends of genuine country music, finding ongoing inspiration in the singing, writing and playing styles of those artists who forged the genre's classic sounds and styles. But rather than being a neo-traditionalist or

revivalist, he is instead a modern exemplar of country's truest and best musical and lyrical values.

"I see myself and my art as a tribute to the legendary artists of country music," he concludes. "There are a lot of people who think they can copy that sound and they get close. But I would never really attempt to do that. I'm influenced by them and live in their shadows. And I do my little part to keep this sound alive."

Contact: mikerunnels@earthlink.net
512-323-2211