



by Allison Seale

If Ford is to Chevrolet what Dodge is to Chrysler, what jazz is to country, what tall is to hair, what Aggie is to Grammy, can you doubt it is Lyle Lovett I speak of?

He has been acclaimed as one of the most unique talents to hit the music scene in years. He's as versatile as his music is unpredictable. He can move you from high spirited, two-stepping tunes to jazzy, toe-tapping, finger snapping rhythm and blues to soft and sincere ballads with ease.

A graduate of Texas A&M, he's released three albums in his career. His second, *Pontiac*, earned him a nomination for a Grammy Award as best male vocalist in the country music category. His latest album, *Lyle Lovett and His Large Band*, won him that honor this year.

Talking to Lovett about his accomplishments, you get the idea that he's not the least bit heady about his fame. In fact, he seems to be a paradox personified. Seeming almost timid at times, he makes you wonder if this could possibly be the same man who stills audiences with such forceful and cocky songs as "L.A. County" and "Nobody Knows Me Like My Baby". But as you look into the fathoms of his

azure eyes, you sense the determination that has driven him since the day he made the pact that he'd never work as hard as he did the summer after his first semester at A&M.

It was the summer of 1975 and Lovett had returned home to Spring, Texas where he took a job installing plumbing at construction sites. It was hard work, harder work than he ever wanted to do in his life. But, by the grace of God, he said, he broke his collar bone two weeks into the summer, and it didn't heal fast enough for him to return to work.

"The next summer, I thought, I'm going to do something different — something easier, that's when I started playing music."

When he returned to A&M, he put his interest for music to work by joining the MSC Basement Coffeehouse Committee. Among his duties was recruiting students and professional performers to play in the coffeehouse.

"The whole thing was geared so that students could play. We had concerts every Friday and Saturday from 8 p.m. to 12 a.m., and we had a different act on every 30 minutes." The auditions, he said, were really just a way to get phone numbers and see a face.

"If you wanted to play, you could play. We never turned anybody down."

By the next semester, Lovett thought he'd give it a try himself. He played the coffeehouse a couple of times that semester, then went

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home for the summer and got a job playing with a friend in a seafood restaurant.

Throughout the next two years, Lovett played somewhere most every weekend and sometimes as often as four times a week. It was also during this time that he decided to change his major from history to journalism. Since he didn't have a specific career direction in mind, he chose journalism because he thought that it would offer more diverse opportunities.

"I was serious about my music at that point, but I didn't really know enough about the business of music to say, 'this is how I am going to pursue this.' It's not really like going out and pursuing getting a job. It's not that tangible a thing."

Lovett used his new major to learn more about the music business. Writing for the entertainment section in *The Battalion*, he interviewed musicians such as Nancy Griffith and Michael Murphy.

School agreed with Lovett. He describes himself as a pretty good student who, like most, was guilty of cutting class from time to time. But, he said, his music didn't interfere with his studies.

"Playing music was fun. The times I didn't study weren't because I was playing music. If there were times when I didn't study that I was supposed to study, I wouldn't have studied no matter what I had to do. You really don't need an excuse not to study."

By 1978 he had stopped playing in restaurants and started playing in places where people came to hear music (as opposed to eat). Two years later, in 1980, he graduated with a degree in journalism and returned home briefly.

"One of the first things I did when I got out of school was to get back in school," Lovett said. "I really didn't want to do anything that

would limit the time I was able to spend on my music." So, guitar in hand, he returned to A&M to study German. He found that being in school was more compatible with the pursuit of his musical interests than any job might have been.

After finishing his degree in German, he enrolled as a graduate student in the English department where he taught English composition. He moonlighted weekends on the Texas songwriter circuit that took him to places he used to visit as a patron. As he continued to play

spent his life savings and a loan from his parents making, he attracted the attention of MCA Records who signed him to their Curb label.

His first album, *Lyle Lovett*, had many of the songs that he had recorded on his demo tape. Among them was "This Old Porch", a song he wrote with Robert Earl Keen Jr. — a song, Lovett says, that had a lot to do with what was going on with them as they prepared to graduate from A&M.

"We were writing about the physical things that were changing. But, in a personal way, we were using that to write about what we were doing. We were in school faced with probably one of the most traumatic things that he (Keen) and I had ever been faced with which was the idea of having to go out and get a real job and work for a living. The song was about us and

some cases would be appropriate, but in others it would be a bit of an overstatement."

So the boy next door made it big. And he remembers the people and places that were part of his ascent. He makes a point to learn the names of the people he meets and to ask them about themselves. He likes Bryan/College Station and feels he owes part of his success to the area.

"Being here — specifically being in Bryan/College Station — was good for me because I had no experience playing music. There were places I could play just starting out. I'm not sure there would have been places I could have played just starting out in Houston or in Austin or in Dallas."

His career has taken him around the country four times in the last three years, to most of the major cities in Canada and to Europe. But he is frequently reminded of A&M.

"There are a lot of schools that have spirit. But, I tell you, Aggies let you know where they are. Everywhere we play all over the country, there are Aggies there and at least one "Gig'em Aggies" during the show no matter where we play."

But his shows have a broader appeal. Lovett and his music are intriguing. His deliberate lyrics and unique style are part of what makes him such a refreshing entertainer. He makes you listen not just to the music, but to the message and, almost always, he packs a surprise. But just who is Lyle Lovett?

"I'm the guy who sits next to you and reads the newspaper over your shoulder. Wait. Don't turn the page. I'm not finished . . . Life is so uncertain." — "Here I Am", *Lyle Lovett and His Large Band*. ■



From one Ag to another — Lyle Lovett

his own music, he started drawing more and more people.

"Things always seemed to be getting better," Lovett remembers. "I was always encouraged enough to keep doing it."

Cutting short his graduate studies, Lovett immersed himself in his music full-time in 1982. Then, after a year of persistent trips to Nashville with a demo tape he'd

that what we were doing was probably going to change."

Several local landmarks are mentioned in this song, The Palace walk-in (as opposed to drive-in), the La Salle Hotel and the Brazos River. But it is not the only song in which he immortalizes local landmarks.

"The rest of the songs that I wrote around here were based on local women. Calling them landmarks, in



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