



Aaron Watson Biography

It's no secret that Texas has always had its own kind of music and its own kind of music business to go along with it. But even by the wide-open standards of the Lone Star State, the ongoing career and success of Aaron Watson are something else. With an uncanny knack for mixing great songs and unforgettable performances with good, old-fashioned business savvy, Watson has grown – night-by-night, fan-by-fan, album-by-album, one honky-tonk stage at a time – into an unstoppable force in Texas Music with his sights firmly set on the national stage.

With the April 1st release of *Angels & Outlaws* – his eighth under his own independent banner, Big Label Records – the Abilene-based artist steps up to the plate and knocks it out of the park with a career-defining collection of 15 pure-country songs that celebrate his deep roadhouse roots and push his music into some intriguing new corners. To Watson, the album represents a creative career high. To everyone within hearing distance, *Angels & Outlaws* represents the freshest musical breeze to blow out of Texas in a long, long time.

"My biggest fear when I record an album is that it's the same all the way through," Watson says. "It's very important for me to throw in some curve balls and some sliders. Pitchers love to throw the fastball, but you've got to throw in some changeups once in a while for those fastballs to be effective."

You'll have to forgive the baseball allusions. Growing up in Amarillo, long before he'd ever picked up a guitar or written a song, the national pastime was the focus of young Watson's life.

"If you had asked me back then what I was going to be, I would have said, 'Short stop for the Houston Astros,'" he laughs. "Then I woke up one day and realized I was the most incredibly average player on the face of God's green earth. But I got a long way on work ethic and fundamentals. Baseball is so much like life."

While father and son bonded on the baseball diamond, his Dad's record collection – where artists like Willie Nelson, Merle Haggard and Waylon Jennings shared space with the Beach Boys and the Beatles – provided a constant soundtrack to Watson's life.

"My dad has an incredible record collection, and I got a lot of different flavors," Watson says. "I guess you can say that he brainwashed me. He surely had a heavy influence on the kind of music I was listening to, but when we were at church on Sunday morning it was Mom always encouraging me to get out the songbook and sing."

Watson didn't heed his mom's advice until college, when an injury ended his baseball dreams. Actually, the seeds of his future life had been planted a couple of years earlier when, through a

friend, Watson scored front-of-the-house seats for one of Garth Brooks' legendary sold out shows at Texas Stadium.

"Those four nights in Irving were the shows where Garth solidified that he was the man," Watson says. "That was a heck of a show for me to see right off the bat. In fact, the guy who promoted those shows, Glen Smith, is promoting shows for me now."

That event, and a subsequent Clay Walker concert, had a profound effect on the former ballplayer. These days, onstage and in the studio, Watson deftly combines Walker's easy way with a song with Brooks' live intensity (not to mention his business acumen).

"To this day, one of my favorite country records is Clay Walker's *Hypnotize the Moon*," Watson says. "That was when I started trying to write songs. I was reading the lyrics inside CDs and listening to all the clever twists in the songwriting."

Attending Abilene Christian University, Watson enrolled in a beginner guitar class. His teacher, Dan Mitchell, would have a major influence on the young singer/songwriter and was the first of many mentors to "appear" in Watson's life.

"I walk into this classroom and it's just me and this old man," Watson recalls. "If there ever was a guitar player who could play like Chet Atkins, it's Dan Mitchell. We just bonded and became good friends. All the students love him at ACU, and I give him a lot of credit."

Armed with the fundamentals, Watson was experimenting with songwriting when another teacher appeared, this time at a local coffee shop.

"I'm sitting there and this guy walks in with these blue ostrich boots on, and it was Larry Gatlin," Watson says. "Meeting him was a big moment that got me going in the right direction."

The outgoing Watson struck up a conversation with the country star and was offered backstage passes for Gatlin's performance that night. After the show, the pair discussed songwriting and struck up a friendship.

"He would talk about being descriptive and painting a picture in somebody's mind in two and a half minutes," Watson says. "I listened to everything he said and it really made a big difference. Some people believe in coincidence, but when you look at all the doors that have opened for me, this is not a coincidence."

Watson put his first band together and was playing gigs on campus and around the region when he came to the attention of Dr. Neal Lowry, a local physician and part-time songwriter. Lowry became Watson's co-writer and an important force in the singer's growing career, financing his debut release, helping to keep his show on the road, and even assisting in the birth of Watson's two sons.

With two albums and a few years of hard touring under his belt, Watson released his third album, *Shut Up & Dance*. After a slow start, the debut single from the album, "Off the Record," took off at Texas radio. Watson and band soon moved from cramped van to roomy tour bus and started playing for sellout crowds all over the southwest. For his next release, 2004's *The Honky Tonk Kid*, Watson hooked up with veteran producer and Asleep at the Wheel leader Ray Benson. That album spawned another hit single, "Reckless," and Watson followed up quickly with the 2005 concert recording, *Live at the Texas Hall of Fame*. His next release, *San Angelo*, also produced by Benson, debuted at No. 60 on the Billboard chart and continued Watson's career momentum and impressive album sales.

Angels & Outlaws kicks off with "Tulsa," a revved-up and re-tooled Waylon Jennings chestnut, and closes with "That's What I Like About a Country Song," a classic Lone Star-shuffle throwdown with co-producer Benson and fellow Texas troubadours Jack Ingram, Kevin Fowler and Roger Creager joining in. In between are some of Watson's finest songs, carved from stages and well-worn dancefloors across the southwest. From the title song, inspired by the legendary love affair of Johnny Cash and June Carter, to the shotgun sentiment of "Wake Up and Smell the Coffee," to an out-of-left-field, fiddle-drenched cover of John Mayer's "The Heart of Life," *Angels & Outlaws* celebrates Watson's all-American artistry as well as his stubborn independent streak.

"In the beginning we were worked hard to try to land that big record deal," Watson says. "Now I'm selling enough records and tickets that it would have to be one heck of a deal for me to even take a look at it. I'm a businessman and a family man, and I'd much rather have money over fame. I figure that if we keep doing it my way, working hard, taking care of our fans and treating them like friends and family, that the fame will come along. Instead of taking an elevator that shoots straight to the top, we're taking the stairs."

While the record business desperately tries to fix its own elevator, you'll find Aaron Watson out on the road – with an expanded touring schedule that includes stops in Nebraska, Kansas, Colorado, Oklahoma and New Mexico – doing what he does best, playing timeless country music, selling thousands of records and truckloads of merchandise, and shaking the hands of those friends and fans night after night.

"The good Lord's really blessed me," he says. "From my management to my booking to the 10 phenomenal guys I've got out on the road, it's crazy how the pieces have just fallen together. It's been a neat experience."