

Rusty factor helped take the award

Justin Pickard shined through all three rounds of the Rusty Wier Singer/Songwriter competition

by Mary Jane Farmer, Scene In Town.

IT WAS THE FIRST DAY FOR JUSTIN PICKARD without vaping, and the first time he'd used his gift cart to Love & War, the one he won when he took the top honor in this year's Rusty Wier singer/songwriter competition, when we talked.

The contest is named for singer/songwriter Rusty Weir, the Texas singer/songwriter known for many of his songs, including "Don't It Make You Wanna Dance?" which Jerry Jeff Walker covered as has Chris LeDoux and Barbara Mandrell. And then, there was Bonnie Raitt's version which was used in the movie *Urban Cowboy*.

Pickard makes his home in Garland and has entered the contest before, in the days when he led the band Sidekick Mafia. "I've submitted songs to other contests, too," Pickard said. "As a kid, I did a battle of the bands and went through it with all the band members, but that's not the same thing. This is the first contest I've ever won. And it's cool."

Pickard remembers making friends through this contests. Especially, he said, he remembered taking second place behind winner Scott Sean White in 2014. "He congratulated me on Facebook and we keep in touch."

That friendship-making and keeping in touch is one of the reasons so many songwriters join up each year for this contest. And it's as much, if not more, for the camaraderie as for the win. Pickard is no exception. "I had picked Mr. Troll and Brad Purdom early in the contest to keep going," he said, "but they didn't make the finals. With them gone, I picked Parker Twomey or Tanner Sparks to take the big win."

Love & War

SONGWRITERS BEGIN IN early winter in the (usually) Tuesday night try-outs at Love & War in Texas. KHYI on-air personality Brett Dillon hosts and coordinates all the contest for Love & War. Then, it moves to Sundays and there's two full rounds and finally, the final round, with some-different, some-same judges.

Justin Pickard shined through all three rounds of this contest. And an amazing part of his performance each time, not known to many people, is that he suffers from rheumatoid arthritis in his fingers and many other skeletal joints. He said he has to really work his hands before grabbing his guitar and going on stage, to loosen those joints up. The medications prescribed for this disease helps, he said, but he cannot continue to take them forever.

Yet, when he hits that guitar, it's like a machine took over, like a cross between drumming and strumming the strings. That part of his performance, each time,

scored him high on the judges' criteria scoring sheets.

And on the Rusty Factor on that same sheet. Rusty Wier was known for his entertainment style — personal and friendly while being professional at the same time. Rusty would have been proud of and entertained by Pickard himself.

"I think it also helped," Pickard said, "that I didn't repeat any of my songs through the rounds. And on the final round, I played two brand new songs, I'd never played before. At first, I thought that was a dumb idea; but guess it was a good one, because it worked."

One of his prizes was studio time in Dustin Hendricks' studios and right up front, Hendricks was jumping in, ready to record those songs.

Pickard, who now fronts the Justin Pickard & The Thunderbird Winos band and plays several solo and duo gigs as well, about 200 times each year, he said.

Acoustic guitar

Pickard's acoustic guitar belonged to his grandfather, and shows the signs of aging, kind of Willie-style. "I learned to take chances from him. Instead of always playing it safe, go outside your box. I could have played it safe (during the contest) and done the songs I play every night, the ones I do the best. But instead, I played some older stuff and some very new stuff. And made it through."

"I work very hard at this, it is my full-time job," Pickard said. He taught guitar for a while, and then the band started playing more and more, and the money was enough to make a decent living. "At a point, I decided this is what I want to do. I started playing a lot of solo gigs, after Mafia broke up. I had the contacts, had been building them

over the years."

And, he said, he had to choose between an already-scheduled Sunday gig or the Sunday Rusty Wier finale.

He rescheduled with the understanding venue owner, and the rest is history. Win-win.

Pickard joins past Rusty Wier singer/songwriter winners (Beginning in 2011) Michael Prysock, Guthrie Kennard, Mark Shelton, Scott Sean White, Mick Tinsley, Michael O'Neal, and Wesley Joe Malone in the winner's circle.

"I think it's cool that the new Love & War owners are continuing to support the contest and local music. There's quite a few people who come to hear this contest."

L&W owner Red Byboth has stated that the contest will be held again in 2019, beginning with the try-outs this winter. Watch the venue's Website for notice of when this will start. LoveandWarinTexas.com

To keep up with Pickard's schedule, go Online to JustinPickard.com



His acoustic guitar belonged to his grandfather: Justin Pickard

Outlasting the naysayers.

Lee Roy Parnell is on the right path after a ten-year hiatus with the release of *Midnight Believer*

By SD Henderson

LEE ROY PARNELL. I CAN SEE YOU REACHING back to the recesses of your mind and remembering that name from somewhere, someplace long ago. Well, not really that long ago if you're my age, but you get the idea. Lee Roy Parnell's musical trails have meandered widely since he left the family ranch in Stephenville in the early seventies, but he's back on the right path after a ten-year hiatus with *Midnight Believer*.

You might be tempted to lump Parnell in with every other country singer coming out of Nashville in the early nineties. He did enjoy a lot of commercial success through his first four releases on Arista Records, charting #2 hits like "What Kind of Fool Do You Think I Am" (which still holds up after 25 years). But to write him off to Nashville in the nineties would be a discredit to a solid body of songwriting combined with legitimate slide guitar chops.

Wills to Kinky

PARNELL'S EARLY CHOPS were featured at six years old on Bob Will's (yes, that one) radio show where he made his first performance. Parnell's complete skill set really developed in the early seventies around Austin, where he landed during halcyon days of an alternate universe that included a stint with Kinky Friedman and the Texas Jewboys. That

kind of pedigree doesn't really fit the mold of the great big music machine, but it established Parnell's knack for blending multiple forms of roots music into his repertoire.

It's been over ten years since Parnell released his last album, and you might think that music industry had left just enough of a bad taste in his mouth to hang it up and play guitar on the porch. But Parnell's formative years prepared him well for a long life in music. He relates, "I didn't know it at the time but ranch life was preparing me for the profession I chose. Turns out the two are not at all dissimilar. There's not a lot you can control. Whether it be a rough partnership with a record company, a manager or booking agency...to me it was no different than trying to change the weather. All you can do is work hard, stay focused and never ever give up. Never! No matter what 'they' might tell you.

Outlast the naysayers."

Midnight Believer

MIDNIGHT BELIEVER WRAPS up little glimpses into Parnell's

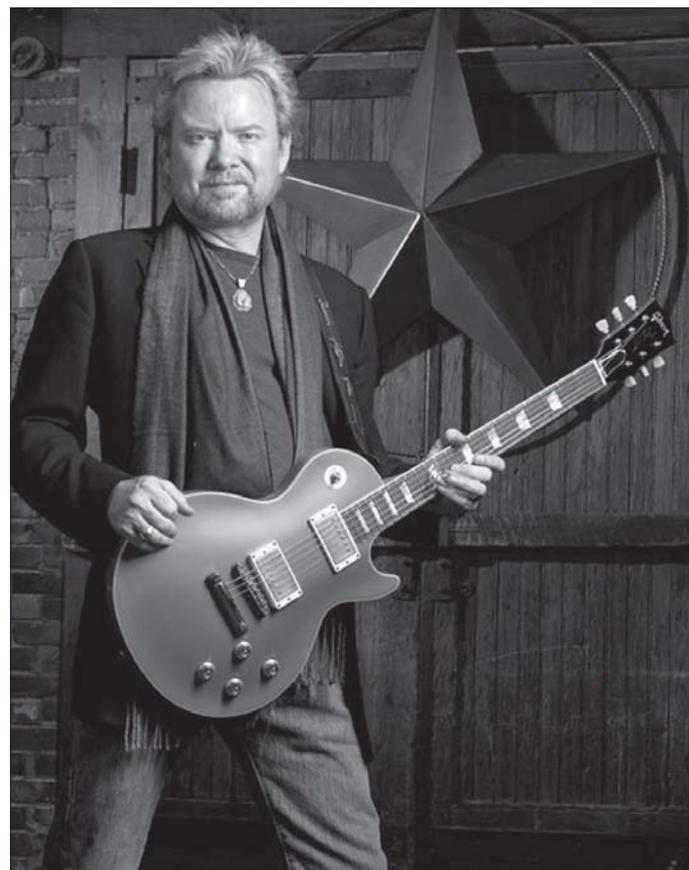
career throughout the work. One of my favorite pieces is "Sunny Days" which features The Fairfield Four, a legendary gospel group in their own right, but

the blending of multiple styles is infused throughout. His voice still carries with the same power and range that put him on the charts and his guitar playing still hasn't missed a beat.

A cynic might hear a little more of that Nashville sound on the record than could reasonably be overlooked by the critic in search of a complaint, but there is no doubt of the craftsmanship poured into the production and musicianship on the album. If you've ever been to Nashville, on your circuitous way to the distillery in Lynchburg, then you know that there is a deep musical well that has to be reckoned with, even by the most stalwart of Texas music adherents.

Lee Roy Parnell has been to both places and lived to come out the other side. You can still hear a little of that something that jogs your memory bank just enough to bring you back to the Good Luck Rodeo or any number of the long departed honky tonks of your youth.

Catch Lee Roy Parnell and reconnect the dots on a whole lot of hazy 90's memories at Hank's Texas Grill in McKinney, Texas on August 11 with a live show starting at 9 pm.



He is a renowned slide guitarist and named a Buddy Texas Tornado in 1996: Lee Roy Parnell