

= Honky Tonk Heroes =

Honky Tonk Heroes is a country music album by Waylon Jennings , released in 1973 on RCA Victor . With the exception of " We Had It All " , all of the songs on the album were written or co @-@ written by Billy Joe Shaver . The album is considered an important piece in the development of the outlaw subgenre in country music as it helped revive the honky tonk music of Nashville by injecting a rock and roll attitude .

= = Background = =

Jennings and manager Neil Reshen had renegotiated the singer 's contract with RCA Records in 1972 , which gave him creative control over his work . By 1973 , Atlantic Records was attempting to sign Jennings who , with fellow country singer Willie Nelson , had become dissatisfied with RCA because of the company 's conservative influence upon their music . Nelson , who had signed with Atlantic , was becoming more popular , and this persuaded RCA to renegotiate with Jennings before it lost another potential success . Jennings ' music had already evolved from his early recordings with the label , especially on his previous three LPs Good Hearted Woman (1972) , Ladies Love Outlaws (1972) , and especially Lonesome , On 'ry and Mean (1973) . This evolution was spurred by the singer trying to capture the dynamics of his live sound on record (often by using his backing band the Waylors rather than studio musicians) and his choice of material , which often included songs composed by writers outside the Nashville mainstream .

= = Recording and composition = =

Jennings had invited the then unknown Billy Joe Shaver to Nashville to write the songs for his next album after hearing him sing " Willy the Wandering Gypsy and Me " just before the 1972 Dripping Springs Reunion . When Shaver got to Nashville he spent six months unsuccessfully trying to speak with Jennings , who had apparently forgotten the invite ; eventually , with the help of local D.J. Roger " Captain Midnight " Schutt , Shaver turned up at a RCA recording session Jennings was doing with producer Chet Atkins , and tried to confront the singer , who merely offered Shaver \$ 100 . Shaver refused the money and told Jennings that he was willing to fight him if he would not listen to his songs . In the 2003 documentary Beyond Nashville , Shaver recalls :

" Finally I caught him in Studio A of RCA . He came out of the control booth and he had a couple of bikers - bikers hung around with him a lot , some pretty tough looking customers - and I 'd had enough . I just said , ' Hey Waylon ! ' And he turned . I said , ' I got these songs that you claimed you was gonna listen to , and if you don 't listen to ' em I 'm gonna whip your ass right here in front of everybody . ' And boy , whew . Man ! Everything got quiet and them old boys started formin ' and Waylon stopped ' em . He said , ' Hoss , you don 't know how close you come to gettin ' killed . ' I said , ' Well , I 've had enough . You done told me you was gonna do this . Now I 'm full of songs and I want you to listen to ' em . "

Jennings offered to record " Willy the Wandering Gypsy and Me " and told Shaver to sing another song ? if Jennings liked it he would record it and Shaver could sing another ; but if he did not like it , Shaver would have to leave . Shaver sang " Ain 't No God in Mexico " , followed by " Honky Tonk Heroes " and " Old Five and Dimers and Me " . Jennings was so taken with Shaver 's tunes that he decided he would record an album consisting solely of Texan 's songs . RCA producer Chet Atkins was reluctant to record the material of an unknown writer , but since he had creative control , Jennings decided to record the album anyway , although the executives of RCA Records delayed its release . Jennings was also spending more of his time at Tompall Glaser 's " Hillbilly Central " studio at 916 Nineteenth Avenue South in Nashville , attracted by the laid back , communal atmosphere that was the antitheses of the traditional setup that Jennings had endured at RCA since 1966 . Jennings brought Glaser back with him to RCA Victor Studios to co @-@ produce Honky Tonk Heroes . " Tompall and I were best friends , " Jennings reminisced in the audio version of his autobiography Waylon . " We met at about the time he broke up with his brothers , and I kind of took

their place in his life . " Jennings and Shaver worked on the songs for several weeks , with Shaver believing that Jennings was not closely following the phrasing of the tunes , and in some cases he played the songs repeatedly so that Jennings would understand them . The title cut was especially problematic , with Jennings and Shaver - both temperamental personalities - clashing over the arrangement . In Michael Striessguth 's book *Outlaw : Waylon , Willie , Kris , and the Renegades of Nashville* , Jennings drummer Richie Albright recalls :

" We were doing the album and Billy Joe was around , and we began ' Honky Tonk Heroes , ' so we cut the first part of the song and we stopped , and Waylon said , ' This is the way we 're going to do it . ' And Billy Joe had been sitting in the back and he come walking up , saying , ' What are you doing ? You 're fucking up my song . That ain 't the way it goes . ' Pretty soon Waylon and Billy Joe are just hollering at one another . Billy Joe didn 't understand the way we were putting it together ... then we put it together and he said , ' Yeah . That 's good . That 's the way it goes . ' "

The album that resulted is what many call the outlaw movement 's first true record and Jennings ' artistic zenith . Almost all of the songs on *Honky Tonk Heroes* contain a defiant , restless longing for and celebration of the road (" Moving is the closest thing to being free ... ") and a rock and roll swagger that was entirely new in Nashville circles . Although concept albums were not new in country music , with stars like Johnny Cash , Marty Robbins , and Porter Wagoner all having recorded LPs with unifying themes , *Honky Tonk Heroes* offered a more progressive take on the enterprise , resembling the albums Mickey Newbury had recently recorded and the blockbuster *Red Headed Stranger* album that Willie Nelson would release two years later . In addition to Shaver 's brooding compositions , Jennings rounded out the collection with the tender ballad " We Had It All , " written by Kris Kristofferson keyboardist " Funky " Donnie Fritts . According to Michael Striessguth 's book *Outlaw* , RCA had asked Waylon to tack on one more song to augment the Shaver songs , in hopes of landing a hit single , and after considering Steve Young 's " Seven Bridges Road , " Jimmie Rodgers ' " T for Texas , " and Shel Silverstein 's " The Leaving Coming On , " Jennings opted for the Fritts tune , which would go on to be recorded and performed by Rod Stewart , Ray Charles , Bob Dylan , the Rolling Stones . Released as a single , " We Had it All " , peaked at number 28 in *Billboard* 's Country Singles . Jennings and Shaver also collaborated on the hit single " You Asked Me To , " which spent fifteen weeks on the *Billboard* country singles charts , reaching a peak of number eight . In the liner notes to *The Essential Waylon Jennings* , Wade Jessen quotes the singer : " We wrote this one night in the dark over at Bobby Bare 's office across the street from a Burger Boy where we 'd been playing pinball . Shaver said , ' I 've got it started . Let 's finish it . ' We wrote it pretty well in the dark . " Shaver recorded his own version in 1977 for the album *Gypsy Boy* , with special guest Willie Nelson on guitar and vocals . " You Asked Me To " also appeared as the closing song on Elvis Presley 's 1975 album *Promised Land* .

Two songs , " Low Down Freedom " and " Black Rose , " were produced by Ronny Light . " We Had It All " was produced by Jennings and Ken Mansfield . Like the music within , the album cover was also at odds with the elaborate , often overwrought cover designs from Music Row , featuring an unpretentious shot of a smiling Jennings and his unkempt friends sat around a studio laughing and drinking . In a 2008 interview with Dan MacIntosh , Shaver said of the LP , " Oh , it was great , because the songs were bigger than me . And I couldn 't possibly sing as good as Waylon . And at the time , Waylon was just great , so great , and I knew something was gonna happen good for him , and sure enough it helped me and it helped him , too , and that 's a pretty good trade . "

= = Release and critical reception = =

Initially , the executives of RCA Records , and Chet Atkins , tried to avoid releasing the album , which finally came out in May 1973 . It got a mixed reception from critics , although it is now regarded as one of the most important albums in the history of country music and is listed in Robert Dimery 's *1001 Albums You Must Hear Before You Die* . It reached # 14 in *Billboard* 's Top Country Albums and # 185 in the *Billboard* 200 @.@ while " You Ask Me To " peaked at number 8 . It received praise from magazines that did not often cover country music , like counterculture bible *Rolling Stone* , which raved , " After many years of overproduction on record , Waylon Jennings '

new album offers an opportunity to hear the crisp , robust no @-@ nonsense sound which has been his trademark since his early days with Buddy Holly 's Crickets . " The Music Journal described the album as " certainly brash , lively and down @-@ to @-@ earth . Thoroughly infectious too . " Regarding the composition of the songs , Stereo Review wrote : " Billy Joe Shaver songs have [Jennings] in a corral if not in a box ... This is like picking Kris Kristofferson up by the literary ankles , shaking him vigorously , and using every damn nugget that tumbles out . "

= = Legacy = =

Honky Tonk Heroes helped add to the outlaw image of Jennings , and the album is considered an important piece in the development of the outlaw subgenre in country music . Shaver , who is regarded as helping push forward outlaw country , feels that the album was " the touchstone of the Outlaw movement " . Stephen Thomas Erlewine in a retrospective review in Allmusic felt that Jennings had been looking for a musical approach which had roots in country and rock , and Shaver 's songs ? " sketching an outlaw stance with near defiance and borrowing rock attitude to create the hardest country tunes imaginable " ? provided that common ground . Erlewine believed that the album arrived at the right moment to revive the honky tonk music of Nashville by injecting a rock and roll attitude that would produce outlaw country . Kenneth Burns , in Robert Dimery 's 1001 Albums You Must Hear Before You Die , says that Honky Tonk Heroes is " one of country music 's landmark albums " , and points out Jennings ' rock and roll roots as bass player for Buddy Holly . In 2013 author Michael Streissguth wrote , " The album christened country music 's outlaw era ... and bathed in risk , having gambled on the work of an untested songwriter . "

= = Track listing = =

All songs written and composed by Billy Joe Shaver , except where noted .

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Bonus tracks

" Slow Rollin ' Low " ? 2 : 44

" You Asked Me To " (Billy Joe Shaver , Waylon Jennings) ? 2 : 38

= = Personnel = =

Bass ? Henry Strzelecki

Bass [The Wailors] ? Bee Spears

Bass , Bass [String] ? Joe Allen

Cello ? Byron Bach , Martha McCrory

Drums ? Buddy Harman , Willie Ackerman

Drums [The Wailors] ? Richie Albright

Electric Guitar ? Billy Sanford , Dale Sellers , Reggie Young

Engineer [Recording Engineer] ? Al Pachucki , Tom Pick

Fiddle ? Tommy Williams

Harmonica [The Wailors] ? Don Brooks

Liner Notes ? Roger " Capt. Midnite " Schutt

Organ ? Andy McMahon

Piano ? David Briggs

Rhythm Guitar ? Billy Reynolds , Dave Kirby , Eddie Hinton , Randy Scruggs , Steve Young , Waylon Jennings

Rhythm Guitar [The Wailors] ? Jerry Gropp , Larry Whitmore

Steel Guitar [The Wailors] ? Ralph Mooney

Technician [Recording Technician] ? Chuck Seitz , Mike Shockley , Ray Butts , Roy Shockley

Viola ? Marvin Chantry

Violin ? Brenton Banks , Lawrence Herzberg , Lennie Haight , Sheldon Kurland , Stephanie Woolf ,

Steven Maxwell Smith

= = Chart positions = =

Album
Singles