



A UNIVERSAL MUSIC COMPANY

**JAMEY JOHNSON**  
***THAT LONESOME SONG BIO***

He could be basking in his songwriting accolades, but Jamey Johnson remains a restlessly creative maverick.

Jamey is the co-writer of the CMA and ACM 2007 Song of the Year “Give It Away,” recorded by George Strait. Trace Adkins, George Jones and Joe Nichols have also recorded his songs. But instead of sitting at home counting his royalty checks, Jamey Johnson recorded more than 40 songs during the past year.

Not content with providing hits for others, the singer-songwriter has a powerful drive to sing, record and perform.

“Writing is not enough for me,” says this intense artist. “I did not come here to just be a writer. I live to play...I’m not here to take a stab at it. I am going to DO it.”

Following a deep period of isolation and introspection, Jamey Johnson entered the recording studio in April 2007. Within months, Jamey emerged with That Lonesome Song, a collection of extraordinary compositions that is equally noteworthy for its lyrical craftsmanship and its strikingly original sound.

The set burns with the emotional heat of songs such as “Sending an Angel to Hell” and “Lonesome Song.” Turn one corner and you’ll find the dark humor of “Mowing Down the Roses” and “Women.” Turn another and you’ll find the soft contemplation of “When the Last Cowboy’s Gone” or “Out on the Ocean.” Jamey’s life sets the tone for the autobiographical “Stars in Alabama” and “Between Jennings and Jones.” And speaking of Waylon Jennings, Jamey pays tribute to his idol by covering “Dreaming My Dreams” and “The Door Is Always Open.”

At the heart of That Lonesome Song is a trio of great story songs. The frank lyric of “High Cost of Living” paints a dramatic portrait of a man who hits bottom and winds up in prison. “Mary Go Round” is the cautionary tale of a woman who goes through a divorce and loses her moral compass. “In Color,” the collection’s first single, is the moving depiction of a man looking back at his life in black-and-white photographs.

“The album never stops,” comments Jamey. “The whole album is one lonesome song, and that’s why it’s called That Lonesome Song. Every song is lonesome in its own way, even the funny ones.

“It’s been a work of love. We just had such a good time pulling it all together.”

Making music comes as naturally to Jamey Johnson as breathing. He was raised outside Montgomery, Alabama in a family that was poor but highly musical. Like so many country musicians, Jamey first performed gospel music in churches with his father.

“We would get up and do a song. Somebody would hear it and go, ‘Man, you don’t even know, but that just hit me right where I needed to be hit today.’ I got used to that at an early age. That’s what music is for. It’s to reach people. And I carry that with me today. I honestly don’t care about the money.”

Jamey is a study in contrasts. He was raised in a devout household, yet he spent part of his youth drinking beer and playing country songs at night on the Montgomery tombstone of Hank Williams. He has a backwoods upbringing, but is a formally trained musician who knew music theory as early as junior high school. He is deadly serious about his music, yet has an outrageous sense of humor. With his piercing pale-blue eyes and biker beard, he looks like a hell raiser, but he has the heart of a poet.

He seems like a rebel, but Jamey spent eight years as a member of the highly disciplined U.S. Marine Corps Reserves. The week he was discharged, the rest of his unit was ordered to Iraq.

By then, Jamey Johnson was in Nashville trying to launch a country career. He arrived on Jan. 1, 2000, spending every dime he had to make the move. He took a job as a salesman for a sign company, then worked for an industrial pumping company. In 2001-2004 he ran his own successful construction firm, restoring buildings devastated by fires, hurricanes or tornados.

Performing in Nashville nightspots led to work singing songwriters’ “demo” tapes on Music Row. Producer Buddy Cannon was impressed with Jamey’s soulful singing, as well as the direct honesty of his songwriting. Song publisher Gary Overton signed Jamey to EMI Music and joined Buddy in the effort to land him a recording contract.

Those efforts paid off with a label deal and Jamey’s hit single “The Dollar” in 2005. He hit the road – and the honky-tonks – with relish.

“Think about my life: I got right out of high school. Then it was eight years in the Marine Corps. I never got to go through that college experience where most kids get to go buck wild. Then I opened a construction company. Got married. Had a daughter. I’ve had responsibility galore on me for years, so when I got that record deal, that was my party. Me and my friends would go take over a bar. We were just as wild as hell and having the time of our lives. Everywhere we went, a crowd followed. I don’t mean 20 or 30 people. I mean like a couple of hundred.”

“We took that same element out on the road with us. Everywhere we went we packed out them bars and did a good job. The bars made money. The crowd had a good time.”

But as a consequence, Jamey acquired the reputation of being a country-music “bad boy.” Rumors and speculation flew, exaggerating his escapades. He admits he was a little wild, but emphasizes that he always delivered the goods, professionally. During this time, he and his wife separated, then divorced. In addition, his record company’s enthusiasm cooled and he lost his recording contract.

“They thought I was a little too wild,” Jamey reflects. “They thought I was a little too rowdy. They did what they had to do. If I was in their position, I’d have probably done the same thing.”

“I turned into a recluse for about a year. I wouldn’t talk to anybody. I wouldn’t go out to clubs. I didn’t want to be at any party. I quit drinking for more than a year. In that respect, losing my deal was a good thing. Because I finally had time to come home and get my life back in order. More than anything, I stayed home and just sat there dwelling on things. It takes an awful lot of thinking to get through something like a divorce.”

“The thing that really carried me through all of that was the writing success. Trace Adkins and George Strait kept money in my bank account and kept my name out there. They pretty much carried me on their shoulders through that period, and didn’t even realize they were doing that. They just liked my songs.”

When he began to work on That Lonesome Song, Jamey says he felt a renewed sense of purpose and freedom. “Nobody was watching. We didn’t use a lot of the automation gadgetry. We spent so much time on the mix, just making sure you could hear every foot patting the floor, every creak of the chair. If someone turned around to adjust an amp, I wanted to hear their back pop. If their knuckles cracked, I wanted to hear it all.”

“After we got done, we knew we had something. I guess around summertime, we started bringing people in to listen to it.”

Word began to spread on Music Row. Two record companies approached Jamey. Both wanted him to either record the songs over again or have outsiders’ songs included on the project. Jamey turned both down.

“From now on, I want it to be my decision whether or not I sing something or I don’t. So just on principle, we turned them down. Luke Lewis at Mercury Records was the first person who understood. He said, ‘Man, I’ve just got one thing to say – don’t mess with that sound. I don’t know what y’all are doing in that studio, but just don’t mess with that sound.’ I said, ‘Hell, I came here to tell you that.’ Ever since then, it’s been a great relationship.”