

# Q & A with TYLER STENSON..

*PC:* "You describe yourself as a cowboy. How did growing up in Wyoming shape your songwriting? What kind of influences did you have growing up?" *Tyler:* "When I call myself a cowboy, I make no claim of owning livestock, land or knowing the first thing about shoeing a horse. It simply means I'm in love with the west. I'm in love with the idea of a simpler time, rivers, campfires, dust, landscapes, struggle and grit. Growing up in Wyoming means I never knew the city until later in life... I like to think it crafted an old soul inside of me and I try to let that shine in my writing. As it says in my bio, I like to picture myself as an old gruff Midwestern poet, rocking in my rickety chair on the front porch and looking out over my fields as I write."

I suppose growing up in Wyoming taught me to slow down and to keep things simple and true. The state has the lowest population in the union and the most land per capita so I think it's safe to say my influences are my memories, the landscapes, nature and the simplistic spirit of the west."

*PC:* "How does that compare to life in Portland & what influences do you have today?" *Tyler:* "Cowboys speak simply. Portland no doubt brought out the artist inside of me and drove me to eloquence. Living in the city has me looking back and reflecting on those simpler times with perspective and romance. Life in Wyoming gave me a pool of experiences to draw from but now the city has me putting those thoughts together in abstract and creative ways. Portland is a breeding ground for creatives and those that think outside the box- I like to believe that it's the fine-tuned elegance behind my simple craft."

*PC:* "How old were you when you picked up your first guitar? Was that before or after you wrote your first song?" *Tyler:* "I have been singing my entire life. Thanks to my mother, music is deep in my bones and rich in my blood. As long as I can remember she's had me buried in the music (in one form or another) and she was no doubt the first to acknowledge my voice and grow my confidence."

At some point I started believing my mom when she said I could sing, but since I wasn't in choir, my voice was useless without accompaniment- a cappella in my bedroom had no appeal; therefore, my senior year of high school (18) I picked up a guitar and started teaching myself basic chords with the hopes that my guitar skills would one day match my voice. It was four chords later when I decided to tackle my first song... Her Song. I wrote it in the Spring of 2000 and have been hopelessly addicted to the craft ever since.

*PC:* "Congratulations on winning the Portland Songwriter's Association Performing Songwriter of the Year again. What was this experience like, both being surrounded by talented songwriters and being chosen as the favorite?" *Tyler:* "The best word to describe winning the PSA Songwriter of the Year is pure validation. The music I write is deep, highly personal and easy to ignore in a crowded bar because it requires your attention. I've always believed my writing was strong but it's easy to get down on yourself when you're talking to the walls. The shows I was playing were at loud and rowdy bars that required X amount of cover songs and upbeat "dancing" music- both are pretty foreign concepts to my nature. I had fans and people that believed in MY music and MY albums but they were few and far between at midnight in a party town. My original music wasn't cutting through and it was discouraging to say the least. I questioned if I was the only one that could appreciate my craft and the thought that went into each song. I questioned my talent, my style, my stage presence and every other element that makes up a successful performer. I was deflated when I stepped on stage at the PSA competition because if history was any guide, they would ignore me too. The pool of performers was highly talented and intimidating and (as the last to perform that evening), my nerves were shot. I played Babysitting the Cowboy and Better Be Us All and literally felt the room shrink to size. I've never played for such an attentive audience and I've never felt such love. Because of the pure talent that surrounded me, I had NO expectations of winning so my heart hit the floor when my name was announced. It was pure validation on an otherwise lonely road and a shot of confidence to my cause. It simply confirmed that I was on the right path."

*PC:* "You recently celebrated the release of your new CD, See That Gleam. Describe the road you took both writing and recording the songs. How has it been received so far?" *Tyler:* "After winning the PSA honor, I was approached by Daniel Work, creator of IndependenceMusic.net and urged to post Better Be Us All as a song for download on his music site. When he found out that I had not recorded the song yet he insisted that I come to his studio and see it through. After successfully finalizing Better Be Us All, he asked if I had any more songs where that came from..."

See That Gleam was four years in the making. Though the recording process itself spanned 14 months, a couple of the songs were written many years before and put on the shelf. As my first official "songwriter" album since the PSA accomplishment, my goal was to put forth a disc that showcased the storyteller. I've recorded five albums with full bands in the past, so this time around I chose a number of songs that were already written but never recorded because I had kept them for myself- free from heavy instrumentation. They are stories. They are the songs that were written as whispers at 4am. I think the name of the album is appropriate because although the songs are somber tales of nostalgia, loss and heartache, there is an undeniable sweetness involved... a gleam.

So far the album has been received with great acceptance and respect. It is another page in my journey and another face that my listeners haven't seen before. What makes it so different is the fact that I used all acoustic instruments (nothing electric) and featured an outstanding upright bassist for the first time- a sound that my songs have been begging for all along. See That Gleam is warm, raw and the beginning of a new Tyler Stenson."

*PC:* "With all your successes through the years, what has been your proudest moment as a singer/songwriter?" *Tyler:* "Being dubbed the PSA Songwriter of the Year!!! VALIDATION!!! My second album (The Low Ceiling)... this album was the first PROFESSIONAL recording of mine and one of those moments that puts a tear in your eye because of the overwhelming sense of pride and accomplishment involved. What a moment."

*PC:* "Finally (and most importantly), with the wide variety of themes in your songs, ranging from growing up to loss and regret... what percentage of your songs are about girls?" *Tyler:* "I pride myself on the fact that I've never written an emotionally generic song... meaning, I don't write something if I don't mean it. If it didn't actually happen, it doesn't get mentioned. I don't write about heartache if my heart is whole. I don't write about losing my job if I'm employed. I don't write about being in love if I'm not."

With that said, I've loved and lost many times. I've praised women and I've hated them. I've been left before and I've done the leaving. To answer your question, easily 70% of my songs are about women/love/matters of the heart."