

BIO

Jimmy Bivens

The first time Jimmy Bivens played on a stage he had a three-member audience that couldn't even see him. "My friends and I went to visit my dad at a club. He told me I could get up on stage and play a song if I wanted," recalls Bivens. It was daytime and the stage was closed off behind a heavy, velvet curtain. "I climbed up there and kicked out a version of an old Conway Twitty song with my buddies. I didn't think that anyone could hear us, but when we got done I heard a little bit of applause. I peeked out from behind the curtain and saw my dad, the clubowner, and Tammy Wynette."

It wasn't strange for Jimmy's dad, Wayland Bivens, to be hanging out with someone like Tammy Wynette. Wayland was a country swing hall of fame musician who had big connections in the music industry. "A friend said to me once, 'can you imagine what your life would be like if you would have grown up around your dad?'," Bivens recalls with a smile. Instead of growing up with his dad however, Jimmy was raised by his mother and stepfather. That is until he was 15. "I was born in Lewiston on October 24, 1959," says Bivens. "Since then I have lived in 7 states and somewhere around 75 residences." But it wasn't the moving around that bothered Jimmy, it was the way his family treated him. "Things weren't so good at home. I realized that I was better off on my own than staying with my mom," says Bivens. So at age 15, when most kids were just starting to think about getting their drivers license, Jimmy left home, albeit with the complete blessing of the court system. After striking out on his own, Jimmy first picked up a guitar. "You know, my family used to tell me I was tone deaf?" says Bivens. "I may have not even tried playing music had I stayed where I was." After living on his own for a bit, Jimmy decided it was time to get out of Nampa. He decided to head south to Long Beach, California to catch up with his dad. Jimmy bounced around Long Beach for a few months and then followed his dad up to Sacramento. It was in Sacramento that Jimmy graduated from high school—he decided to go sans college. "I had already been out and lived on my own—I felt like I had already done the college thing," laughs Bivens. Instead he took a job cutting parts at a Harley Davidson shop and formed a band. "We really just played around doing covers and stuff," says Jimmy. After playing a few bands, Jimmy got a little put off by the "egos" he played with. He decided to put his guitar away and quit playing. He wouldn't pick it up again till nearly eight years later when he was 26.

Over the next few years Biven's floated around working different jobs. Eventually he took a job with the American Cancer Society—eventually becoming an executive director. He was offered other promotions in his tenure, but Biven's says they were "non-fuzzy" jobs and Jimmy wanted to keep working with cancer patients. And it was this working with cancer victims that prompted Bivens to pick his guitar up again. When a camp for children with cancer needed some entertainment, Jimmy "threw together a show with one of the camp counselors." The impromptu show was a blast. Soon Jimmy found himself playing gigs all over the place for the American Cancer Society. "I think I hold the distinction of having played the more benefits and auctions than any other

musician,” says Bivens with a laugh. Eventually Jimmy left the American Cancer Society. But a few years later cancer would re-enter his life and prompt him to take his music further.

Ten years ago, Jimmy Bivens visited his good friend in the hospital. His friend’s body was ravaged with cancer, and the hospital visit would be the last time Jimmy would see him. Seeing his friend in such a devastated state had a profound effect on Bivens—but he didn’t feel any of that effect until later. When he went to the hospital all he could think about were the river sandals next to the hospital bed. “I looked down at his Texas and thought, ‘I wonder what size those sandals are?’” Jimmy says with a distant look in his eyes. “It was my way of escaping the moment.” Days later Jimmy’s friend died. Bivens escaped to the desert. “I just drove around for three days in the desert,” says Bivens.

”When I would think of a song I’d sit on the back of my truck and work it out.” After spending some time reflecting and writing—Jimmy had worked out nearly a whole album’s worth of material—the song about his friend’s sandals became a tune called “Dead Man’s Shoes”. At the time, Biven’s didn’t know if the songs he wrote on that sojourn would ever see the light of day. He just kept doing what he was doing: playing gigs around Idaho. Then, in 2002, Jimmy found himself in Las Vegas at a Clay Walker show and it was backstage where Bivens ran into Walker’s bandmates Rex Wiseman and Curt Walsh. After a brief conversation, Jimmy let Wiseman and Walsh hear some of the stuff he had been writing. After listening, Wiseman said to Bivens, “You gotta be one of the best writers I have ever heard.” Jimmy laid down the plans to record an album with Wiseman and Walsh. To make his first album, Jimmy did it proper—he rented out a studio in Nashville.

Bivens was new to the studio, and new to the whole process of recording. Because of this, he unknowingly kept the feel in the studio ”light”, Bivens thinks this easygoing environment helped his album. At the end of one of the recording days, Curt Walsh came up to Bivens, gave him a hug, and told him it was the most fun day he had ever had in the studio.

Since releasing his new album, *Tell the Story*, in April of 2005, Bivens has become a full time musician. His album provides a great foundation for his new full time job. “I made the album with a looping effect ... the songs are all different and when you get to song ten and the disc starts over, you don’t realize it,” says Bivens. “It’s a musical journey.” He plays gigs all over the Northwest. He does his shows as a solo act. He likes the freedom it gives him. Bivens also sees himself more as an entertainer than a musician. “I have broken 7 out of 10 fingers—I am not a good picker. I love entertaining people ... whether they are 3 or 93. You gotta smile when you play,” says Bivens without a hint of sarcasm.

If you ever see Bivens play, you’ll learn a lesson in entertainment. Bivens frequently sets a washboard up on stage and invites kids to play with him. He caters his songs to his audience, constantly tweaking his presentations to as to keep the most people smiling and having a good time. And what does the future hold? Currently Bivens is working on a small town, rural tour. He wants to take his music to the small, out of the way towns

where, as Bivens sees it, traditional music began. “I can teach communities how to write grants for the arts,” says Jimmy. “And do a traveling show showing people where and how music began. “