

THE PARKS

Biography

Music business tradition dictates that every generation has its own musical style, a sound that helps sons and daughters form their own identities as they rebel against parental influence.

In that context, The Parks are a completely different kind of rebel. Johnny and Clint Park are father and son, united in their passion for Southern-rock barnburners and thoughtful country ballads, determined in their willingness to challenge the status quo.

Instead of butting heads with each other, the pairing defies music-industry beliefs about demographic differences and ultimately rebels against the establishment.

“Musically, Dad and I are on the same page,” Clint says matter-of-factly. “We’re very Texas-influenced.”

“We want,” Johnny adds, “to make music that will last.”

Their self-titled debut album, *The Parks*, suggests they might well accomplish that. Featuring 12 tracks written and produced by The Parks using their own club-honed band, the CD balances a wealth of bedrock sounds from country music’s Outlaw past and rock music’s peak festival years. Solid Waylon-esque backbeats, Clint’s Travis Tritt-like country-soul vocals and twin guitars a la The Eagles and the Allman Brothers Band help to define a sound that connects the current generation with its predecessor.

The Parks’ configuration is certainly unique in country music history. The genre’s stars have included a mother/daughter duet (The Judds) and a father/daughter tandem (The Kendalls), but the only successful father/son collaboration of any length belonged to Asher Sizemore and Little Jimmie, a Grand Ole Opry sensation during the 1930s. The Sizemores, however, were primarily a novelty act, hinging on the cuteness of Little Jimmie, who was already a veteran of seven years by the time they made their final appearance on the Opry when the boy was 11 years old.

The Parks, by contrast, are a mature duo full of grit and swagger, owing much to their relentless pursuit of the music and a resilience that allowed them to push forward despite numerous emotional setbacks that dogged their pursuit of Music Row.

Their determined spirit echoes in the autobiographical pieces “Born Into It” and “Sons Of The Outlaws,” the opening “As Long As You’re Goin’ My Way” and the corporate kiss-off “You Can’t Take Away My Music.” But they also display a masculine tenderness in the classic-Glen Campbell sonics of “That Ol’ Blacktop,” the subtle acoustics of “That Don’t Stop Me” and the vulnerability of the first single, “Where The Truth Lies.”

“Seven or eight of the songs we played live all the time,” Clint observes, “so we already had an idea of what we wanted to do before we got in the studio.”

Appropriately, the roots of The Parks extend to an earlier era of music. Johnny Park was born in the Texas Panhandle town of Borger. Located northwest of Amarillo—between Elk City, Oklahoma and Clovis, New Mexico—the region has ties to such musical heavyweights as Jimmy Webb, Bob Wills, Buddy Holly, Waylon Jennings, Jimmy Dean, Roger Miller and Woody Guthrie.

Several of Johnny's relatives played fiddle or guitar, and he started playing pedal steel at the age of six. While he was still in elementary school, the family relocated to Arlington—a suburb between Dallas and Fort Worth—and during his teen years, he was immersed in the music of the Outlaw movement, attracted to the rough-textured sounds of Waylon Jennings, Joe Ely, Willie Nelson and Jerry Jeff Walker. Johnny had, by that time, picked up the guitar, and he soon hit the circuit with his own hard-edged music.

"There was a club on every corner in Texas with live music," he says. "It was huge. You could make a pretty good living playing clubs."

Johnny and Sondra Park married when he was a mere 18 years old, and within three years, he made his living full-time in the clubs.

"In a way, I kind of credit our marriage staying together all these years because we never saw each other hardly for the first 10 years," he laughs. "My wife worked during the day, I worked at night, so we saw each other maybe two hours a day. She would get home at five o'clock, and I'd leave for the club by 7:30. Maybe that's why we've lasted so long."

The schedule actually helped Johnny bond more closely with his sons. Their oldest son, John, was born when Johnny was 19, Clint when he was 23. Dad was home all day with the boys before starting his shift on the bandstand, and he saw Clint's interest in music expressed early.

"Clint was just naturally rhythmic," he notes. "It's something that was in his bones and in his soul. He could carry a beat when he was two years old, you know, keep time with the radio, and he was always beating on something—had sticks always hitting something."

"That," Clint jokes, "could be my Attention Deficit Disorder!"

In 1988, Johnny and Sondra moved the Parks to Music City without a single contact. He quickly discovered that clubs could not sustain the family, and he began writing songs in earnest. Within five years of his arrival, he signed with Atlantic Records as one-half of the duo Archer Park. They landed a pair of singles on the Billboard charts, released one album produced by Randy Scruggs and joined a bevy of actors and artists—Mel Gibson, James Garner, John Michael Montgomery, John Anderson, Hal Ketchum, Rodney Foster and Eddie Rabbitt, among them—to record "Amazing Grace" for the movie *Maverick* in a barn loft at Amy Grant's house.

All the excitement proved little more than a tease. The duo soon bit the dust, and Johnny, disheartened by the experience, swore off the music industry.

“I actually went out and got a day job and did some physical, manual labor,” he laughs, “and went, ‘I don’t like this at all. I need to go back to playing guitar and writing music.’ The fact is it’s all I’ve ever done. I didn’t go to college. What am I gonna do? It’s either do this and keep plugging away at it, or go out there and do some construction work or something, and I don’t think my back could handle that.”

While Archer Park might have led to Johnny’s disillusionment, the duo was an inspiration to Clint, who was entering junior-high school at the time.

“He was on CMT,” Clint explains. “My buddies and I thought it was the coolest thing in the world. That’s when music really hit me.”

Clint started playing drums in a band he formed with his best friend that covered Metallica and other hard-rock acts.

“We were terrible,” Clint jokes. “We were called Armageddon, and it sounded like the end of the world.”

He moved on to drums in a high-school ensemble that played jazz songs and backed theatrical music productions. During a Christmas production in 1997, Clint stepped into the spotlight to sing lead vocals on a couple of songs. The Henley-esque moment was a turning point.

“Sondra and I both just looked at each other when Clint started singing,” Johnny recalls. “I think that was the first time we realized our boy had some real musical talents.”

Clint’s school ensemble group branched out into club work in Nashville’s Gallatin suburb, and it quickly found a niche.

“Nirvana and Pearl Jam and Bush and all that stuff was coming out, and we were the only band playing Three Dog Night and playing Skynyrd, so we were getting all the bar gigs,” he assesses. “I knew we’d make money playing that type stuff, and I just kind of grew to love it.”

Eventually, Clint picked up acoustic guitar and formed another duo with a friend in the area. Johnny occasionally sat in with them, but father and son soon decided their musical connection—grounded in a deep-rooted blend of country and Southern rock—was stronger than the one Clint had with his original musical partner.

“We’d always played together, you know, pickin’ out some songs at home but never in front of an audience like that,” Clint says. “I think we were both surprised by how the crowds reacted to what we were doing onstage.”

Johnny and Clint slowly assembled a band, one musician at a time, and The Parks built a following in the Gallatin area, making a home at one club that’s had four owners and five different names during their eight-year tenure.

Clint and Johnny began co-writing material for the band and traded vocal leads, Johnny providing a hard-core country tone and Clint supplying a smoky soulfulness derived from such influences as Stevie Ray Vaughan, T. Graham Brown and '60s soulsters Aretha Franklin and Otis Redding.

"I just love that rough rattling of the microphone," Clint says of the latter two. "Their voices are so powerful, and they didn't have anything to filter it."

Once they had enough original material together, manager John Dorris brought their music to the attention of Lyric Street Records Senior Vice President A&R Doug Howard, who trekked out to Gallatin to catch the band. In short order, the duo had a recording deal and a chance to make a full album.

"Doug got us, and he got our sound and didn't want to change anything about us or the music," Clint says.

They pulled together a dozen titles they'd written with Steve Bogard, David Lee, Doug Nichols, Tony Lane, Don Rollins and Brett Beavers—a cast whose credits include hits by Alan Jackson, George Strait, Montgomery Gentry and Dierks Bentley.

And The Parks settled in with their live band at Quadraphonic Studios, a legendary Nashville facility that's yielded hits for Neil Young, Joan Baez, Steve Forbert and Eddie Rabbitt, among others.

The result is a debut album with an authentic bar feel and blunt sincerity, a record that celebrates its musical ancestry but feels every bit a 21st-century interpretation of Southern, working-class life. The grooves are confident and energetic, and the twin-guitar textures of Johnny Park and Sonny Deaton bring a crisp bravado to the commanding heartland sound.

That sound reflects not just two men, but two generations. The genre is bound to remain a staple of American music for years to come, and The Parks intend to do the same.

"Once music gets in your blood, you'll do it until the day you die," Johnny concludes. "You look at a lot of these old guys that are out there—Merle Haggard and a few others—and you wonder, 'Don't they have enough money to retire? Why are they still doing it?' Because they love it. That's all they know. I guess as long as the fans will keep coming to see them, they'll keep doing it. And so will we."

The Parks

Song by song

Born Into It – (Johnny Park, Clint Park, Steve Bogard & Brett Beavers)

Johnny: A rocking up tempo song with an Allman Brothers meets ZZ Top kind of feel.

Clint: This is a song we felt like we really needed for the record to show our southern rock style. We were fortunate enough to have this song on the Nascar '09 video game.

As Long As Your Goin' My Way – (Johnny Park, Clint Park & Brett Beavers)

J: A mid tempo that Clint and I wrote with Brett Beavers. A fun song to play live.

C: We wrote this song with our good friend Brett Beavers. Since the day we wrote it I had always thought it was one of our stronger songs. We always get a good response when we play it live. So, we knew it needed to be on the record.

That Ole Blacktop – (Johnny Park, David Lee & Tony Lane)

J: One of the most requested songs we do live. It was written with two old song writing buddies of mine, David Lee and Tony Lane.

C: We have played this song live for a really long time and always got real positive feedback from it. I always thought this song had a strong country sound that we needed for this record.

(You Can't Take Away My) Music – (Johnny Park, Clint Park & Steve Bogard)

J: This song takes a shot at corporate America and what's going on with America today. We wrote this for all the people that have been laid off or fired because of the practices of the corporate world (ie: Enron). It has an old Waylon kind of sound which I love.

C: Everyone, sometime in their life, has been kicked around by corporate America. This was our attempt at kicking back.

Where the Truth Lies – (Johnny Park, Clint Park & Steve Bogard)

J: A powerful ballad that is going to be our first single for Lyric Street Records. A song with a message that I think will touch the hearts of many listeners.

C: This is going to be our first single. It is one that is very dear to us. We knew when we wrote it we had something special. We hope that country music fans feel the same way.

Somebody Like Me – (Johnny Park, Clint Park & Don Rollins)

J: A song written with one of our favorite co-writers, Don Rollins. It's a medium tempo good dance song for the record.

C: This is a fun, light- hearted song that we wrote with one our favorite writers, Don Rollins. It's a really cool groove that we think people will enjoy.

Even Texas – (Johnny Park, Clint Park & Steve Bogard)

J: This was the first song Clint and I wrote together along with Steve Bogard, a great co-writer. A very special song to me that has a haunting melody.

C: For me this is the most important song on this record. This is the very first song dad and I ever wrote together. We wrote it with Steve Bogard, who became a very important part in our lives over the years. It also shows our deep Texas influence.

The Party's Right Here – (Johnny Park & David Lee)

J: A down home rocking, partying kind of song that Clint and I felt would be a great addition to this album. It has the signature twin guitars which you will hear throughout the album.

C: The most rocking song on the record. Steve Henson on the slide guitar and Reese Wynans on the organ along with twin guitars really brought out a great southern rock sound.

They Said it Wouldn't Last – (Johnny Park, David Lee & Doug Nichols)

J: A song that has been a favorite of listeners at the clubs. It was written over 10 years ago. I think it still stands the test of time.

C: This is one everybody wanted on the record. We have been getting requests for this one for a long time. It's the song on the record we have been playing live longer than any of them.

Southern Summer – (Johnny Park & David Lee)

J: A feel good summertime song that will take you back to your childhood. Just a fun song to have on the record.

C: We needed a song like this on the record. One you can take out the boat with your friends and just crank it up.

That Don't Stop Me – (Johnny Park, David Lee & Tony Lane)

J: A song I wrote years ago that I love, plus it's a waltz. The gut string guitar gives it a little different sound from the rest of the record.

C: This is a song I wish I had been part of writing. It's one my favorite songs Dad ever sang. We knew we had to have it on the record, plus it's a waltz, and it's not often you get hear those anymore.

Sons of the Outlaws – (Johnny Park & David Lee)

J: A song written about our heroes Waylon and Willie. It has a real Texas flavor and since I grew up playing the clubs in Texas it really hits home for me.

C: We always loved the original outlaws of country music, so we had to have a song on the record to say thanks to them for paving the way.