



Jay Stott Bio

Ask some musicians where they'd be in their lives if not for their art, and they'll invariably answer with some variation of "no idea." "Music is all I've ever really known," they'll insist, perhaps adding, earnestly, "I don't even know how to do anything else!"

Jay Stott is not one of those artists.

He's a singer-songwriter, yes, and if, going forward, that's "all" some folks choose to peg him as, well, rest assured he'll be perfectly A-okay with that — *especially* after the early 2020 release of his second album, *Wreckage of Now*. But scratch the surface, and the amiable Pennsylvania-born, Minnesota-reared and now Colorado-based Stott will tell you that he's actually known, done, and been a *lot* of different things. Over the course of the last 30-odd years of his adult life, he's been (deep breath!) a ski instructor, a fishing guide, bus driver, airport shuttle driver, brick layer, carpenter, hot tub technician, retail store manager, raft guide, janitor, heavy equipment operator, house painter, vacuum cleaner salesperson, security guard, and even a bouncer for a strip club. Along the way, he's also drafted a couple of novels, and dabbled in print journalism, too.

And mind, that's just his *short* resume, leaving out "a bunch of other stuff I can't remember." Most recently — as in, at least as of the time of this writing — Stott brings home his share of the family bacon by teaching high school English.

"I'm just one of those people who seems to be incapable of staying on one idea of what I want to do when I 'grow up' for more than about 10 minutes," admits Stott with a laugh. To wit, back in his middle and high school wonder years, not even rock 'n' roll could pin him down. "My dad was a big pop, rock, country, and classic R 'n' B fan, so we always had music around, and when I was about 12, I begged my parents for a whole year and ended up with a guitar and some guitar lessons. Then I did the teenage thing and played in a couple of really bad garage bands. But nowhere in that did I ever think, 'Oh my God, *this* is what I want to do with my life!'"

But like the proverbial Chekhov's Gun, that guitar introduced in the first act of Stott's life was bound to come back into play at some point down the line. In fact, he actually never really *stopped* playing it, no matter what else he was doing. "I've carried a guitar with me through every stage of my life since I was 13 years old," he says. It just took awhile for the self-professed "horribly uneducated musician" to realize he could do more with the instrument than just play it around the campfire.

"I actually always wanted to write songs, but I tried and they sucked," he says. "And what I didn't understand was that that was part of the process. You've got to write bad songs in order to write good songs; you've got to write bad *anything* in order to write anything good. But I didn't get that until I was much, much older. So I wrote the first song that I played for other people when I was about 26, but it wasn't until I was in my late 30s or early 40s that some switch just clicked in my head and I realized that everything I had learned about writing, from the little bit of journalism stuff I'd done and the novels I'd worked on, could all be applied to songwriting."

Environment proved a big factor into his long overdue coming out as a performing songwriter (as opposed to 'just a middle-aged guy in the basement with a guitar), too. Stott first moved to Colorado from Minnesota after college ("I moved here for the warmer climate," chuckles the avid ski enthusiast), and 20 years ago he planted roots and started his family in Lyons, an eclectic little mountain town 20 miles north of Boulder where, he says, "you can't chuck a rock without hitting three banjo players." Having grown up in Minneapolis in the '80s, catching the likes of the Replacements and Hüsker Dü in small clubs in their prime, the still-a-rocker-at-heart Stott admits to sometimes feeling "a little bit out of place" in Lyons (hence the tongue-in-cheek "Electric Guy in a Bluegrass Town" on his new album). But he also readily credits the nurturing, tightly knit local music community for helping him to find his voice, confidence, and overall groove.

"Lyons is a tiny little town with a bunch of funky artists and musicians in it, so you kind of hang out with other people who are really *doing* it," he explains. "And the whole scene here is really supportive. I was still basically just going to open mics a couple of years ago when I ran into this other musician I know, and told him I was thinking about making an EP. And he was like, 'Well, I produce records — call me I you want some help.' So all of a sudden there were people around who treated what I was doing seriously, which obviously felt good. We ended up making my first record together, and my second one, too. Because there's a talent pool here in Lyons where you can make a pretty good record with some pretty awesome people on it — kind of punch above your weight, I guess — *and* do it all without breaking the bank."

Of course, you've got to have a handful of good songs together before even thinking about recording one album, let alone two. Fortunately for Stott, he just happens to live right next to Planet Bluegrass Ranch, the hallowed grounds of both the annual Rocky Mountain Folks Festival and Song School, a widely renowned retreat for song shamans and students of all skill levels.

"I literally live a couple hundred yards from Song School, so I'd heard about it forever but for whatever reason just never went," he says. "But finally one year I was like, 'ok, screw it,' and threw my money down, and it was such an incredibly powerful experience that I've now done Song School for about eight or nine years. You learn things like how to be completely uncompromising about what you're doing from these wonderful teachers like Darrell Scott and Mary Gauthier and Amy Speace, and you find this really great peer group of other people that helps you *get* that you can be a songwriter and a musician, and you don't have to be 'famous.' I mean, obviously we'd all like to figure out some kind of sustainable business model as musicians, but mostly we're just doing what we do because we don't know how to stop."

Since the release of his first album, 2016's *Dirt & Heartache*, Stott has gone from open-mic newbie to seasoned (but still growing!) troubadour. The day job (teaching, remember?) and closeness to his family (with a daughter still in high school) have to date kept his touring radius fairly modest, but he figures he's now "played almost everywhere there's a liquor license in North Central Colorado," thanks to the booming microbrew industry which he says "has been very good to songwriters." And come the release of *Wreckage of Now* in 2020, he aims to do everything he can to get his music "out there in a way that I haven't yet."

Like *Dirt & Heartache* before it, *Wreckage of Now* showcases a roots-rocking Americana songwriter who balances a fresh, unjaded exuberance for the art form itself with the mature perspective of, well, a 51-year-old grown-ass man who's seen, and *done*, a lot. Songs like the evocative (and sensual) "Desert Heat" and the swaggering "Wreckage of Now" may not directly reflect the way that the happily married and clean-living Stott goes about his day-to-day life *now*, but they're very much rooted in first-hand experience — "for better or worse." "I had a very misspent youth, and got sober when I was pretty young," he explains. "So on the one hand I'm grateful for recovery, but on the other hand, I'm like, *boy* — that whole chunk of my life back then sure gave me a bucket full of stuff to write about!"

Other standout tracks on the new record range in mood and tone from the Springsteen-somber "Dying in Doves," a lament for the put upon, disaffected blue collar working man (and woman), to full-band barroom rockers like "One Drink, Two Drink" and light-hearted romps like "I Never Learned How to Dance" and the aforementioned "Electric Guy."

"My first record, *Dirt & Heartache*, from the title on down, it was just so serious," notes Stott. "And that's just part of who I am, because as a music fan, I happen to like really sad, depressing songs — the more downbeat the better. But for this one, I made a conscious effort to try to slip in a few more songs that were just for fun, just like when I play live. Because when people go out on a Friday or Saturday night to listen to music, a lot of times they just really want to have a good time. And as a songwriter and performer, sometimes you just want to *help* them have a good time, you know? It's all about bringing a good show to them, whether you're playing live or making a record."

Clearly, Jay Stott is a guy who's been paying attention — and taking good notes — all through his many years of Song School. He's a guy who's lived long enough through the wreckage of *then* to have earned the right to enjoy the goodness of *now*. And above all, he's a guy who at long last finally does know what he wants to do when he "grows up," armed with the confidence to share his songs not just with the general public, but with some of the toughest critics imaginable. Namely, his own students.

"To sit in front of high school kids and play a song, which I've been known to do, is far and away the most vulnerable, intimate thing I've ever done," Stott admits with a laugh. "But I have to say, they have unfailingly been the most generous audience you could ask for! I'm always really upfront about going, 'Listen, I don't play the kind of music you probably listen to,' but I'm also appreciative about what they bring to the conversation about music, and what they are into. Because the thing about high school kids is, if you are insincere, they will definitely eat you alive. But if you come *honestly*, they'll at least meet you halfway."

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