

Like a Rock by Paula Reynolds

Texas is a big state...musically, geographically, culturally, historically, and of course, state-of-mindedly. How, then, does one do justice in this column to one of the state's current biggest talents and not have to call Mr. Editor with the plea of "*I need Texas-size space this issue!!*"? My cooler head prevailed (this time), and thus I present to you a succinct-as-I-could-manage look at the one and only, **MIKE BLAKELY**.

Just like the Cretaceous rock at Garner State Park, Mike's talents are multi-layered and vast, with one challenged to decree any particular layer as his "best". Well-known and well-loved, Mike has more than made his mark on the Texas music scene with 8 CD's (as well as many appearances on other artists') and a busy circuit of live performances. Additionally, he and John Greenburg (aka Johnny Gringo) host TexAmericana Tuesdays at The River City Grille in Marble Falls, with each show featuring a special guest. Lots o' fun...worth the time to get there. Mike's further established himself on the Texas music scene as host and head cowboy for the Mike Blakely Fandango held each fall in Luckenbach. The Sixth Annual will occur September 12 – 14, and promises to beat 'em all.

If the music weren't enough to keep Mike's creative muse in overdrive, he has also found acclaim as an award winning author of 15 novels, even having won the highly coveted Spur award for western writing. And just recently, Mike finished co-writing Willie Nelson's first western novel, *A Tale Out of Luck*, scheduled for release in September. Insiders tell me it's going to be one exciting

ride! Turn the rock around and you'll find even more: an independent label layered in, Swing Rider Records, as well as another performance sideline with Doc Blakely, Mike's well-known & really cool motivational speaker/humorist dad, aptly named The Swing Riders. Throw in some real-life cowboying on his ranch, a little hunting and fishing now and then, the wise ability to know when to kick back with friends, and you have a sketch of the man, Mike Blakely.

However, lest I sound like a technical writer preparing a brochure on Mr. Blakely's truly wonderful accomplishments, one has to address that bit of glitter that reveals itself upon close inspection of those aforementioned, as well as analogous, rocks. A little time spent around Mike not only reveals a man with talents as big as a West Texas sky, but also a man who appreciates the wry wit of a bad pun (always a good person in my book), enjoys a shared laugh, and finds meaning in the simple yet beautiful things of this life, both past and present. He's comfortable in his own skin, always welcomes a "howdy" from a stranger, and seems to get sincere pleasure from having someone shake his hand and say, "Now I liked that!" Maybe the moniker "nice guy" would fit, but that seems more sandstone than cretaceous...just won't do!

Take a good listen to Mike's music. . You'll hear finely crafted story-in-song, a vast range of rhythm and style. Read his novels. The rich palette of character and setting, as well as extensively researched detail, will quickly grab your imagination. It'll be fast-apparent that Mike really is a Texas Renaissance man, appropriately sporting nicely creased Wranglers rather than velvety frocks.

Oh...and I dare not leave out one layer. The man knows how to **cook**. Yes, gals...all that AND a bag of charcoal bricks! Which leads me to introduce a new feature I'll be including in some upcoming articles...favorite recipes of Texas musicians. Mike was kind enough to share with me his *Award-Winning (for real!)*

Stuffed Venison Back Strap for the first go. Mike took First Place at last November's Back-to-Beef music weekend over at Cedar Lodge Resort in Lake Buchanan, and felt that M.Y.T.H. readers were just the sort of folks who'd appreciate him sharing his secret. Here goes...

MIKE BLAKELY'S STUFFED VENISON BACK STRAP

Cut the back strap into sections 4-5 inches long. Marinate overnight in your favorite marinade. Rub the back strap with your favorite seasoning. Cut a slit in the top of the back strap, but not all the way to the ends. This creates a pocket in the back strap. Stuff this pocket with your choice of sausage. (I use a spicy venison/pork sausage of my own making.) You can add some chopped onions and garlic to the sausage for flavor and moisture; and some chopped peppers for heat! Wrap the stuffed back strap with bacon strips, secured with toothpicks. Grille until bacon wrapping is fully cooked and crispy. Don't overcook it! Each back strap section will feed one or two people.

Make note: Mike Blakely, along with Larry Nye on lead guitar and Donnie Price on bass, will be appearing at **Hilltop House Concerts Saturday, April 12th**. See our website, www.hilltophouseconcerts.com, for details. This one fills up fast, so don't dilly-dally! Hope to see y'all on the hilltop...

Author's Note: Late breaking news! Mike just informed me that he has become the first-ever person to win the new Spur award for songwriting for his song, "The Last Wild White Buffalo". Mike is now the first person to be honored with a Spur for a novel AND a song. Like a rock...!