



An Interview with Shane Michael Taylor

There's no such thing as a road block for Shane Michael Taylor. Born with Cerebral Palsy, Shane Michael has been overcoming life's greatest challenges by using his creativity and enthusiasm to inspire and entertain people through his music, book, and lectures about living life to its fullest. Regardless of his physical limitations, Shane Michael has always believed in his ability to achieve his dreams.

Who is Shane Michael Taylor?

1. Please explain what Cerebral Palsy is and describe your condition?

Cerebral Palsy is a small injury to the cerebellum, the part of the brain that controls muscle movements, balance, and speech. My mind and body both work, but not necessarily together. Sometimes my mind tells my body to stay still, but the body doesn't listen.

2. What are some of the challenges you face in day-to-day life?

One of the challenges is being unable to assist myself efficiently with daily living activities. Everything from eating to taking a shower to getting in and out of the wheelchair requires the assistance of somebody else. Another major challenge I have is communicating verbally. I consider myself a friendly person and I love to interact with other people, but most people have difficulty understanding what I say, since I can take a while to get used to my speech patterns. Because of that, I'm usually quieter than I want to be, since I don't want to make anyone feel uncomfortable. They don't know what I'm trying to say.

3. Describe your philosophy on life?

We all have challenges in life, but rather than complain about them or use them as excuses, we but live to our fullest potential, accept our challenges, and strive to become who we are meant to be regardless of the roadblocks that attempt to stop us. I feel that life is a gift, and I try to make the most of what I've been given. It's often very easy to get caught up in the day-to-day insanity of the fast paced lifestyle that we live in today, and get overwhelmed and discouraged when things don't go as planned. But I always seem to be able to take a few steps back and trust that things will eventually work out, and that there's a reason for everything that happens, even though we may not understand it.

4. Tell us about the journey that led you to this path?

5. You mention that a horseback riding program changed your life. Tell us a bit about that. **When I was little I couldn't even balance sitting cross-legged on the floor. As I describe in my book, I was kind of like Humpty Dumpty on steroids; always banging my head and giving myself concussions. But in 6th grade, I had a teacher, Ms. Stolfi, who kept trying to convince me to try a horseback riding program after school. Between her, and my mother, they finally convinced me to give it a try. I was surprised. Here I was, riding a horse without falling off. So on the last day of the program, there was a big ceremony in which we all rode out on horses. They played "Standing Outside the Fire" by Garth Brooks. That was the first time I got to experience and appreciate the power of music. It was then that I decided music somehow had to be a part of my life.**

6. What inspires you to be the best? **I only get one shot at life- and to make a first impression- so I'll be damned if I don't give it all I've got. I think it has a lot to do with the way me and my brother were brought up. My Dad, is a major roll model for us. We were constantly being told that if we set out to do something, we needed to put 100% effort into it and not half-ass the job. And as a songwriter, I know that I could have a major impact on others. Songs have the power to invoke emotions, and it's my job to write songs that make people's lives better; whether it gives them a laugh or helps them to realize they're not alone.**

7. Who have been the biggest influences in your life? **So many people have helped shaped the person I am. My mom and dad definitely deserve a ton of credit for my determination; and my grandparent played an integral role in teaching me to face life head-on and to never stop trusting God. They came to this country with just a suitcase and a dream- not a penny to their name, never took a dime that they didn't earn, and worked their way to providing a wholesome life for their children. I'm very humbled to think that it is because of their hard work and passion for family is the reason I am who I am today**

8. When did you first start writing songs? **I think I was around 14 when I wrote my first song. It was about a girl I liked. I never let that thing see the light of day- and its just as well... I don't even remember the title of it!**

9. Did you write music first and then decide to write a book? **Yes, definitely- the music came first. I wouldn't say that the album was fully written before I wrote the book; it wasn't. It wasn't until we decided to cut an album that I got the idea to write the book and chronically my musical journey to illustrate how I got to this point. I also thought it would serve as a back story to my career and the album.**

Songwriter and "Warrior Cowboy"

1. Where did you get your inspiration to write songs? **Inspiration comes to me from all kinds of places. Each morning I try to write freestyle for 10 minutes on a regular basis. Sometimes a phrase pops out, and it becomes an idea. Sometimes, I could be overhearing a conversation somewhere, and an idea comes to me. I have ideas and phrases come to me in the middle of the night, that wake me up from a deep sleep. As a songwriter, you're always on the clock, and that's what I love about it.**

2. Which musical artist has influenced you the most?

Garth Brooks definitely had the biggest impact on me. Besides adding a great songs with strong messages, the level of passion he has for his music and fans. That's really what turned me on to music. I owe my career to Garth and hope that I could bring the same amount of energy and passion to my music.

3. How did Garth Brook's "Standing Outside the Fire" change everything for you? What was it about that song?

The message in the lyric of the song is powerful, and I think it matched what I was feeling at that particular moment in time. I realized that by riding a horse, I "walked through a fire" since I was able to overcome the challenge and my fear that I would get hurt by falling off a horse. Words can't explain the intensity of the emotions I was feeling at that moment in time, riding my horse into the arena to at song as the crowd was cheering. It was then and there I realized that music is the best drug in the world, and I needed more!

4. How would you describe the genre of your songs/music?

Intense country music. :-) I write what I feel, and for me to put a song out there, the emotional intensity needs to be though the roof- whether the songs bring tears of joy and laughter, healing, or just by cranking the volume knob s high, you broke it. If I don't feel a song, it gets thrown in the vault. I write all sorts of stuff, from the feel-good inspirational stuff to straight up fun songs where I let my twisted sense of humor comes out. Musically, I'd say there's a driving energy to them. I'm drawn to songs that are full of life and vibrant, so that's the sound we went for. There are also some tender tunes on there. I think that being a songwriter first, I let the style of music conform to the lyric instead of writing to a specific style.

5. Where does the material for your songwriting come from?

Most of the things I write about are from personal experience that I try to put into a universal context so everybody can relate to a song in one way or another. I'm not saying that I experienced everything I write about. Did I try to cross a river with a tractor? Did I have a one night stand with my best friend's girlfriend? No. (At least I don't think so- hahaha.) But will those lines get people to at least laugh a little? I hope so. Yes, inspiration is a big part of my career, but I'm just an average guy- I do stupid things, I have my struggles, stuff that I'm not proud of. I'm human and a sinner. Because of that, however, I'm able to make prove the case of "If I can do this -- reach my dream and be fulfilled- so can you!

6. What inspired you to write "Warrior Cowboy"?

The idea for "Warrior Cowboy" came to me after watching a news story about soldiers who had been severely wounded and disabled while in combat. Seeing their stories and the footage of their challenges really struck a note with me. I was born with my disability so it's the only way of life I know. But for many of these guys it's a whole new way of life for them and their families—it's traumatic for them, and to think of what they have sacrificed in battle fighting for us sends chills up my spine. Since they are facing similar challenges as I am, I felt that I was obligated, as a songwriter and artist, to write a song in honor of them.

I took the idea down to Nashville where me and two of my amazing writing buddies, KelleyAnn Hoctor and Justin Zimmer got together and collaborated , after which we knew we had something special.

It's the lead single because it sums up who I am the most. Its a song about being strong and

withstanding the tough times in life. The bridge sums my approach to life: “I don’t need to kneel to say a prayer, to thank God that I’m still here.” we all in one way or another fight for what we believe in and have “battle scars.” No matter how wounded we get, we still have our spirit which can never be destroyed.

7. Why were you so moved by seeing the story about the wounded soldiers?

As somebody who can relate to their challenges, and as someone who is living the American Dream that they fight to protect, the least I can do as an artist is to help raise awareness for them and maybe inspire them to keep moving forward.

I’ve had this disability since birth, so I have a lifetime of experience learning how to cope with stuff. But we have these men and woman in uniform who make sacrifices for us coming back with huge physical and emotional challenges- many of which are very similar to mine- and life is turned upside down for them and their loved ones. They have to learn a whole new way of life right off the bat.

8. Josh Helms is the vocalist on “Warrior Cowboy.” How did he get involved in this project?

Lorna Flowers, my producer actually introduced me to Josh when I was in Nashville working on this album. Josh is a very talented artist, and as we were thinking about which vocalists would sing which songs, Lorna suggested that I go see him perform. I loved the sincerity in his style, and I knew we needed to have him on the album. He came with us to the studio, and really he nailed the song. In addition, he also sings the song “I’m Giving In”; another powerful song on the album.

9. How did you decide on the title “I Will Stand” for your album?

The phrase “I will stand” appears in the bridge of another song on the album, called “These Ole Wheels” I wrote this one a few summers ago as I was sitting on the back porch with my grandmother, Baba. We were talking about life and what it was like to live life in a wheelchair and the lyric kind of fell out of the sky for me. Basically, it starts out as literal, about how my experiences of life in the wheelchair made me who I am today, and then later on, it becomes about wheels of the mind- the wheels that “drive” us to keep plugging along. A lot of people see the wheelchair as a curse, but I see it as a blessing; I see it as just another challenge to make our spirits stronger to eventually become healed and be able to stand in the next life, and that’s where I got the title- the phrase is such a strong and powerful affirmation to me- and encompasses the overall theme of the album.

10. What turning point in your life inspired “I’m Giving In” and how did you get to that point and then move beyond?

11. Where was the album recorded?

The album was recorded right in Nashville. It was quite the experience for me to see the Nashville way of recording. All the players were playing at the same time- those guys blew my mind.; Lorna and I would describe a feel we wanted for each time, and seeing these songs go from a simple worktape to a full blown production was quite euphoric.

12. Did you produce and mix this album?

Lorna Flowers produced the album. She’s amazing to work with. She did a great job at making my vision for the album a reality and thought of things that I never would have contemplated in a million years. A few of the songs feature a saxophone. I love the sax, but when she suggested it for two of the songs, I had my doubts. But I was amazed at how the sax

took the song to a whole new level. She really knows how to bring a song to life, to bring out it's potential. I'm a mixing engineer by trade, so I mixed the entire album and am fortunate enough to directly put my own sonic stamp on this project.

Author and "Living This Rodeo: A Journey from Fantasy to Reality"

1. What made you want to write your audio book?

There are 2 main reasons I wrote the book. First off, I felt the need to put my music career in context, since I'm an unconventional artist, in that I do not do my own vocals. I thought I needed to put my own back story out there sort of like a prequel to the album. But more importantly, I wanted to prove that anybody can become whatever they want to be, as long as they believe in themselves, and work hard. I talk to a lot of people who use their challenges in life as an excuse, for not doing much with their lives, when there is so much opportunity out there. We all have challenges in life and it's up to us to use those challenges to make us stronger and accomplish what we set out to do.

2. What types of stories do you share?

I share significant stories of experiences that led me to the career I have today. I discuss challenges and roadblocks that I've had to overcome as well as the message I use to overcome to the challenges and crush the roadblocks.

3. John "Cadillac" Saville is the voice in your book, as well as a number of your TV appearances. How did you and John connect?

I grew up listening to John on the radio- since i first got into country. He instantly grabbed my attention the very first time I heard him- he has the rare gift of connecting with listeners on a very deep level. His knowledge and passion for country music and life in general radiate through the speakers. I'd always tune in to his shift because he gave radio and the songs come to life. So when I decided to make 'Rodeo' an audio book, I had a very short list of folks who I wanted to narrate it. John was at the top of that list. So I took a leap of faith, wrote him a letter, he gave me a call as soon as he got it, and the rest is history. Now, he's the first person I call on whenever I land a TV spot- and he's right there. I'm so humbled that I get to work with one of my role models. He was there when I fell in love with country music, and is now at the epicenter of my career as a country artist. It has been a blessing to see this come full circle.

4. What do you want readers / listeners to take away from your book?

When people are done listening to my audio book, I hope they let loose and go after it- and find the life they want to live regardless of the challenges that may, or may not be stopping them. We get bombarded with so much negativity today, that it is easy to get discouraged. It was my goal in writing this book, to prove that people can overcome their challenges to achieve their goals and dreams.

5. In your audio book "Living This Rodeo," you say that believing in yourself is one of the most important things in life. How did you arrive at that principle? How have you motivated others to follow that advice?

Believing in yourself is one of the most fundamental keys to a successful life. If someone doesn't believe that they are worthy of happiness or success, it is likely that they are not going to be. On the other hand, if they truly believe that they can achieve something, they will.

Inspirational Speaker

1. What advice would you give to an aspiring artist?

Just be yourself and never give up. Everybody is a critic in this business and it's often tempting to give in to do the ideas of others whether they are well intended or self-serving. To be a successful artist, you must stay grounded and be true to who you are, otherwise you are going to be seen as a phony.

2. Do you still have to stand up to rejection and move on from it? Do people still say you can't do this?

Success and rejection go hand in hand. You need to get rejected in order to achieve success. I will go one step further in saying that if you are not constantly getting rejected, you are not doing your job right. Most of the time, there are a lot of "no's" before there is a "yes," and that's often for a very good reason. When you hear a "no", it gives you a chance to make tweaks and I think you get more driven to get a "yes". As a songwriter, I pitch songs to major label artists on a daily basis, but I have yet to get a hold. Does it discourage me? Absolutely not. I believe in my songs and that somebody will cut one of them. It's only a matter of time.

3. What do you think makes you put your all into a project?

I believe it's the only way to do anything in life. I come from a family that has an unbelievable work ethic. If you're not going to put at least 100% of yourself into something, you shouldn't be doing it in the first place. I give all I've got to every aspect of life and I expect that of the people that I associate with. Also, as a songwriter, it's my job to write the best songs possible. In life, and especially in this business, it's easy to detect something that's been half-assed. I take in pride in my work and I want to be able to look back in twenty or thirty years and be proud of what I've done in these early days of my career.

4. When we face obstacles and challenges, what words of advice do you have?

Overcome them. Everybody has obstacles and challenges. Some people choose to sit back and complain about them and let them stop their lives, while other people are relentless in their determination to overcome them, and are successful.

2012 and Beyond

1. What projects are you currently pursuing?

There are a few projects that I'm currently working on. I'm hoping that the album will be out before the end of the year. We are starting to brainstorm ideas for a new speaking tour for 2013. But right now, we are working on getting the single and music video out there.

2. What's next for Shane Michael Taylor?

I'm psyched to get this music out there and can't wait to bring the album into the world. And I have many more songs in me and as long as there's an opportunity to connect, I'll keep on writing