

As an over-eager audiophile who never seems to feel comfortable with her album collection, I hear a great deal of music. The seas of new music and artists can be somewhat treacherous and overwhelming. If you've felt that way at times, you'll feel like "Conviction", Brandon Rhyder's third album, is a sturdy life raft. After touring solo, he's once again playing with a full band. Whether you see him perform with a band or an acoustic solo event, the strength of his voice and the sincerity of his songwriting will convince you to find out more.

Brandon first picked up a guitar in 97, and says there was an "immediate bond" felt there. After recording an acoustic set in a Tyler, TX, he was on his way. He recalls a friend telling him to "write music for Brandon," and he took that to heart. When discussing the specifics of his vision for his third project, he told producer Walt Wilkins he wanted to make, "a Brandon Rhyder album". Quite determined to be true to a unique sound, it seems Brandon's audiences follow him with a respect that he's earned through hard work and determination.

With a slightly dressed down approach, "Conviction" winds its way through a wide range of song styles. Be it an on-the-brink-of-destruction relationship song, or a glimpse of a beautiful morning reflection on life, all songs were recorded with an idea of making it "art". Now completed and released, Rhyder stands firm behind the album, and is proud to be endorsing it across Texas. He's even making trips back and forth to Nashville, peeking interest wherever he goes.

Brandon's perspective on success seems to be balanced and positive. He knows that the expanse of the audience that hears it only depends on those who listen to it. In the meantime, he'll keep doing what he does. Interestingly, he feels that he's just now getting a "better grip" on what that really is. As a frequent audience member of his shows, I can tell you that what he does is perform. Humility and generosity are manifest in both songwriting and singing, and in greeting new fans.

"I could live here", says Brandon, looking out at the town of Kerrville. He's been loyal to Kerrville, and his fans here are grateful he found them. If I had it my way, everyone would go see him perform at least once, because I know once is all it would take to win you over. He likes cold beer and adult conversation about politics and religion, late morning Chinese food breakfasts, and he can't wait to see what is going to come next in his career. With great enthusiasm, neither can I.

Chelsea Chapa