

Jeff Varga – Bio



When the Urban Cowboy craze blew into New York City in 1979, newly transplanted Cleveland boy Jeff Varga found himself smack in the middle of it.

It's a surprising story, coming from Varga, an unassuming folk-styled, singer-songwriter and 40-year veteran of the Cleveland music scene. He belongs to a seasoned class of artists who followed in the footsteps of the likes of James Taylor, Cat Stevens and Paul Simon. Unlike the ramblings of suburbanite hipster-folksters who write about washboards they've never touched and moonshine they've never tasted, Varga's music is dipped in a classic brand of folk that values emotional authenticity over populist style.

So when he talks about touring as a member of the somewhat contrived Urban Cowboy movement in the late 1970's and early 1980's, it certainly is an unexpected tale.

Varga started making music as an all-American, Beatle's-loving 16-year-old, too young to play Cleveland clubs without a chaperone. After high school, he moved to New York City to attend the

American Academy of Dramatic Arts as an actor and started playing open mics and coffee houses in the East Village.

When Country music climbed to the top of the popular music charts and swept New York City by storm, Varga was in that rare position of being in the right place at the right time.

Promoters scoured the city for would-be Urban Cowboy musical talent and Varga was quickly recruited. He spent the next five years as a rhythm guitarist in various groups that toured the U.S. and Europe. One such group sent him on a Scandinavian tour as "rehearsal" for a part in the newly pitched Urban Cowboy sitcom slated in the tradition of The Monkees and expected to become the next-big-thing. But just as quickly as the trend swept in, it drained out.

"By the time we got back [from Scandinavia] the sitcom idea was scrapped and the whole Urban Cowboy movement was over," said Varga. After that, "I had a little cash in my pocket and I thought 'I'd like to take a break.'"

He moved back to Cleveland and began the process of writing and performing his own songs. Country folk artists like Lyle Lovett and Guy Clark "were making music that just blew me away," said Varga, they inspired him to want to do the same. He started playing up to 250 shows a year, sometimes double bills. But then, his voice gave out. Doctors found a pre-cancerous tumor on his vocal chords and operated. Varga wondered if he would ever sing again.

"What I loved to do, I couldn't do," says Varga. It was agony to be in that position he says. But he refused give up. Six months of therapy and hard determination later, his voice was back and Varga says, he was better than ever.

It's that quality of hope and perseverance that defines Varga's music.

"With my writing, I want people to know that whatever happens, it can get better. There is hope," Varga smiles and shakes his head. "It's a three to five minute genre of telling a story and if you can get it right," he says, that's when you're making something great."

Varga currently performs on Cleveland-area stages and multi-state tours. He recently scored and performed the theme song for the award winning short film out of Los Angeles, "Burnt," and released the 7-song album Back Porch Songs (2012).