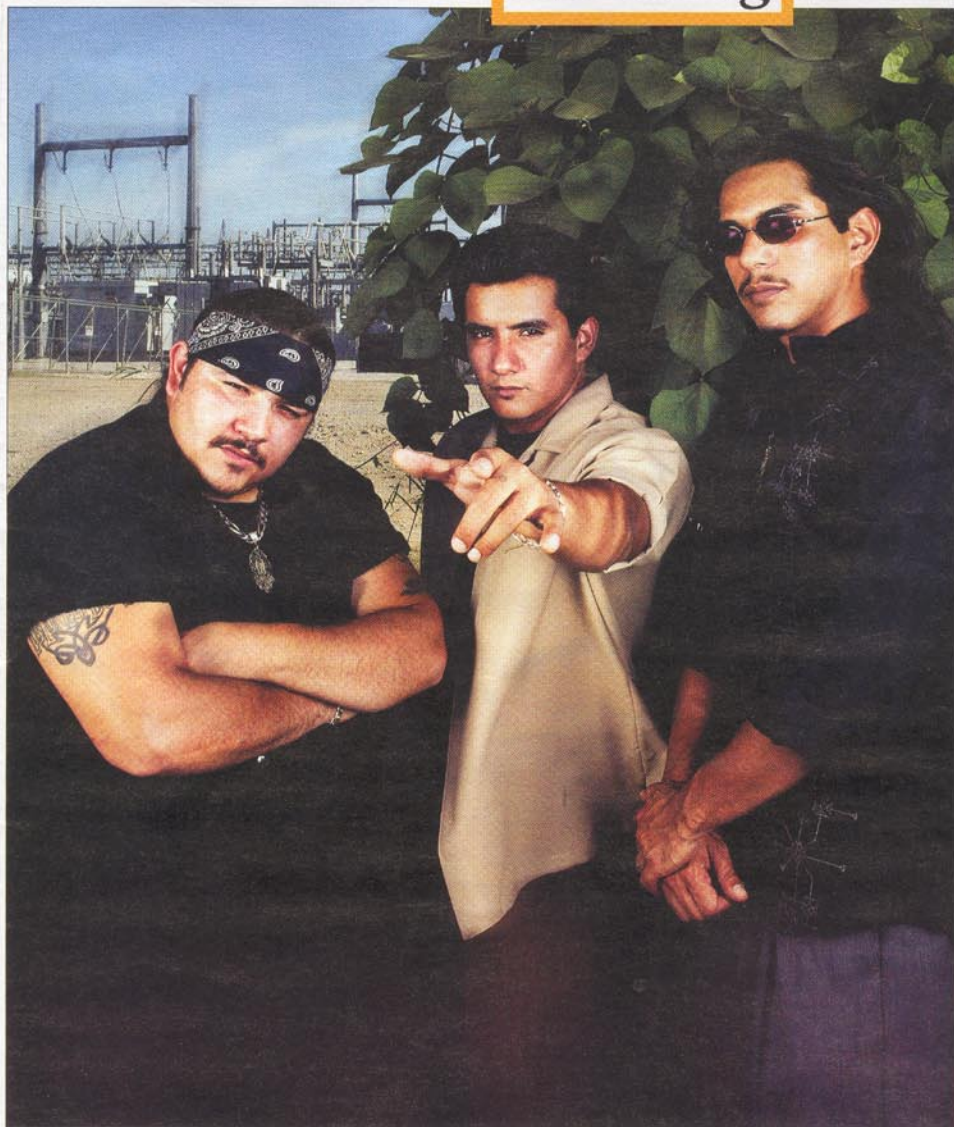


Incoming



The Garza boys: Ringo, JoJo and Henry (from left). Above: With their father in 1991.

All in the Family

Tex-Mex rockers Los Lonely Boys scored the summer's sleeper hit, thanks to brotherly love and Willie Nelson BY GAVIN EDWARDS

SOMETIMES A NAME IS JUST A name. But when the three Garza brothers decided to call their band Los Lonely Boys, they weren't kidding. Drummer Ringo Garza, 22, says, "Every time I hit the road and I'm on the tour bus, I cry myself to sleep at night

looking at pictures of my daughter and my wife." Bassist JoJo Garza, 24, remembers his most recent bout of loneliness: "The last few years of my marriage. She was there, but I was lonely." Guitarist Henry Garza, 26, is the only dissenter: "I've never been lonely. I always have family, man.

And my guitar isn't too far off, either."

Sorrow, family and guitar: Those are the ingredients for Los Lonely Boys' debut album, a slow-burner that cracked the *Billboard* Top Ten in June, ten months after it was first released. Plenty of the record is good-time Tex-Mex rock & roll — they cite

Los Lobos and Santana as influences — but the breakthrough hit is the bilingual ballad "Heaven," where Henry pleads, "I know there's a better place/Than this place I'm livin'/How far is heaven?" He wrote the song when the band members were living in Nashville, crammed with their families into a tiny house, not making enough money to get by, feeling like the whole world was crashing down on them. "I got on my knees and started crying and started praying," Henry says. "And the good Lord told me to start writing it down, dude."

The three Garza brothers began playing as a band when they were small children, persevering through heartbreak, hard times and death. "We've been chasing this dream since we were little dudes," says Henry. "To most people, it seems like the beginning. But they're wrong."

It began with their father, Henry "Ringo" Garza Sr., in San Angelo, Texas. In the Seventies and Eighties, Dad played with his seven siblings in a band called the Falcones, mixing Mexican *conjunto* music with country. Then Dad decided he wanted to make it as a solo musician, playing bad-boy country in the vein of Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings. "He always called himself the missing outlaw," Henry says. "But he was the one who showed us all kinds of music, from *conjunto* to the Beatles. When I was a kid, I thought my dad wrote all those songs."

Henry Sr., 54, remembers, "I told them, 'I'm going to teach you what I know, and someday you'll be the Mexican Beatles.'" When the boys were still young, their parents split up. Dad would serenade his sons with a song he wrote for them after the breakup. The chorus went, "I'm just a lonely, lonely boy." After Dad remarried, he started moving around the country, chasing after music stardom. Just outside of Escondido, California, the whole family crammed into a small tent with a mattress. For a meal, their stepmom would open a can of ravioli and let it heat up in the sun.

COURTESY OF LOS LONELY BOYS (RIGHT)

ADRIAN WHEAT/GETTY IMAGES (HENRY GARZA); CHRIS MCKAY/RETNA (RINGO GARZA, JOJO GARZA); MICHAEL CHUI/FIELD/REXUS (CAAN, KEITH, STALLONE, NELSON AND LOS LONELY BOYS)

With a name like Ringo, the youngest son would seem destined to play drums. (He proudly points out that Ringo is his real name, while that Beatle guy was born Richard Starkey.) He got his first kit when he was nine; soon after, all three boys began playing together as a band, and Dad recruited them to back him up. Remembering his father's song, Ringo picked the name for the family band: Los Lonely Boys.

In January 1990, the family moved to Nashville. "We came in like the Beverly Hillbillies, driving an old wagon with speakers on top of the roof," says Henry Sr. He talked his way into a gig that night, neglecting to mention that his backing band didn't qualify for PG-13 movies. "People couldn't see Ringo sitting behind the drums," he says. "But when they played, they sounded like adults." That first night, they made \$200 from the bar and \$200 in tips. That began a long Nashville residency, with the boys playing in bars just about every night and going to school during the day - although none of them made it past the ninth grade, because they were so focused on music. "We were just a hungry family chasing a dream," says Henry.

"We were always in bars," says Jojo. "We saw all kinds of things, but it's all basically the same. Somebody getting shot, stabbed or beat up." At one gig, the headliner's father got shot, and the cops came in with Mace, or maybe tear gas. The Garzas kept playing.

The brothers don't want to talk about why they stopped playing with their father, partly because they don't want to say anything unkind about him, but they parted ways in 1996. Their first gig on their own was in Atlanta, and they were unsure what to do without their dad's cues onstage. The show was full of their usual party music, including covers of Merle Haggard and "Wooly Bully" and "Johnny B. Goode." But when they finished playing, they huddled together offstage and wept.

"It was a terrible thing, but it all ended up all right," says Henry Sr. cheerfully. "People were looking for young talent, not old farts. And the boys started getting too fast for me. Not that I'm old - I can still do it six times a night." He laughs heartily.

"We love our father's music, and one day we will cut it," Ringo promises.

The Garza brothers eventually returned to Texas, signed with a new manager and somehow slipped a tape to Willie Nelson. Nelson took them under his wing, inviting them to Farm Aid, letting them use his home studio and flying them out to Maui for shows. In Hawaii,



“People think this is the beginning. We’ve been chasing this since we were little dudes.”



Clockwise from top left: Henry solos at Farm Aid, 2003; Ringo in Atlanta, July 2004; Ringo and Henry with James Caan, Toby Keith, Sylvester Stallone and Willie Nelson in 2004; Jojo in Atlanta, 2004.



at Nelson's urging, Ringo had his first piece of sushi, which he didn't like, and his first taste of hot sake, which he did.

HENRY WROTE HIS FIRST SONG when he was about five: "She Left Me." It was about the pain of being abandoned by a girl - not because he had ever experienced it but because he figured that's what songs were about.

Eventually, all the clichés of pop heartbreak became autobiography for Los Lonely Boys. For example, their next single, "More Than Love," is about Jojo's junior-high girlfriend. He was crushed when they broke up, and even more crushed when he heard she was pregnant by another guy. When he was eighteen, he saw her again and he knew that none of their past mattered. "I got back with

her, I trimmed the lawn and I was a proud daddy-husband," he says. They had two more children together but split up last year. "What we went through was destiny - it wasn't supposed to last forever," Jojo says.

Henry's heartbreak came when he was eighteen: His son died of sudden infant death syndrome. "He was sleeping right next to me," Henry says. "My wife was going to give him a bottle, and she started crying and saying, 'Baby, baby, he's not breathing.'" His voice catches. "That's not something I like to remember. But you know what? Before that, I was on a destructive path, mixed up in the pollution of what music isn't really about - girls and drinking and partying. It stopped everything. I tried to commit suicide. I only got through it because of my family. And because I went through that, it changed my whole life."

THE THREE GARZA BROTHERS ARE together almost all the time. At home in San Angelo - 225 miles from Austin - they live just a few blocks away from one another, in what they say is a quasi-suburban neighborhood. There, they hang out, jump on the trampoline with their kids and ride midget motorcycles together.

Ringo is the most boisterous Lonely Boy, the one who wants the readers of ROLLING STONE to know that he can beat any of them on any Xbox game. Henry is the band's most spiritually minded member. His younger brothers razz him endlessly, but they also genuinely admire him. Ringo attests, "I'm not saying he's a saint, but he's an awesomely good man." Jojo is the classic in-between middle brother, capable of spouting long Cheech and Chong routines or brooding quietly in the corner.

When the three of them are together, they joke and tease one another like they're all in junior high. "I know exactly what to say to get both my brothers pissed off," says Ringo. "It's very easy, dude. But they can do the same for me." Backstage at the Austin club Antone's, he demonstrates, saying, "I'm an only child. My parents adopted them because . . . well, look at them. Losers, both of them."

Henry dodges this jab. "On a serious note, Los Lonely Boys put all their faith in God."

Jojo interjects, "On a serious note, Ringo is full of shit."

"Ringo loves to take it up the tailpipe without lube," Henry adds, abandoning his theological discussion. When Henry and Ringo start mock-wrestling, Jojo shouts, "They're fighting like Oasis!"

Henry straightens himself. "We've been through everything together," he says. "We're three fingers on the same hand - but it's a pretty strong-ass fist." **Q**

GAVIN EDWARDS wrote about Ethan Hawke in RS 952/953.

Boys on Film

See the Texas rockers' "Heaven" video at rollingstone.com/lostonelyboys