



Coy Bowles

A SA MEMBER OF THE GRAMMY-winning Zac Brown Band, former science major Coy Bowles has played guitar on some of the most popular country songs in recent memory.

Yet despite the No. 1 hits, awards, and the touring demands of being in ZBB (as the band is known for short), Bowles is more than a musician. He's written a children's book, *Amy Giggles*, and co-authored the *Southern Ground Cook Book* with Brown, designed a fedora hat called the Troubador, and most important, founded a charity called Coy Cares to help people with disabilities in his hometown.

Bowles was born in Thomaston, Ga., in 1979 and formed his first band shortly after picking up the guitar at age 11. He played local gigs, parties, and church events before enrolling in Georgia State College and University to major in environmental studies. Finding that he spent four hours a day studying and *eight* hours practicing the guitar, he decided to major in music.

But first he needed his family's approval. "I told my parents that if I was going to stay in school, then I really wanted to do music," he recalls. "My mom agreed as long as I could prove to her how I was going to make a living

and had a plan. I had to call a bunch of [working] musicians and ask them how they made a living. It was the most 'uncool' thing I'd ever done, but I learned a lot from those calls. Everyone had a different way, but the common thread was that they all did multiple things within music."

His music studies took place at Georgia State's Atlanta campus. Bowles honed his chops in the city's music scene and made connections with other musicians. "To be successful in the music industry, you have to know a lot of people," he says. "You have to build relationships. You have to be as dedicated and as professional as possible. And you have to have an insane work ethic."

In 2004, he formed the Coy Bowles and the Fellowship Band, which self-released an album in 2006. That year proved to be significant for another reason, however, when

Bowles reconnected with an old friend from college: Zac Brown. The ZBB was performing in town, and after the two old friends spent an afternoon getting reacquainted, Brown invited Bowles to join them onstage. Within a year, Coy was part of the band.

"Everyone in the band wanted to be successful," he says, recalling their attention to detail. "They had extra cables and batteries

in the trailer. Each member had a [specific] job. One handled booking, another gear and audio, another social media. It was a well thought-out business."

Two years later, Bowles was sharing the glory when ZBB won the GRAMMY for Best New Artist (the first of three the group has won so far). "Things kind of changed overnight once we won awards," Bowles says. "I decided to check out of the spotlight. I moved back home and spent time with my parents (and) buddies. I didn't want much to do with fame per se. I wanted to be respected and admired for my creative accomplishments. I'm lucky that I'm grounded by the way I was raised; I can really

see how artists can get spun out from all the attention."

And while the Zac Brown Band has allowed him to travel the world and meet musical heroes like Bruce Springsteen, Warren Haynes and Smokey Robinson, Bowles continues to point his creativity in other directions, too. "I have a lot of my own music to release, probably three to four CDs," he says. "I'd love to produce more for other artists. [And] I'd love to write a book a year. One of my goals is to get my children's book into school systems. I just signed my first [book] publishing deal (and) wrote a children's story that Random House picked up." **T**

Profile

MAIN CLAIM TO FAME: Guitarist and keyboardist for Zac Brown Band

Studied: Jazz major at Georgia State University; also studied with GSU instructor David Frankenpohl

INFLUENCES: Miles Davis, John Coltrane, B.B. King, Stevie Ray Vaughn, Duane Allman

ADDITIONAL CREDITS: Leader of Coy Bowles and the Fellowship band, published author, founder of Coy Cares charitable foundation

EQUIPMENT: Ibanez Artist guitar, VVT amps, Hammond B3 organ

"You have to be as dedicated and as professional as possible."—Coy Bowles