



How far is heaven?: Los Lonely Boys' Jojo Garza speaks to meaning behind the hit

Garza spoke with the Post-Gazette ahead of the band's upcoming show at Three Rivers Arts Festival



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As a band of three Mexican American brothers from the projects of San Angelo who came up playing eclectically influenced music in Texas venues 1,200 miles removed from Los Angeles, many might have told you Los Lonely Boys would never have a prayer of becoming an overnight U.S. pop radio sensation.

Turns out, all it took was the one.

The band behind the ubiquitous and Grammy-garnering “[Heaven](#)” — a lightly strummed and airy Latin guitar song infused with blues licks and silky three-part harmonies that belie its crushing inspiration — is set to headline the main stage of the free Dollar Bank Three Rivers Arts Festival

at 7:30 p.m. on Saturday.

“What really inspired that song is a prayer of Henry’s,” said bassist and vocalist Jojo Garza. “It was a prayer that he feels he was instructed to write down as a song.”

That prayer poses the existential question “How far is heaven?” written into the song repeatedly after the unexpected loss of then 18-year-old guitarist and vocalist Henry Garza’s son to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.

“It’s a song about somebody that was going through such a hard time in their life that they were just ready for what we’re taught as being the place after life, life after death,” Garza said. “...It’s a cry out for the pain to go away man.”

That solemn plea would lead Henry, Jojo and drummer and vocalist Ringo Jr., having paid their dues in Texas, California and Nashville, on a largely joyous journey.

“It was just a whirlwind man,” said Garza of the song’s effect. “It was like what we would call a Texas tornado, a Texas Twister.”

As the band’s debut single for Epic Records, “Heaven” spent sixteen weeks at number one on the Billboard Adult Contemporary charts while simultaneously gaining enough cross-genre steam to become a minor hit on country radio for good measure, having been taken under Willie Nelson’s wing after the band’s manager sent him a tape.

“When we’re on some of those international flights and you see this strange food in front of you, man, that you’ve never seen before because you grow up eating meat and potatoes, you see all these colorful plates of food and things and you go out to Hawaii and and it looks like a beach you may have seen somewhere, but it’s not — you realize you’re in the middle of the frickin’ ocean surrounded by volcanoes,” Garza began.

“And then you’re having dinner somewhere and you look up to the end of the table and there’s Willie Nelson sitting right there who just stands up to give a toast like, ‘Man, I just wanted to say you guys are well deserving of what what’s going on in your life.’ It’s surreal, man.”

The song netted the trio the 2005 Grammy for Best Pop Performance by a

Duo or Group with Vocal. Along the way, they received further praise for their self-branded “Texican rock” that combines elements of rock n’ roll, Texas blues, brown-eyed soul, country, and Tejano music from such icons as Prince, Beyonce and Jay-Z, to name a few.

“Seeing Carlos Santana stand right in front of you telling you ‘You guys have the torch now, it’s in your hands now...’ ” said Garza, trailing off to emphasize his shock at the words of the legendary guitarist with whom they’d record [“I Don’t Want to Lose Your Love.”](#)

Following a hiatus that began in 2019 to find their way out of the whirlwind and focus on their families, the brothers Garza have been back on the road since 2022 and have released new singles, including a renewed plea to a higher power on the immediate [“Send More Love”](#) and the deeply grooving, horn-bolstered fire of [“Dance with Me.”](#)

“It’s just really finding that moment to breathe. You can really hear it with the song ‘Send More Love.’ There was a lot of personal reflection, but also looking at what’s going on in the world, man,” said Garza. “It feels more thought out when you get a little more time.

“It’s like if you’re in a working in a restaurant and you have to cook something on the fly, you definitely give it all you got, but when you can focus on cooking that meal, take your time with it, know what you’re gonna do, it definitely comes out with a lot more heart and a lot more connection to you.”

Of course, despite an admission that there have been times when the band have felt it’s overplayed, same as many bands with a monster hit on their resume, they’ll be playing “Heaven” too.

“We gave it the perfect spot because of what it gave to us,” said Garza, noting it usually serves as their finale. “It’s kind of like being a chef. You’re known for a lot of good food and stuff, but you got this one specific plate that everybody knows you for, man and, for us, it’s that. It’s the special plate, man, that we share with everyone.”

When asked what fans and newcomers alike can expect from the post-hiatus version of the band, Garza was expansive, leading off with a guarantee of a good time and seeing three brothers doing what they really love to do together again.

“But more than that I think, when you see and hear Los Lonely Boys do what they do, it's like looking at the waves of the ocean or beautiful park scenery where the trees are growing massively and it's something greater than ourselves. What you're going to really experience is a gift that, like the trees, makes you breathe, man,” he said. “And like when you’re looking at the waves of the ocean it makes you feel the waves of life, of life force.

“We're all creations of an ultimate creator, whether people call it God or light or whatever. And we’re all small specks of something else’s idea, concept. And when you can see something like a beautiful piece of art or a beautiful plate of food or great dancing, it shows what’s going on inside a tree, what’s going in the ground. You see that materialize through the expression of a human.”

“That’s really what you get with Los Lonely Boys, you get to see a gift that was given — life in one of its rawest forms.”

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