

# Eddie Stout, Dialtone Records, and the Making of a Blues Scene in Austin<sup>1</sup>

Josep Pedro



The Dynafloes at Rome Inn, 1982. (L-R) Eddie Stout, Stevie Fulton, Stevie Ray Vaughan, and David Murray. Courtesy Eddie Stout.





Austin, Texas, native Eddie Stout's dedication to the preservation and celebration of the blues over the past four decades has earned him tremendous respect and admiration within the local blues community. A performing bass player since 1972, Stout has been active in the global expansion of blues. He also has been a prolific producer of African-American roots music, including blues, gospel, and jazz, with the creation of labels such as Pee Wee Records (1984), Dialtone Records (1999), and Dynaflow Records (2014). Stout has served as an international representative, distributor, and publisher for several companies, such as Justice Records, Independent Artists, Doolittle, New West, Antone's Records, and Malaco Records. Because of his broad knowledge and experience in the field of blues, he is frequently invited to serve as a panelist and label representative at music conventions throughout the world, as well as a producer and director of forty episodes of the popular television show *Songwriters across Texas* (2012-2013).

STEREOPHONIC

A.C. LITTLEFIELD  
& the original bells of joy



## SECOND TIME AROUND

A.C. Littlefield & the Original Bells of Joy album cover.  
Courtesy Eddie Stout.

24

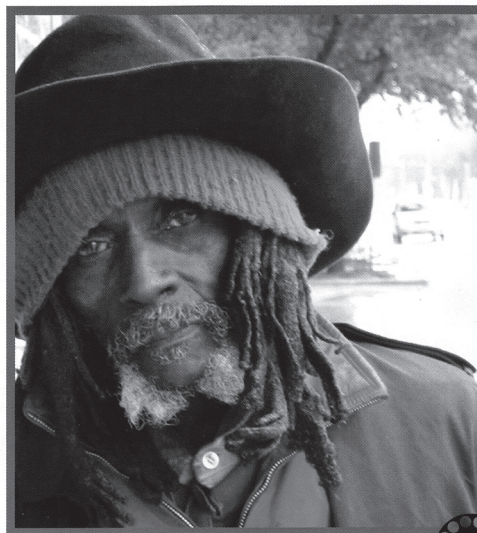
Thus, Stout has contributed from different angles to the collective construction of a specialized blues music scene in Austin, the self-proclaimed “Live Music Capital of the World,” and has channeled emotional communicative bonds among musicians, audiences, and cultural industries.

Eddie Stout is an accomplished musician and has played bass with such popular artists as the Dynaflores, Stevie Ray Vaughan, Anson Funderburgh and the Rockets, Sammy Myers, Katie Webster, Lou Ann Barton, Hubert Sumlin, Elvin Bishop, Barbara Lynn, Gary Clark, Jr., and Eddie & the Evereadys (Stout’s current band). He also has backed many of the artists signed to his iconic Dialtone Records, a label that has become a benchmark of quality and a popular source of historic Texas music for blues lovers around the world.<sup>2</sup> Dialtone has released twenty-six recordings to date, producing an archive of some of America’s greatest living legends. With great passion, and an enhanced level of creative freedom available to a small, independent company, Stout has developed an impressive “stable of stars” that includes African-American artists from across several generations and genres, including the Bells of Joy, Lazy Lester, Milton Hopkins, Bobby Rush, Jewel Brown, Cornell Dupree, Barbara Lynn, Hosea Hargrove, Lavelle White, “Little” Joe Washington, Matthew Robinson, and Reverend K.M. Williams, among others. In addition, Stout has produced international tours for a number of blues musicians, thereby creating opportunities for authentic intercultural encounters between the artists and their audiences.<sup>3</sup>

The artists and recordings that Eddie Stout and Dialtone Records promote are rich in spatio-temporal bonds resonating across different historical periods and geographical regions. On one hand, Stout’s fondness for urban post-war blues allows us to view his contribution as the continuation of a long series of influential record labels from this era, such as Houston-based Duke-Peacock Records, led by the pioneering and controversial African-American businessman Don Robey; Chicago’s Chess Records, which arguably epitomized the development of urban blues; Excello Records, which established the canon of Louisiana’s swamp blues; and Atlantic Records, whose ascension from its New York City headquarters was pivotal in the development of rhythm & blues and soul music.<sup>4</sup>

Locally, Stout also has documented the post-war blues scene tradition and legacy in East Austin. This is most clearly illustrated by such ensemble records as *Texas Eastside Kings* (2001), which effectively blends music, history, and identity expression.<sup>5</sup> As observed in the liner notes, “this community [East Austin] was the heart of the most thriving time of Blues and R&B in Texas, hosting some of the hottest live shows in the state. Touring musicians such as T-Bone Walker, B.B. King, Amos Milburn, Guitar Slim and Lightnin’ Hopkins would frequent the area because of its hoppin’ clubs and the great local talent they could use as support.”<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, Stout has recently created the Eastside Kings Festival (2013), an annual celebration that brings together the musicians on his label, as well as other veteran and upcoming local and regional artists.<sup>7</sup>

MONOPHONIC



LIL JOE WASHINGTON

## Houston Guitar Blues

Lil Joe Washington album cover. Courtesy Eddie Stout.



In many ways, Eddie Stout's "labor of love" is an extension of the work done earlier by Austin-born folklorist and ethnomusicologist Alan Lomax. The son of pioneering folklorist John Avery Lomax, Alan Lomax produced a remarkably large and diverse body of field recordings and other research.<sup>8</sup> Over the years, Stout has "(re)discovered" many unsung heroes within blues culture, contributing to their artistic revitalization through recordings and live performances. Older bluesmen such as "Little" Joe Washington (1939-2014) and Joe Doucet (born 1942)—both linked to the Houston blues scene—and Mississippi-born Sherwood Fleming (born 1936), whose recording was Dynaflow Records' first release, are examples of this.<sup>9</sup> However, instead of following the ethnographic field-recordings tradition, Stout brought these artists to his Austin studio, where he organized a recording session with veteran local musicians, including Kaz Kazanoff (sax), Nick Connolly (piano), Johnny Moeller (guitar), Jason Moeller (drums), Mike Keller (guitar), and Corey Keller (drums), among others.

Stout's recording experiences and inspiration, as well as his understanding of Austin's musical identity, his opinions about the disputed definition of blues music, and topics such as musical composition, originality, and authenticity.

## Recording Texas Blues

**Josep Pedro:** Why did you found Dialtone Records?

**Eddie Stout:** This was in my blood and it just started bubbling up. First I was just jumping in, doing what I knew I could do. This was my life. I first started with Pee Wee Records. It was something I always wanted to be involved in—a record label, do European tour dates, just to be involved with all the guys. It's just a blessing recording with them. We have so much fun in the recordings with Omar [Dykes], Mike Keller, Jason Moeller, Kaz Kazanoff—all the guys. It's just a blessing. I'm getting the sound that I like, which is reminiscent to the Duke Records

Over the years, Stout has "(re)discovered" many unsung heroes within blues culture, contributing to their artistic revitalization through recordings and live performances.

Stout's efforts to document and preserve this music reflect both a scholarly impulse of blues-related folklore and the more pragmatic need to achieve at least some level of commercial success within the modern music industry.

Eddie Stout has witnessed the profound transformations that have affected Austin's musical history, from its nascent 1960s image as a socially and politically progressive "college town" to its more recent global ascension as the "Live Music Capital of the World." His life and career exemplify the overlapping of different musical sub-scenes that contributed to the complex historical construction of Austin's blues scene—the Eastside black music scene, which he has nourished through recordings and festival productions; the folk and psychedelic rock scene, which he helped shape as both a musician and a blues fan; and the 1970s-present Antone's scene, in which he was involved primarily as a producer and international music promoter and representative.<sup>10</sup> The following interview with Eddie Stout was conducted via Skype on August 14, 2013, and is divided into three sections: "Recording Texas Blues," "The Austin Blues Scene," and "Defining the Blues Genre." The interview provides additional insight into

and Chess Records type of post-war blues. I love that sound, so that's what I'm trying to capture but with today's technology.

**JP:** What are your feelings towards the famous African-American impresario Don Robey (Duke-Peacock Records) and his contribution to Texas blues?

**ES:** Well, it's a mixed bag. I love what he did. Don Robey was aggressive, he knew what he was looking for; he went out and found it. I mean, these old guys would have been playing around these joints everywhere across Texas unless Don Robey shows up. How cool is that? This is a guy that, without him, a lot of this stuff would have been lost. He was right there with all these guys, and so, in that respect, I really dig him. The other respect is the low pay the artist got back then. It's changed somewhat right now, and it's always changing and evolving with all the new technology. [But] Don Robey was—that part of him was a total hero in my eyes. And he was so fortunate, too. He was living at the right time, the

right place, in the right position. It's in Texas, just outside Houston, man. Houston was a hotbed of some of the best players in the world—Joe [“Guitar”] Hughes, [Clarence] “Gatemouth” Brown, Albert Collins, even Little Joe [Washington]. [Long John] Hunter was out there, Lavelle White, Junior Parker, “T-Bone” Walker—all these guys were in his camp. I just really love what he did and really like the sound he got.

**JP:** How has the recording of blues changed since?

**ES:** The business has changed dramatically, and, of course, that goes with the technology. Also, it's changed for the better. With technology comes a change in everything. Back in the Don Robey days these guys were only getting a penny a cut, one cent for a cut. That was standard back then. These record men like the Chess guys [Leonard and Phil Chess] and Don Robey were making a lot of money.

**JP:** What help do you get with the work at the label?

**ES:** My wife helps me a lot; my daughter helps me. Mostly, I run the whole thing myself. I do have a partner—Randy Reagan. He is just spiritual guidance. I have run [Dialtone Records] for the last sixteen years. We have twenty-six recordings right now.

**JP:** You have recorded musicians from all over Texas and released different geographically-grounded albums such as *Texas Eastside Kings* (2001); *West Side*

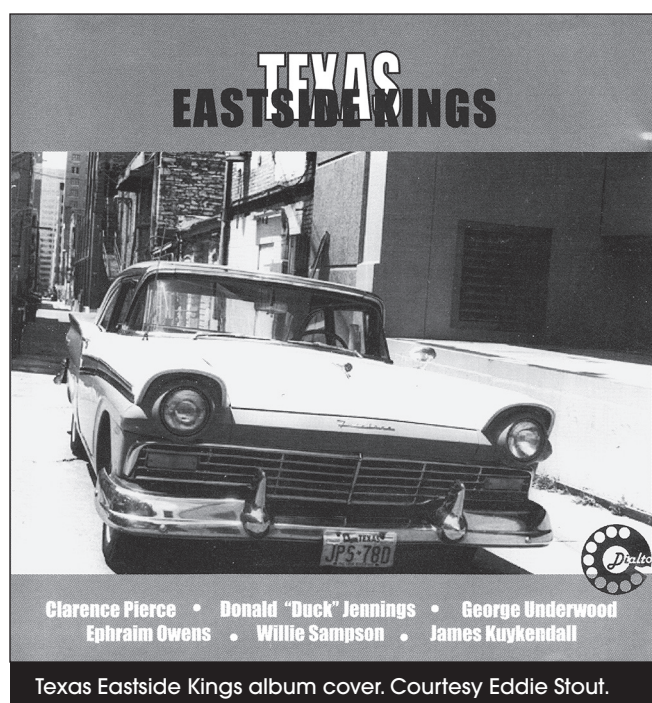
*Horns* (2002), *Texas Southside Kings* (2006), and *Texas Northside Kings* (2007). Is this the mission behind Dialtone?

**ES:** It's part of a mission and also part of economics. I just really can't afford to go out of town. I'd love to start going into Mississippi, Louisiana, and Georgia looking for these guys that are still out there playing. Much like what Broke & Hungry Records are doing. I love what they're doing. I'd love to, but Texas has a lot of great blues, so I'm real happy and fortunate to be close to music I grew up listening to. I can go out there and find these guys. Houston still has a lot of great guys in there. And communication is so much better. It's not too hard to find what you're looking for. I've got friends all over the country with whom I talk all the time, like my friend at *Living Blues* [magazine] Scott Bock. He said, “Man, you gotta record Birdlegg.”

**JP:** Many blues musicians in Austin, like T.D. Bell, Erbie Bowser, “Blues Boy” Hubbard, or Matthew Robinson, have had long careers but have made few recordings. What balance is there between live performances and recordings, and what has been your role in this situation?

**ES:** In the '60s and '70s “Blues Boy” was all over with Blues Boy Hubbard & the Jets. But he's never aggressively been focused on recording. The musician's goal, if they have a goal, is to get into the studio. That's the end of our line. To record what we've been learning all these years, put it down for posterity or documentation, or just for the love of the music.

Yes, they're under-recorded. But the type of blues they're playing is doing copy songs, not writing original songs. They're just in there to have fun, to play their music, and do what the audience wants. It's been how they've been molded over all these years, to play what the people want in the juke joints. As far as recording, one of the Eastside Kings and I said to “Duck” [Donald Jennings], “Man, how can you not record more?” He said, “Man, I was waiting for you to grow up!” These guys are just really sitting there. They're not aggressive, they all got homes, they all got day jobs. They've never got out of the circuit—never wanted to. They just wanted to do their gigs. There's a few diamonds down here like Matthew [Robinson] and the Eastside Kings, but we're losing some like Clarence Pierce, T.D. Bell, Erbie Bowser. They're leaving us, and the only person here that I can see recording them is me. So I document them



and I get them out, but I can only do like one record, because the rest of them it's just juke joint blues, what they're playing for the audience; it's copy songs. They have no passion to go any further, because it's just not happening for them.

**JP:** What role does composition play in blues and what difference might it make?

**ES:** If they write their own material, they have a chance of recording for a record company to be interested in. A record company needs two things—original material and a tour. If you don't do that, there's no reason for them to sign you. But myself, I'm a lot different. I find artists that I really like in the blues vein that I love so much, and I record them in the Dialtone sound. And, if you've noticed, none of my artists tour, because they are local artists. But it's a passion with me that I love the music.

and how important it is to have a house band for a specialized label?

**ES:** I'm so fortunate to be in Austin because all of these great players all around me. The Keller brothers, the Moeller brothers, Kaz Kazanoff, Nick Connolly, Riley Osborn. I choose different people for different projects, different people for different sounds—for instance with the Earl Gillian and Joe Doucet. With the Birdlegg one I don't think I really hit it just exactly right, but I think we did a really good job. His sound was a bit more lowdown, and I still worked with the same guys because they are such great musicians. I wanted to make sure that we got a good record the first time, because it costs so much these days. So I worked with the same guys. That's the reason why I got them twice or almost three times in a row with that Cornell Dupree [album].

I want the artist to be happy, then I'm happy, and then everybody's happy.

27

**JP:** As a listener, it's really interesting to hear so many instruments in your recordings, especially piano and sax, which sometimes fall aside live due to economic reasons. How would you describe that "Dialtone sound"?

**ES:** Well, if you notice on the recordings I always break them down, too. Like on the Birdlegg album (2013), I got them down to just doing a duo, and I also did a three-piece with drums, guitar, and harmonica. Some songs are with piano, and then some songs I bring Kaz [Kazanoff] to play baritone and sax and double up. So the Dialtone sound really comes from the warmth-ness of the recordings, not just how many people are involved. It's a sound I'm looking for. It's a feeling that you get and that I like to keep consistent throughout all the recordings.

**JP:** Your featured artists are usually backed by a versatile house band that includes musicians such as Kaz Kazanoff (saxophone), Nick Connolly (piano), Mike Keller (guitar and bass), Corey Keller (drums), Johnny Moeller (guitar), and Jason Moeller (drums), among others. What can you tell me about them,

Using these guys and bringing them in and out.

The drummer, I think, is the most important person in a session. Like Jason Moeller—nobody can shuffle like Jason Moeller. He's got a great Texas shuffle, also like a Jimmy Reed kind of beat, Freddie Below or something. He can do that, or play the straight whack. Jason is a certain type of drummer, and Corey Keller is a straight whack, great timing. You bring these guys in depending on the artists that you have. I do like using Nick [Connolly], because we're so familiar with each other. He's probably the guy that I probably stick the most on the sessions 'cause he's versatile playing B3 [organ] and piano. He's great at both. He's the only steady, and I always mix with him, because he's got a freaking great ear and knows exactly what I'm looking for.

**JP:** What expectations do you have?

**ES:** I don't really have any expectations other than being able to make myself happy. I want the artist to be happy, then I'm happy, and then everybody's happy. The expectation is to capture a moment of time that's going on right now with the guys I'm working with, and also to be able to capture that in

the way that it should be. Like you said, if you go and see Matthew [Robinson], he's doing three-piece because of the economics. But his real sound comes from having an organ player, a guitar player, bass, drums, maybe a sax. That's his real sound; that's what he wants. If he could, he would carry that with him every night. So my expectation is to capture that sound with what the artist would like, and also with myself in there as a producer. It's got to be a happy medium. I'm walking a fine line of making everybody happy but still making it high quality, and also choosing the right songs to make it marketable, too. So I put it all together, juggle it up, and make a great martini.

**JP:** Where does the audience come from?

**ES:** They're not coming from nowhere. I don't sell records. Period. You've got a few of them over there

why vinyl is coming back. They're fans who are collectors. Nowadays it's collectors.

**JP:** Why do you think blues is not in demand?

**ES:** Everything evolves and changes. I mean, now they call Gary Clark, Jr. blues. We don't call that blues, but people do. Blues has just taken a different shape. For the real blues, what we call blues, it's just—it's not going anywhere. It's always there. Hopefully one day it will be picked up—and I'll be there when it does! [Laughs]

## The Austin Blues Scene

**JP:** What do you think of when I say "Austin blues scene?"

**ES:** The Austin blues scene is still here, and it just evolves. It doesn't have to be black to be blues. We still have the east side entity which is growing smaller

If it wasn't for my good friends in Japan, Dialtone would not (be the same).

but my recordings don't sell a whole lot. There's not a real big audience. They come from Japan first of all. If it wasn't for my good friends in Japan, Dialtone would not [be the same]. That's a fact. The Japanese audience has really been big for me. Some European audience is helping. But my releases sell a few hundred copies. We just go record by record, and then put it all together to do another record. So there's not a big audience for Dialtone.

**JP:** How hard is it to distribute your records in well-known local record stores such as Waterloo Records or Antone's Record Shop?

**ES:** It's available. I got good distribution. It's just there's no demand. If the demand was there, then the records would be there. That comes with having an audience. That's still a big hurdle I'm trying to figure out, like everybody else—how do you sell your product? My product is blues, so it's not a very big commodity that's sought after. People love to listen to blues at clubs, at the radio, at festivals, but [they don't] go to the record store and buy a CD. I think it has all come down to just selling to the fans. That's

everyday but also the west side is doing great with Greg Izor, the Keller Brothers, the Moeller brothers. These guys are heavy into the blues and they sound freaking great. I go to see a band called The Peacemakers—that's with Greg Izor, Mike Keller, and Corey [Keller]. They're a really great band. I watch those guys a lot. And then, sporadic bands around Austin play blues really good. On the east side there's the Eastside Kings with "Blues Boy" [Hubbard] and Matthew [Robinson] playing, Sugar Brown & the Brothers—a little different blues, it's not really "blues blues," but it's some in there. There's also Pamela Allen; she's singing blues, too. They're trying to keep it alive and I'm trying to do the same with this festival, the Eastside Kings Fest.

**JP:** How would you describe the Victory Grill's current shape?

**ES:** That's a tough one, man. [It's] such a great place. I love the Victory Grill. I love what Harold McMillan is doing, keeping it alive. In the forties, fifties and sixties that was a jumping place, man. But in the eighties, nineties, and the last ten years have just



not been good to it. It's been overlooked. It's just been sporadic with people showing up. It hasn't had any appeal for some reason. It's a nice club. I love the place. Shit happens. Sometimes there's no reason at all, a club will just dry up. Nobody will go there. But hopefully something will happen and turn again. That's what everybody's waiting on because they're really great. That's a landmark in Austin.

**JP:** How much is the east side changing now?

**ES:** The east side is getting pushed out, and with no blues—no real juke joints like there used to be. As far as the music scene, every year is being pushed away. There's just a few pockets left. Downtown is slowly being taken over by all these brand new condominiums, housing, the rich people moving

The Rolling Stones helping with it, even Led Zeppelin. All these people recorded the blues and were trying to find out where they came from. Thanks to people like Don Robey and Chess records all these guys had something to go back and learn from. So the next generation of blues players came up white. I think that's how it happened.

**JP:** In my research I conceptualize Austin's blues scene through three big moments—a post-war black music scene in East Austin (1945-1975); a folk-psychedelic scene (1960-1980); and the Antone's club scene (1975-2006), which specifically defined itself through blues.

**ES:** Antone's was an anchor. The Soap Creek was here, too. And another Creek where they had blues

You got Amos Milburn, Bobby Bland, BB King, Ike & Tina (Turner) would come through and always pick up side guys here in Austin. Austin was a great place for these musicians to come through, make their money, and don't have to bring the band, because there's plenty of side guys here. That was really great for touring musicians right then.

in, because the people living there just can't afford the land taxes. Everything changes and develops, like blues. Blues used to be all black blues and now it's just developing into all white. Thank goodness somebody is around to keep it going.

**JP:** How do you understand the ethnic or racial "shift" in blues from blacks to whites?

**ES:** Blues clubs have never been a place to take your kids, so black blues players when they're playing at night they would leave their kids at home. They were not going to take them down there. So a lot of kids did not grow up learning how to play what their dad did. 90% of dads did not pass it on, because they didn't want to take their kids to the club—unlike Cajun music. Cajun music they bring their whole family, play all day, and make the kids play. So you still see black people playing Cajun. Thank goodness that the next generation of young white guitar players picked up the blues and that's generally thanks to people like Eric Clapton,

[Castle Creek?]. But Antone's came in, and with his money was able to bring the Chicago guys down and rejuvenate what Austin had lost for so many years. 'Cause the Eastside was happening. You got Amos Milburn, Bobby Bland, BB King, Ike & Tina [Turner] would come through and always pick up side guys here in Austin. Austin was a great place for these musicians to come through, make their money, and don't have to bring the band, because there's plenty of side guys here. That was really great for touring musicians right then.

**JP:** Where would you place yourself?

**ES:** I missed the first part. The psychedelic [era] I was around to see Shiva's Headband, 13<sup>th</sup> Floor Elevators. Then when Antone's opened up I was like the first one down there, before he even opened up on Sixth Street. I place myself just a little bit later after Clifford [Antone] opened. About twenty years ago I started Pee Wee Records in Dallas. I was trying to do blues. When I came down here [to Austin],



I worked for Antone's for a while and started my own label, just to fill my own niche, and record what I thought should be recorded and how I thought. I don't know how I fell into all of that, but I fell in as part of it, documenting music here in Central Texas. You know, like "the Smithsonian of Texas Blues," they call me the "Ambassador of Texas blues."

**JP:** How would you describe your relationship with local musicians from other genres?

**ES:** Well, it's real good. You don't get very far in this business if you're a fuckup. From the jazz community here I am real good friends with Ephraim Owens, Brannen Temple, Red [Young]—the jazz cats. We're all good friends; we all run together and respect what we do. And, of course, everybody in my label—we're all good friends. We stay in communication throughout the years.

Everybody gets along here. Everybody plays some of the same venues. Some of the cats play blues gigs, like Mike Flanigin. He can do a blues gig or a heavy jazz gig. Same with Ephraim Owens. He's a really

great player, as well. And Brannen Temple—he does his heavy jazz thing, and he is playing blues with The Peterson Brothers. Yeah, everybody intermixes here and plays the same gigs, and they'll know each other. So everything is real cool and laidback. They're just all musician cats. There's always been camaraderie here, and when you see people from Austin out on the road, there's always camaraderie, too. There's no friction.

**JP:** What role does the Austin Blues Society play?

**ES:** The Blues Society here in Austin is a work in progress. Austin is a very different community. Each person feels like they're the big man on campus, so it's real hard for everybody to come together. It's great to have a blues society. Hopefully, something would stick someday, and maybe it's gonna be now. These guys seem pretty aggressive in what they do. They're always down at Antone's on Monday night and do their meetings and jams. Blues societies come along, but it is working progress.

**JP:** It hasn't reached the point where everyone in the blues music scene is involved?

**ES:** Well, it hasn't reached that point. Everybody hasn't really joined in and helped yet. And they haven't reached out to like the Oklahoma blues society or the New Orleans blues society. They haven't really put in a big connection. Each one should be having touring bands that come through, and support it. They haven't done that yet. They haven't started a festival. They're hosting jams, pressing T-shirts, stickers and stuff like that. I think it should be coming along soon. Hopefully they'll get something together.

**JP:** Austin's growing global popularity is primarily linked to big festival events such as South By Southwest (SXSW, founded in 1987) and *Austin City Limits* (ACL Fest, founded in 2002). What role is blues playing in this ascension?

**ES:** Blues isn't playing any part of it. SXSW I really very much support and love. We're so lucky to be here. Roland Swenson is a great guy with a really big heart. I really dig it, but there's not much blues. 90% of all music is played by kids that are 12 years old. All the bands are just so—they're very different and diverse, and they're from all over the world, from Australia to Spain. But the blues is just very small. Alligator [Records] came down and did a show one time, which was great. But if I'm not putting a show



Poster for Arctic Border Blues Festival. Courtesy Eddie Stout.

at South by Southwest, there's really no blues at all. It's just what's in demand, what's popular, and that's what comes up. And there's just not a lot of people playing blues anyway.

**JP:** Would you say that Austin's musical identity is traditionally related to country and blues music?

**ES:** No, I wouldn't say country and blues. You got Gary Clark, Jr. He doesn't play blues. He can, but he doesn't play blues. His music is totally different. He is exploding, but I wouldn't really label Austin as having some particular kind of music. I can't think of any really big band apart from Stevie and Jimmie [Vaughan] that's come out of Austin. Well, [singer] Robert Plant has lived here, which is crazy. It's a place for all genres of music but no single band has brought it all together.

Back in the seventies Austin had a movement. I saw all this going on. A lot of people from Port Arthur came up and moved to Austin. Also, a lot of people from Corpus Christi, like Chris and Tom, a lot of people from Fort Worth, like Mike Buck and Jackie Newhouse, people from Lubbock, like Joe Ely. They all moved here in the seventies. From then it just really became a big thing. That's what caused it. That was right after the blues fell off in the east side at the end of the sixties. And then in the seventies this big movement came in here from all over. Marc Benno moved here. Stevie and Jimmie [Vaughan] came down from Dallas. There was a huge movement and that kind of revived the music. There was music everywhere. It was really cool back then, and it still is. There's a lot of music. But there's no one genre of music you can pin to Austin. That's why they say it's the "Live Music Capital of the World."

**JP:** What do you think of the tag "Live Music Capital of the World"?

**ES:** Well, there's plenty of live music capitals of the world, but it's a pretty good tag and it's sticking for right now, that's for sure. It's great to have a record company here because I got so many people I can call on to come down and play on the record.

**JP:** How similar and how different is Texas blues from other geographically-grounded subgenres?

**ES:** Well, it used to be more defined back in the early days when transportation wasn't so much around and communication was limited. It was all different sounds back then because of the location and how

## TEXAS HARMONICA RUMBLE



hear these harp-huffing heavyweights:

- Gary Primich
- Paul Orta & the Kingpins
- Keith Dunn with John Packer, guitar
- Walter T. Higgs
- Lewis Cowdrey
- Steve "Hook" Herrera
- Memo Gonzalez
- Allen Hamilton



## WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 13<sup>th</sup> ANTONE'S on Guadalupe in Austin

Poster for Texas Harmonica Rumble. Courtesy Eddie Stout.

everybody was in their own [community]. They didn't move around much. But now that everybody moves around, everything is all blended together. Back in the early days, you had the Chicago sound. Then you go out to California and you got this big jump swing sound. And then you come down to Texas, and you got people like Lightnin' Hopkins, dirty old blues stuff. Also "Gatemouth" Brown and the Upsetters. [But] especially with harmonica players, it's easy to say "West Coast harp," "Chicago harp," or "Texas harp." They are all very different and that's a way to pin them.

**JP:** What are the particularities of the Texas tradition?

**ES:** It's kind of tough to say. Everybody talks about the horn players, because we had great horn sections, back when everybody had horn sections. If you



wanted three horn players, you'd always come to Texas and get it. I think hot guitar players too, like Albert Collins, Cornell Dupree, and stuff like that. I'd have to say that the horn players were what made Texas different back in the days. [But] I think it just really stands for the record labels that were recording the guys—Chess Records, Federal Records, and Duke-Peacock Records. I think they're the ones that made our distinctions.

## Defining the Blues Genre

**JP:** In recent years, the success of blues-related bands such as the Black Keys and Gary Clark, Jr., has exposed the different ways in which blues is understood and defined. Some say they're blues, others say they're not. What are your feelings towards these debates?

**ES:** You got the traditional people who love the blues, who are traditional. And then you have the people who are more open-minded, and this is the way they were introduced to it. Black Keys were what they thought was a blues band. Somebody told them that. So, this is how they perceive a blues band. That's just different people's takes on the same thing. The traditionalists would not call the Black Keys a blues band. Or I wouldn't call Gary Clark a blues band either.

There is one thing that is true that I found out, and that's why I created my label to start with blues. If you start with blues and you play blues, then it's easier for you to go to other genres in music. Then you can go to other music like Gary Clark's done. Or if you need to, like Eric Clapton, you can go back and play blues. But if you don't start with blues, then you find it much harder to go to blues. People that started playing rock like Led Zeppelin and then want to record a blues album, I wouldn't call that blues. You can come from the blues and be able to play blues, and go back to the blues for the rest of your life, but if you don't come from the blues, then it'll be something else. So, if you come from the blues, you'll be a blues player forever, 'cause you can play whatever you want and then go back and play blues, and it's acceptable. If you don't come from the blues, like Led Zeppelin or something, and you do a blues album, well they wouldn't call that blues. They'll just call it rock, which is probably what it is.

**JP:** What tag would you use to describe Gary Clark's music?

**ES:** I'd just call it—just new music. The way blues evolves. His own inspiration, indie pop is what he's doing now. But Gary can play blues. He could go back to the blues and he will be accepted, of course. He's playing good music, there's no doubt about it. Or he wouldn't be where he is today. He's a great player. The type of music he's playing now I don't know what you call it, but you don't go into a music store, look in the blues records, and find Gary Clark. You go to the pop records, and then you find Gary Clark.

**JP:** How would you define the blues?

Oh, I don't know how to define it. There's no words to just put in what music is really. I can't answer that because I really don't have an answer for how to describe it in words, other than by naming artists. I can name different artists—Sunnyland Slim, Big Walter Horton, Muddy Waters, you know—that's blues. Gary Clark and the Black Keys—that's not blues. [Laughs] I can describe like this, but as far as putting what it is in words, I just don't know how to do that.

**JP:** What role does originality play in blues?

**ES:** Originality would just be mostly their feelings, their interpretations of the old blues, and how they're changing up a few riffs and stuff. And then, writing their lyrics. Lyrics is a big thing. I think this is part of why everything is evolving and blues is changing so much, and why Gary Clark is changing so much. All these guys, they're coming up, and they're making changes. This is where you get people like Gary Clark and Johnny Lang. They're taking the blues and moving it into a different way, and it changes the whole thing. They're wanting to do something. They're experimenting, and this is where it's taken them.

**JP:** What makes blues authentic?

**ES:** Well, it's not the blues. It's the person itself that makes it authentic and makes it stand out. You're only as good as you are. So being different brings attention to yourself. People recognize this, and they either feel attracted or not. Being different, standing out still in the same vein, brings notoriety. You're either a great guitar player like Stevie [Ray Vaughan] was, or a great singer. It's just a personality that brings it out.

**JP:** How different is the perception of blues in the U.S. and overseas?

**ES:** Not perception—respect. There's a lot more respect for the blues in Europe, and especially in

Japan, than in America. In America there's just a few festivals around and few sales. But over in Europe and Japan, respect is there. Look at the audience. People in Europe will sit and listen, you know. Or stand and listen. They come, and they're quiet, paying respect. In Japan they won't say a word until you're finished, not even clap. It's just respect. But in America, they're just used to it. As I've told other people, we are still living our history. America is still very young, and especially our music. There's still some of the guys who invented the blues. It's still around. You know, Lazy Lester, Bobby Rush—some of these guys are still around, and they're still

teaching the guys. We are still in our second generation of real blues guys. They're still here teaching the new guys like the Moeller brothers and the Kellers.

**JP:** How much do you know about the blues traditions in Europe or Japan?

**ES:** I know some. There's blues in Europe and in Japan. Blues is an American roots music. It's where it came from, and so it started to spread, which is great. Everybody should share everybody's music. This is how we communicate. One of the best communications is music. It came along later on, and it's still coming together. It's a new music. ★

## Notes

- 1 This work was supported by the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports ("Ministerio de Educación Cultura y Deporte") under the contract FPU ("Formación de Profesorado Universitario").
- 2 Despite limited attention in scholarly books about Austin and Texas music, Eddie Stout and Dialtone Records have received considerable coverage from blues writers and specialized media throughout the United States and Europe. See, for instance, Patrick Beach, "Labor of love: Eddie Stout's on a mission," *Austin 360*, February 19, 2011; Gene Tomko, "Birdleg: I Never Lost Sight of My Dream," *Living Blues*, Issue 227, Vol. 44, No. 5, October 2013, 18-25; and Scott M. Bock, "Eddie Stout and Dialtone Records. 'This is What I Was Supposed to Do,'" *Blues & Rhythm*, No. 284, November 2013, 22-25. Stout's recordings have also been repeatedly played and reviewed in blues radio programs in Spain, including *Blanco y Negro*, directed by Eugenio Moirón, and *La Hora del Blues*, directed by Vicente Zúmel.
- 3 Authenticity and its relation to race has been an important object of study for blues and popular music scholars, as illustrated, among others, by David Grazian, *Blue Chicago. The Search for Authenticity in Urban Blues Clubs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Roger Gatchet, "I've Got Some Antique in Me': The Discourse of Authenticity and Identity in the African American Blues Community in Austin, Texas," *The Oral History Review*, Vol. 39, No. 2, 2012, 207-229; and Josep Pedro, "The Globalization of Blues: Rural, Urban, Transatlantic" in Brian Goss, Joan Pedro, Mary Gould (eds.), *Talking Back to Globalization: Texts and Practices* (New York: Peter Lang, 2016). Race, geographical origin, and age are arguably the most dominant factors in the sliding scale of authenticity within blues culture.
- 4 Don Robey remains a controversial yet inspirational figure in African-American culture and popular music history, as reflected by author Nelson George in *The Death of Rhythm & Blues* (New York: Penguin, 1988), 56-57. George states, "You might not like all their methods—Robey's 'songwriting' is particularly objectionable. Still, as urban models for balancing black capitalism with the realities of a white-dominated society (whites of course even owned most of the black labels and stations), this 'rhythm & blues world' had real merit"; for more on the Houston blues scene in general, see Roger Wood's *Down in Houston: Bayou City Blues* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003); another good source of information about a variety of record labels that specialized in African-American music is Bill Wyman's *Blues Odyssey: A Journey to Music's Heart and Soul* (New York: DK Publishing, 2001).
- 5 For an extended-analysis review see Josep Pedro, "Texas Eastside Kings: Texas Eastside Kings," *All About Jazz*, November 23, 2012. Other representative recordings of the East Austin tradition include *Texas Trumpets* (Dialtone, 1999); Hosea Hargrove, *Tex Golden Nugget* (Dialtone, 2010); and *Matthew Robinson & The Texas Blues Band* (Dialtone, 2011).
- 6 *Texas Eastside Kings* (Dialtone, 2001).
- 7 The 2015 edition of the Eastside Kings Festival was celebrated on September 12th and 13th. The line-up included a wide variety of blues-related artists, such as Lavelle White, Jewel Brown, Milton Hopkins, Sonny Rhodes, Hosea Hargrove, Mel Davis & The Blues Specialists, Harold McMillan & The Eastside Blues Syndicate, Jabo & The Old Dogs, Andrea Dawson, Pamela Allen, "Soul Man" Sam, Ray Sharpe, Orange Jefferson, "Blues Boy" Willie, and Dempsey Crenshaw.
- 8 The expression "labor of love" is used in Patrick Beach's "Labor of love: Eddie Stout's on a mission," *Austin 360*, February 19, 2011; and in Scott M. Bock's "Eddie Stout and Dialtone Records: 'This is What I Was Supposed to Do,'" *Blues & Rhythm*, No. 284, November 2013, 22-25. Furthermore, similarities between Eddie Stout's recording activities and the folklore research of Alan Lomax have been emphasized in several articles. For instance, see Robert Gabriel's "Sheiks of Industry. Austin record labels, part 1," *Austin Chronicle*, November 14, 2003, which states that "[t]he genuine feel of each Dialtone release reflects label co-owner/in-house producer Eddie Stout's role as Austin's modern-day Alan Lomax." See also David Mac's "Eddie Stout: The Blues Junction Interview," *Blues Junction Productions*, n.d., who describes Eddie Stout as a "folklorist for the new millennium" and as a "21st century Alan Lomax."
- 9 Having had limited economic success in their careers, "Little" Joe Washington, Joe Doucet, and Sherwood Fleming remained largely unknown, even within blues culture, before Stout produced their album recordings *Houston Guitar Blues* (Dialtone, 2003), *Houston's Third Ward Blues* (Dialtone Records, 2006), and *Blues Blues Blues* (Dynaflow Records, 2015), respectively. Rhys Williams's "Sherwood Fleming – Blues Blues Blues, Album Review," *Blues Blast Magazine*, July 29, 2015, exposes Fleming's story of hardship and perseverance from the early years of cotton picking in Mississippi, and the failed attempts to become a professional musician in California, to his unexpected and triumphal comeback through Stout's Dynaflow Records.
- 10 The conceptualization of Austin's blues scene through three historical sub-scenes—East Austin's black music scene (1945-1975); the eclectic folk-psychedelic scene (1960-1980); and the specialized Antone's scene (1975-2006)—has been proposed in Josep Pedro, "An Intercultural History of Blues in Austin, Texas: From the Negro District to the Global Rock Circuit," forthcoming. The idea of a music scene that includes different sub-scenes has also been used in Barry Shank's *Disonant Identities: The Rock 'n' Roll Scene in Austin, Texas* (Lebanon, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1994). For more information on these scenes, see Alan Govenar, *Texas Blues: The Rise of a Contemporary Sound* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 485-532; Jason Dean Mellard, "Home with the Armadillo. Public Memory and Performance in the 1970s Austin Music Scene," *Journal of Texas Music History*, No. 10, 2010, 8-21; and Ryan A. Kashanipour, "Antone's," *Handbook of Texas Online*, June 9, 2010.