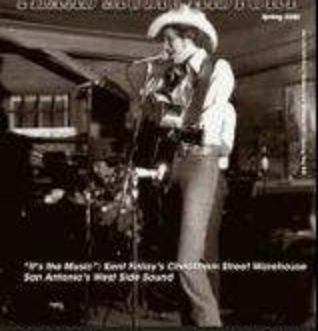


The Journal of

TEXAS RANGING HISTORY

Volume 8 Number 1

Spring 2009



"It's the Music!" Karl Ralston's CHADRON Street Warehouse
San Antonio's West Side Sound

Letter from the Director



As the Center for Texas Music History prepares to celebrate its sixth anniversary in September 2005, we can look back on a tremendous record of success and forward to a future filled with exciting new opportunities.

The Center continues to develop new graduate and undergraduate courses in southwestern music history through the History Department. The *Journal of Texas Music History* and the *Handbook of Texas Music*

serve as valuable reference tools and have helped provide a format for scholarly debate on the evolution of Texas music.

The Center has expanded its work with museums, public schools, universities, and others to develop educational programs related to Texas history and culture. Following our successful collaboration with the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum's 2002-2003 exhibit on Texas music history, we are once again working with the Bullock Museum on its new "Spirit of Texas Music" concert series. We are also pleased to be working with Dr. Richard Cheatham and Texas State University's College of Fine Arts and Communication to present the new "Stars of Texas Music" series, through which we invite younger artists to perform alongside veteran artists in order to educate students about the rich musical heritage of our state.

The Center is working on other new projects, as well. Of particular note is the Center's new Texas Music Oral History Program, launched this past spring with the help of Dr. Ron Brown and others in the Department of History. Through this program, the Center is working with graduate history students to conduct oral interviews with people throughout the state who have been involved in the development of Texas music. These interviews, which will be conducted over several years, will become part of the university's extensive archival collection on Texas music history and will be available to students, scholars, and others for research and educational purposes.

As part of our ongoing efforts to be more cost-efficient, we

are also working to make all issues of the *Journal of Texas Music History* available on-line. This will help us keep costs low while making the *Journal* instantaneously available to readers anywhere in the world.

We are exceedingly grateful to everyone who has supported our fundraising efforts during this past year. Since we receive no direct line of funding, we rely on the generosity of all who believe in the importance of what the Center is doing. In particular, I would like to thank Gregg Andrews & Vikki Bynum, Dee Lannon, Jimmy McWilliams, Cat Reed, Carley Wolf, Gene Bourgeois, Perry & Marianne Moore, Frank de la Teja, the entire Texas State University History Department, the Center's Advisory Board, Ann Marie Ellis, Nina Wright, Deborah McDaniel, Becky Prince, Richard Cheatham, Liz McDonald, Carroll Wiley, Vicki Meehan Clarke, T.Cay Rowe, Diana Harrell, César Limón, Lanita Hanson, Brandi Bridgeman, Gary Hickinbotham, Francine Hartman, Jim & Cathey Moore, John & Robin Dickson, Rick & Laurie Baish, Lucky & Becky Tomblin, Kim & Robert Richey, Jo & Paul Snider, Margie First, Darrell & Barbara Piersol, Phil & Cecilia Collins, Ralph & Patti Dowling, Cathy Supple, Dennis & Margaret Dunn, Sharon Sandomirsky & Chris Ellison, Ron & Judy Brown, Byron & Rebecca Augustin, John Kunz, Kent Finlay, Clifford Antone, Tracie Ferguson, Mildred Roddy, Elmer & Susan Rosenberger, Billy Seidell, and all of our other friends and supporters.

Please visit our website or contact us to learn more about the Center and its unique and exciting programs.

Sincerely,

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gary Hartman".

Gary Hartman, Ph.D.
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In order to continue this success, we need your help. Your contribution will help fund continued publication of *The Journal of Texas Music History*, along with all the other important educational and preservational projects we have underway.

We are very grateful to the donors listed on this page. They have made a personal commitment to preserving the musical heritage of the Southwest. Their efforts will help us continue to increase awareness of how Texas music represents the unique historical development of the region.

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“It’s the Music”:

Kent Finlay’s Cheatham Street Warehouse in San Marcos, Texas

Gregg Andrews

Photo of Cheatham Street Warehouse, 1974, Courtesy, Nathan Allen



As songwriters step inside Kent Finlay’s Cheatham Street Warehouse every Wednesday night in San Marcos, Texas, perhaps the most frequently asked question of the bartender and others gathered inside is, “Is the list out yet?” Of course, the “list,” which the bartender does not put out until eight o’clock (bar time), is a sign-up sheet for songwriters who hope to perform that night. Hopefuls eagerly check out the Budweiser Light clock behind the bar in anticipation, aware that their position on the sign-up sheet might determine whether they perform two songs or only one, depending on the number of names on the list.

The weekly Songwriters Circle is the heart and soul of Finlay's vision for the now legendary honky tonk that he opened in June, 1974. Seasoned songwriters are well-aware that Wednesday nights at Cheatham Street are much more than "open mic" nights. For historical purposes, Finlay carefully preserves the yellow legal pads that contain years of lists of Songwriters Night performers. As he often reminds the audience when he kicks off the show at nine o'clock, usually with his song, "I'll Sing You a Story, I'll Tell You a Song," this

Canada, Australia, Mexico, Germany, Norway, The Netherlands, and other regions of the world, songwriters make the pilgrimage to Cheatham Street to sample the influences of this very special night of "church" under Kent Finlay's creative ministry.

Although Songwriters Circle is Finlay's real passion, it is only part of his broader vision of Cheatham Street—a vision that is rooted in his own personal evolution. He was born in Brady, Texas, on February 9, 1938, the oldest of five children (Barbara, Mike, Tommy, and Steve), to parents Grace (Short)

Although Finlay grew up in a farm family, it became apparent during high school that his future would be in music and education, not farming.

is "church," and "we're here to listen." Little wonder, then, that Ace Ford has called Finlay the "Godfather of Texas Songwriters." Al Barlow, Director of Music Programs and Community Relations at the New Braunfels Museum of Art and Music and a popular singer-songwriter who got his start at Finlay's Songwriters Night, has observed that Cheatham Street "is kind of like the Ryman Auditorium for Texas songwriters."¹

The fast-rolling trains that shake and rattle Cheatham Street's walls and tin sheeting may be too close-by for some folks's comfort, but for songwriters and other musicians, the trains are an important prop. Located just a few yards from the railroad tracks, the honky tonk with its low ceilings and well-seasoned wood provides fabulous acoustics in a setting that fires the imagination of writers. Woven into the folklore of the old warehouse are numerous stories about the outside crashing sounds of rumbling trains occasionally picking off a stray car parked too closely to the tracks.

Except for newcomers who at times need to be reminded of the unwritten courtesy code that discourages talking, shooting pool, or distracting behavior while songwriters are on stage, writers and faithful members of the audience regard Wednesday nights at Cheatham Street with reverential awe. They appreciate that they are part of something culturally distinctive and inspirational. Whether from small Texas towns and cities, other parts of the United States, or

and James Finlay, Jr. As anyone who has heard Finlay sing, "I'm Hanging My Hat Just Down the Road," an entertaining song about his wide travels in Texas, can tell you, he grew up in the tiny west Texas town of Fife in McCulloch County. Some of his ancestors gave Fife its name in 1882 to honor Fifeshire in Scotland. Since only about 50 people lived in Fife at that time, his earliest education took place in a one-room school house.²

Musical talent abounds on both sides of Finlay's family, especially on his mother's side. His father had a good singing voice, and his mother and her family played at house dances in the area. One of his mother's cousins, "Sleepy" Short, was a great fiddler who played in a popular Western swing band, the Texas Top Hands. Kent and his family often sat in the backyard at night to watch the stars and play music. Since all of his brothers and sisters developed their talent and appreciation for music, family reunions usually featured music, primarily piano, guitar, and fiddle. Finlay took piano lessons as a kid but became



Charles Marshall (left) and Kent Finlay, FFA Talent Show, 1956.
Courtesy, Kent Finlay

bored with the regimentation, quit, and began to play on his own and to try his hand at other instruments. During his freshman year of high school, he bought his first guitar in San Angelo while on a Future Farmers of America (FFA) trip. It was during high school that he had his first public gig.

Although Finlay grew up in a farm family, it became apparent during high school that his future would be in music



Willie Nelson, Jack Rogers, and Jerry Jeff Walker, c. 1976. Courtesy, Hal Odom

and education, not farming. During lunch breaks, he and his cousin, Winifred Short, often would rush in from the fields to gobble down their food quickly so that they would have a little time to play music before they resumed work. It was between the cotton rows that Finlay received “formal” voice lessons. His powerful vocals are partly a product of the training that he received as a teenager trying to sing above the loud popping of the tractor that he drove for hours on end on his family’s farm. Finlay remembers that on one particular occasion, he became so wrapped up in singing that he forgot to turn the tractor around at a designated point while planting cotton. The next thing he knew, his father was running across the field waving his hat desperately at him, trying to get him to stop the tractor.³

Thanks in part to his father’s strong emphasis on education, Finlay pursued writing in college. He attended San Angelo State University for the first two years, playing “slap” bass in a band that worked on a somewhat regular basis in West Texas. As a solo performer, he also played for beer parties at Lake North Concho, but in 1959 transferred to Texas State University-San Marcos (at that time, Southwest Texas State College), where he received his Bachelor’s degree in English in 1961 and later a Master’s degree in Education. He had developed a fondness for Texas State University when as a high school student he and his musical partner, Charles Marshall, won a regional FFA-sponsored talent show contest held on campus. They then went to the state finals

in Dallas, but lost to a group that did a blackface minstrel parody of Little Richard, lip synching to one of his songs. The fact that the group’s act, which Finlay regarded as “distasteful,” took first place in the competition had to do more with the pervasive racism of that era than with musical talent.

Finlay emphasizes that despite racial segregation in Texas and the South, a significant degree of cultural integration and cross-fertilization took place in music. At the time he was really getting into music in the 1950s, he loved the rock-and-roll music of Chuck Berry and Little Richard, as well as the blues of Jimmy Reed and Willie Mae “Big Mama” Thornton.⁴ Gospel music also had a significant influence on Finlay. As a kid, he participated in group singing during vacation bible school and at other church-related gatherings that were sometimes organized by his grandmother. He recalls at times sitting in cars outside Pentecostal tent revivals, listening to the music.

Although he was influenced by other genres of music, including conjunto, he preferred country and rockabilly. As a teenager, he was particularly fond of Johnny Cash, Hank Williams, Slim Whitman, Webb Pierce, Bob Wills, Gene Autry, and Elvis Presley. He often listened to the Louisiana Hayride on KWKH radio in Shreveport, and to “Red River Dave” McEnery’s show on WOAI radio in San Antonio. Finlay recalls that when he first made the pilgrimage to the house in which Jimmie Rodgers, the “father of modern country music,” had

lived in Kerrville, Texas, he felt as if he had been to Mecca.⁵

Finlay played music on the side as he pursued graduate work at Texas State University. After receiving his Bachelor's degree in English, he took a full-time teaching job in San Antonio but worked on his Master's degree in Education at nights, on weekends, and during the summer. He later took additional graduate courses in English and accepted a position at Gary Job Corps, a federal

Luckenbach that special magical feeling. "I always say that most of the songs I wrote at that time," Finlay recalls, "I wrote so I could go play them for Hondo."⁷

When Hondo died in 1976, Finlay mourned the loss of a legend who had been his musical mentor and spiritual godfather. Finlay's songs, "Christmas in Luckenbach," and "I've Written Some Life, I've Lived Some Songs," particularly evoke vivid images of his experiences and the song writing comradery that grew out of the culture nurtured by Hondo in those laid-back days in Luckenbach. Hondo's death, followed by the death of Finlay's father a month later, helped to inspire his haunting song, "I Never Will Get Over You."⁸

The relaxed atmosphere and sharing of songs had a big impact

If there hadn't been a Luckenbach, there wouldn't have ever been a Cheatham Street.

vocational training facility created in 1964, where he taught for six years. At Gary, he made significantly more money than he had made in the public schools, and he enjoyed the

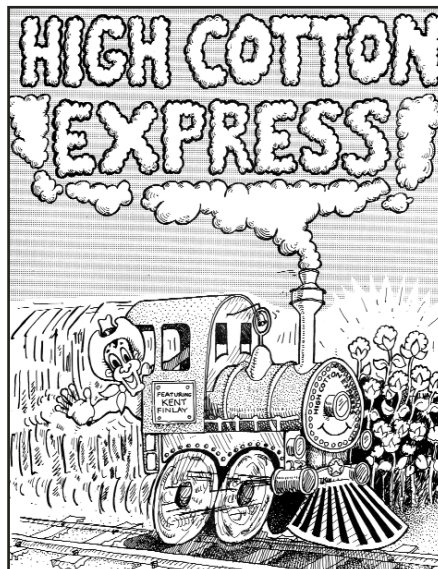
more flexible learning environment and innovative teaching methods. He continued to write songs, and on weekends played at Shakey's Pizza Parlor in Austin with Arthur Johnston, a graduate of the Texas School for the Blind.⁶

In the early 1970s, long before Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson recorded the smash hit song, "Luckenbach, Texas," Finlay would drive from San Marcos to Luckenbach several times a week to hang out with folk hero Hondo Crouch, who, along with partners Kathy Morgan and Guich Koock, had bought Luckenbach in 1971. Finlay joined Gary P. Nunn, Jerry Jeff Walker, Dotsy, Darryl Staedtler, Willie Nelson, and a number of musicians who regularly made the pilgrimage to Luckenbach to sit under the trees, swap songs and stories, crack jokes, pass the guitar around, and play dominos, sometimes in tournaments organized by Hondo in which area farmers would participate. As Finlay recalls, Hondo was a practical joker whose "eyes always sparkled." For Finlay, who regarded him as the "center of the world" and "our spiritual leader," it was Hondo who gave

on Finlay's song writing and decision to open his own honky tonk. As he emphasizes, "If there hadn't been a Luckenbach, there wouldn't have ever been a Cheatham Street...I learned how to think from Hondo."⁹ He also credits Threadgill's in Austin, where he enjoyed going to listen to music every Wednesday night. Such Wednesday nights usually brought together university students, "rednecks," hippies, other Austin residents, and at times (until her death in 1970), Janis Joplin.¹⁰

The sight of "rednecks" and hippies gathered together in a small place just grooving to the music particularly impressed Finlay, who quit teaching to devote full-time to music. In June, 1974, he and his business partner, Jim Cunningham—a columnist for the *San Marcos Daily Record*—leased an old weather-beaten warehouse (originally, Reed Moving and Storage) on Cheatham Street along the railroad tracks in San Marcos, and converted it into a honky tonk. Previously, San Marcos had never had such an establishment devoted to music. Finlay muses that he opened the honky tonk in part so that he and his band, High Cotton Express, would have a place to play.¹¹

Using a lot of volunteer help, Finlay and Cunningham busily cleaned up the building, built the stage, and performed countless tasks to get the honky tonk ready for its grand opening. Steve Finlay, Kent's youngest brother, was among those who pitched in to do whatever needed to



Advertisement for Kent Finlay's band, c. 1975. Courtesy, Kent Finlay

be done. Steve, who at that time was a student at Texas State University, recalls that "I first saw the warehouse a day or so after Kent rented the place. It was an old warehouse the city had stored Christmas decorations in." Along with friends George Wall, Danny Neal, and Grant Everidge, Steve helped to build

traditional country, rock, folk, and blues.¹⁶

One of the important products of this dynamic music scene in Austin was the creation of a new television music program, "Austin City Limits," in 1974, by program director, Bill Arhos, who was inspired in part by the publication of author Jan Reid's

Even a casual look at the pictures on the walls of Cheatham Street confirms the honky tonk's important role in nurturing the progressive country movement.

tables, new bathroom walls, and the original bar-top from heavy crate material that Kent found in the attic. As Steve remembers, Kent and Jim provided barbecue, hamburgers, and a keg of Shiner and Pearl beer "to keep us coming back."¹²

To get the feel of what operating Cheatham Street would be like and to work out any logistical problems before a large crowd descended on the place, Kent Finlay and his business partner decided to open two nights before they had scheduled the first night of live music. Although they did not advertise the honky tonk's opening, they, along with employees and volunteers, were stunned by the rush of people through the door. At that time the maximum occupancy of the place was 364, but "we opened the doors, and let me tell you," Finlay laughingly remembers, "four hundred people rushed in...We didn't have a band...People had been watching us, you know, and the rumor was out."¹³

The grand opening was "unbelievable," Steve Finlay remembers: "At least 5 people behind the bar were selling beer as fast as we could open them. The beer box was soon depleted of cold beer and we kept icing down beer in an old bathtub behind the bar."¹⁴ For the occasion, Kent had booked a "hippie country band," Freda and the Firedogs—Marcia Ball, John X. Reed, Steve McDaniels, David Cook, and Bobby Earl Smith. As Kent recalls, they sounded—but certainly did not look—"country." At that time one of Austin's hot bands that played at the Armadillo World Headquarters, Broken Spoke, Soap Creek Saloon, and other Austin venues in the early 1970s, Freda and the Firedogs broke up soon after the Cheatham Street gig. Since then, Ball has carved out an outstanding career as a vocalist, songwriter, and blues piano player, returning on many occasions to play at Cheatham Street.¹⁵

At the time Finlay opened Cheatham Street, "progressive country" music, or "redneck rock," was in full bloom, thanks in part to Willie Nelson's relocation from Nashville to the Austin area in order to gain greater creative control over his music. Although Nelson strengthened the progressive country movement, he did not create it. A vibrant culture of "Texas Outlaw" music was thriving at the time of his exodus from Nashville. This culture included a creative amalgam of

book, *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*. The program's pilot performance by Nelson contributed to fundraising for the show, which was launched nationwide in 1976. The first season of Austin City Limits on Public Broadcasting affiliate KLRN-TV (now KLRU-TV) showcased the reunion of Bob Wills's Original Texas Playboys and several musicians who shaped the rise of progressive country music in the Austin area, including Marcia Ball, Jerry Jeff Walker, Townes Van Zandt, B.W. Stevenson, and Alvin Crow.¹⁷

Even a casual look at the pictures on the walls of Cheatham Street confirms the honky tonk's important role in nurturing the progressive country movement. From Willie Nelson, Ernest Tubbs, Billy Joe Shaver, Jerry Jeff Walker, Gary P. Nunn, Greezy Wheels, Flaco Jiménez, and Kinky Friedman, to Ray Wylie Hubbard, Guy Clark, Gatmouth Brown, Joe Ely, Butch Hancock, Townes Van Zandt, Alvin Crow and the Pleasant Valley Boys, Ray Benson's Asleep at the Wheel, Doug Sahm, Augie Meyers, Eric Johnson, Joe Bob's Bar and Grill Band, Ponty Bone, Omar and the Howlers, Lou Ann Barton, Joe "King" Carrasco, and others, the small stage at Cheatham Street featured countless musicians who shaped the rise of the progressive country movement in Central Texas. Finlay remembers a particularly magical night when Guy Clark joined Townes Van Zandt on the Cheatham Street stage. Since San Marcos imposes a midnight closing time on club owners, all members of the



audience on that particular night voluntarily surrendered their beers at midnight in compliance with the law, remaining glued to their seats as Clark and Van Zandt continued playing long past closing time.¹⁸

For students and musicians such as Mike Daily, who was encouraged to enroll at Texas State University because of its proximity to Austin's progressive country music scene, Cheatham Street provided a great venue and training ground. Daily, a young steel guitar player, began to hang out at Cheatham Street not long after it opened. It "was a natural for us young players," he recalls, "to come and hear the top bands/artists and players in the area in that time period. We hung out there a lot, every night that we could...Joe Bob's Bar & Grill Band, Alvin Crow, Asleep at the Wheel, Marcia Ball, [and the] Bronco Brothers were a few of the main acts we liked to hear." Soon, Daily met Jay Dominguez, who at the time was playing a solo acoustic show at Cheatham Street on Sunday evenings. Dominguez then hired Daily as his steel guitar player, along with drummer Tommy Foote, lead guitarist Ron Cabal, and bass guitar player Terry Hale to form a band, Stoney Ridge, that began to play regularly at Cheatham Street.¹⁹

Stoney Ridge later split up when Dominguez left the band,

but his departure soon led to the debut of George Strait at Cheatham Street. At that time, Strait was a student majoring in Agriculture and Ranch Management at Texas State University who sang more traditional country music. In response to a notice posted on campus by members of Stoney Ridge, Strait successfully auditioned as lead singer and joined Daily, Foote, Hale, and Cabal to form the Ace in the Hole Band. Foote, who had moved to Houston after graduating from Texas State University in the summer of 1975, did not join the group until January, 1976. The other band members convinced him to return, although as Foote points out, once he heard Strait sing, "It did not take much convincing." Strait soon used the small, rustic Cheatham Street stage to launch a career that would bring him national and international celebrity status, including 50 Number One songs on the country charts.²⁰

On October 13, 1975, Cheatham Street provided the setting for the Ace in the Hole Band's very first gig. "Kent was the first person we went to with the new Ace in the Hole Band," Daily recalls, "[he] didn't bat an eye, and said when we were ready, we could play."²¹ At that time, Strait, who had done a little singing while in the United States Army in Hawaii, was unknown in the field of music. In fact, the poster that advertised the band's first gig with

Ace in the Hole Band's Debut, October 13, 1975. Courtesy, Terry Hale



him at Cheatham Street did not even mention his name. Daily remembers that the band's expectations that night were modest:

I was really happy that we had a good crowd for that first night. I mean—nothing worse than having no one come out on your first night of a new band...We sounded pretty good and had some people dancing and every one seemed to enjoy it. I even saw a girl from one of my classes back by the pool tables, and I was hoping she would be impressed. But she never even saw me!²²

Finlay recognized Ace in the Hole's potential and continued to book them weekly, along with others, such as Alvin Crow and Asleep at the Wheel, who played more traditional country music along with western swing. "Simply put, Kent was the single biggest supporter we had in the early days...His faith in G's talent never wavered," recalls Foote.²³ As Daily emphasizes, "Cheatham St. was our *only* gig for a while until we branched out. But it was those first gigs...that helped us get our band started. We often played there twice a week."²⁴ Finlay remembers calling James White, owner of the Broken Spoke

anniversaries were maybe the most special. I recall setting beer sales records on a couple of those dates."²⁸

It was Finlay, in fact, who, in early 1977, took Strait to Nashville in an attempt to get a record deal. At that time, Strait had some of his original songs, along with a few by Darryl Staedtler, a south Texas songwriter who, at the time, was writing for Chappel Music. Staedtler accompanied Finlay and Strait on the Nashville trip. Although Finlay believed that Strait had some impressive demos to shop around Nashville, none of the major record labels showed enough interest at the time to offer Strait a record contract. Strait's determination to stick with traditional country music and western swing put him at odds with the prevailing commercial trend toward pop/country in the national marketplace. As Finlay recalls, "We already had this little thing, this little anti-slick country thing going...in our minds, you know, and we were sick of it."²⁹

The short-term results of the trip to Nashville were disappointing for Strait, who upon graduation from Texas State University took a job with an agricultural company in Uvalde, but the trip planted seeds that would later sprout. One of the individuals in Nashville with whom Finlay and Strait talked was

"Kent—Thanks for your years of support, years of friendship, and for giving me and the guys a place to perform when no one else would."

George Strait, 1981

nightclub in Austin, trying to arrange a gig there for Ace in the Hole. When White booked the band for the first time, Finlay took part of the Cheatham Street audience to the Broken Spoke in order to make sure there was a good crowd. Finlay estimates that Strait played his first fifty gigs, however, at Cheatham Street. "I thought he would be a star," Finlay later recalled, "probably before he did."²⁵

As the Ace in the Hole Band tightened their sound and gained experience on the Cheatham Street stage, they attracted a growing number of fans and booked gigs at Gruene Hall and larger venues in Houston, Austin, and the area over the next few years.²⁶ Thanks to Finlay's work on the entertainment committee of San Marcos's annual Chilympiad, Ace in the Hole opened for the original Texas Playboys one year at the Chilympiad. "That was such a great, great show," Finlay recalls.²⁷ Cheatham Street featured Ace in the Hole almost every Wednesday night until its rapidly growing popularity and the demands of a touring schedule made it no longer feasible to continue the regular gig there. For Mike Daily, though, memories of those early gigs are still vivid: "A dance floor full of people, a packed house and of course Wednesday night—ladies free night was hard to beat. I would have to say that our first, second, and third year Ace In The Hole Band

Erv Woolsey, a business graduate of Texas State University who had worked in promotions for Decca and ABC Records before joining MCA Records in Nashville. Woolsey owned and operated the "Prairie Rose," a club south of Highway 123 on the southbound access road along Interstate 35 in San Marcos, where Ace in the Hole also played for awhile. Thanks to Woolsey's promotional work and extensive connections in Nashville, MCA Records signed Strait to a recording contract that, in 1981, led to his first album, *Strait Country*, which included his hit single, "Unwound," and Staedtler's "Blame It on Mexico." In 1982, Strait also included Staedtler's song, "A Fire I Can't Put Out," on his MCA album, *Strait from the Heart*. In 1984, Woolsey left MCA to become Strait's full-time manager. When Strait gave Finlay a complimentary copy of his first hit record, he inscribed on it, "Kent—Thanks for your years of support, years of friendship, and for giving me and the guys a place to perform when no one else would."³⁰

Because of Finlay's educational background and expertise in music, Dr. William Poole, a professor in the Department of History at Texas State University, who often went to Cheatham Street to listen to music, initiated the idea of hiring Finlay to teach a campus course in the history of country music. Dr. Poole's more traditional departmental colleagues on the senior

leaving to find Joe Bob in San Marcos. Whitbeck ran into the house, got some of his stuff, told his family that he was going to San Marcos, and jumped into his friend's car. When they arrived in town, they went to the Ice House (now Joe's Crab Shack) and then jumped into the San Marcos River for a swim. That evening, as Whitbeck recalls, "We're just driving down

played Gruene Hall and other venues in the area until they broke up in early January, 1987. Joe Bob's Bar and Grill Band (more recently reconstituted as Big Square Sun) never achieved great commercial success, but as Finlay proudly proclaims, "they were always stars at Cheatham Street."³⁸

Through Cheatham Street connections, Whitbeck

Stevie (Ray) Vaughan and Double Trouble played to Cheatham Street audiences that often consisted of no more than thirty people, most of whom were other guitarists.

Hopkins Street and there's a guy with long hair walking down the street, and I said, 'Hey, [do] you know somebody named Joe Bob,' and he says, 'Well, he might be over to Cheatham Street'...We went, 'Where's that?'"³⁶

When Whitbeck and Permenter stepped inside Cheatham Street, the place was packed with college students, and the Reynolds Sisters were playing on stage. After someone who worked there told them how to get in touch with Joe Bob Burris, they spent the night under the bridge near Herbert's Taco Hut. The following day, Permenter successfully auditioned for a spot in Joe Bob's Bar and Grill Band and prepared to move his belongings from La Porte to nearby Luling. After returning to LaPorte, Whitbeck received a phone call from Burris, who told him that his bass player, Hector Ramirez, had just quit. Burris then invited a jubilant Whitbeck to join the popular band, which played regularly at Cheatham Street, along with Ace in the Hole.

Initially comprised of Joe Bob Burris and Marion Quick, the band at that time included drummer Butch Burdette, later adding Cindy Burris (Joe Bob's sister) on vocals. Whitbeck fell in love with the town and music scene immediately after floating down the San Marcos River on the day of his arrival and after attending a taping of Austin City Limits. He vividly recalls the first night they played at Cheatham Street: "It just blew my mind. The place was packed...All these people, you know."³⁷ The band also

established friendships with members of the Ace in the Hole Band, particularly fellow bass player, Terry Hale, and guitarist Ron Cabal. In fact, about a year after Whitbeck moved to San Marcos, he, Hale, Cabal, Roy Rushing, Pete Denny, and Bennet Spielvogel also formed a blues band, The Razor Blades, that played at Cheatham Street every Monday night for about two years. For Whitbeck, it was particularly great to be so close to Ace in the Hole and then see George Strait reach stardom so

fast. "I remember the first gig when they actually had a bus, you know, a tour bus, it was really exciting to be around those days and to see that happen." One of Whitbeck's greatest professional thrills came in 1989, when at the suggestion of Terry Hale, Strait invited him to play with the band for a couple of gigs in Cheyenne, Wyoming, while Hale was with his wife and newborn child.³⁹

In 1980, a young Austin blues singer and phenomenal guitarist whose career would soon skyrocket internationally, electrified Cheatham Street on Tuesday nights. Stevie [Ray] Vaughan and Double Trouble played to Cheatham Street audiences that often consisted of no more than thirty people, most of whom were other guitarists. On many occasions, the phenomenal, young Sexton brothers—Charlie (age 12) and Will (age 10)—opened for Vaughan and joined him on stage.

As Finlay looks back on these "magical nights," he vividly remembers how Vaughan would crank up the amplifier and really get into the blues: "He'd just



Stevie Ray Vaughan. Courtesy, Nancy Barnard

faculty did not show great enthusiasm for a course that in their eyes might lack academic rigor, but they consented because of steeply declining classroom enrollment at the time. Dr. Everette Swinney, chair of the History Department, then worked hard to get administrative approval for the class. As Swinney recalls, "Our misgivings were mild compared to those of the administration. I had to fight hard to sell the idea to [the] dean and vice-president, and won only on the condition that the class be monitored extremely carefully to insure academic rigor." After Swinney persuaded fellow department member Dr. Ron Brown to audit the class regularly and file a comprehensive report, he hired Finlay to teach the class in the spring semester, 1977.³¹

Strait and other members of the Ace in the Hole Band, Ron Cabal and Terry Hale, were enrolled in Finlay's class that semester when Kent took Strait to Nashville. Finlay remembers that he played Strait's demos to the class after they returned from Nashville. The university administration's concerns about the course were eased when Dr. Brown filed a very positive evaluation of Finlay's teaching. Twenty-one students enrolled in the course when the History Department re-hired Finlay to

to include Blaker's songs, including "Never Gonna Let You Go," "Lonesome Rodeo Cowboy," "We Must Be Lovin' Right," "She Lays It All on the Line," and "Need I Say More" on subsequent albums. Earlier, thanks to Strait's steel guitar player, Mike Daily, Blaker had recorded "The Only Thing I Have Left" and other songs on D Records, a Houston label founded by Daily's grandfather, H.W. "Pappy" Daily, in 1958, and passed down to Mike's father and uncle. Ace in the Hole, before Strait signed with MCA, had also recorded with D Records, which between 1958 and 1975 produced other well-known Texas musicians, including George Jones, Roger Miller, Willie Nelson, and the Big Bopper. As Daily recalls, "My dad was always looking for a big act to try to break and so he produced our first recordings...Some of Clay's stuff came out on it, too, because he was our good friend and unlike nowadays there wasn't just any label anywhere to put your records out on."³⁴

Blaker liked the classic honky-tonk atmosphere of Cheatham Street, where there was always a good dance crowd, but he was particularly impressed with the great listening crowds on acoustic songwriter nights. "They had to listen," he laughingly recalls, "or Kent would throw 'em out." For Blaker, Finlay's

Blaker liked the classic honky-tonk atmosphere of Cheatham Street, where there was always a good dance crowd, but he was particularly impressed with the great listening crowds on acoustic songwriter nights.

teach it again in the spring semester, 1979.³²

After playing one night at Cheatham Street, Ace in the Hole Band members met singer-songwriter Clay Blaker and his group, who walked into the honky tonk looking to book gigs in the area. Blaker was born in Houston but had moved to Hawaii before joining the early 1970s country rock scene in southern California, where Gram Parsons, the Eagles, and the Flying Burrito Brothers were popular. Soon attracted by the rise of outlaw country music in the Austin area, Blaker moved back to Houston. Then, upon the advice of Glenn Schalles, his ex-guitar player who had left California to attend Texas State University, Blaker went to San Marcos. He established friendships with Ace in the Hole Band members and sat in on Finlay's class. Finlay soon booked Blaker at Cheatham Street. Meanwhile, the Ace in the Hole group helped Blaker line up gigs in the surrounding Hill Country, and Blaker used his contacts to help Ace in the Hole get gigs in Houston.³³

Blaker's outstanding song writing impressed Finlay and Strait, and Blaker's new friendship with members of Ace in the Hole helped him to get a foot in the door in Nashville. Strait soon covered one of Blaker's songs, "The Only Thing I Have Left," on his Strait from the Heart album in 1982, and he continued

personal integrity and unselfish devotion to song writing and music, in general, have been the ingredients that have distinguished Cheatham Street's role in the history of Texas music. Blaker has great praise for Finlay's song writing, and admires the way he has nurtured young songwriters, in particular. Blaker remembers seeing him reach into his own pocket on many occasions to pay musicians when the "door" was low on a given night.³⁵

The mid-1970s were heady times at Cheatham Street. Bill Whitbeck, a singer-songwriter, former English teacher, and now a graduate student in the History Department at Texas State University who lives in San Marcos and plays bass guitar in the Robert Earl Keen Band, remembers the chain of events that first drew him to the honky-tonk. He was living in La Porte, Texas, when he and Jimmy Permenter, a steel guitar player in their local band, overheard a remark after a gig one night in July, 1976, that someone by the name of Joe Bob was looking for a steel player in San Marcos. The next morning, Whitbeck looked out the window of his family's home and saw Permenter, who lived across the street, loading gear and equipment into his old car. When Whitbeck went outside to ask him where he was going, Permenter replied that he was

goofy songs, and he told me I could play. To tell you the truth, I was more than a little nervous about singing and playing in front of the twenty-something folks gathered around the woodstove. The music I heard coming around the circle that night changed my life forever. After I sang a couple of my songs, the audience...asked for more. At last, I knew I had a venue—an outlet—for my songs. It was Kent Finlay who made this possible.

Before long, Finlay invited Barlow to play several gigs with him. "I became hooked on entertaining," Barlow explains, "Tuesday nights at Cheatham Street were magical. They really were. Sometimes I'd drive all the way back to New Braunfels after the show and wake my wife up to tell her about the magical evening I'd just spent...Sometimes, she'd chew me out and holler at me to shut up and go to bed. But my excitement just seemed to spill out everywhere."⁴⁵

One of Barlow's "favorite 'regulars'" on Tuesday nights was Todd Snider, a recent high school graduate from Oregon who, in 1986, came to Songwriters Night to meet Finlay and ask for help in learning to write and perform. Finlay took Snider under his wing; in fact, Snider became an unofficial member of the Finlay family. As Snider recalls, "I had no place to stay, so he and his wife Diana gave me the couch for the summer."⁴⁶ Soon, six-year-old Sterling Finlay began to emulate Snider, who often picked him up and brought him home from Cub Scout meetings in an old Buick that had a CB radio. The two of them would sing all the way home. As Diana Finlay fondly recalls, "That was the moment Sterling discovered there was coolness in our world."⁴⁷ Soon, Kent gave Snider a gig and introduced him to the song writing of Jerry Jeff Walker, Kris Kristofferson, John Prine, Billy Joe Shaver, Guy Clark, Shel Silverstein, and others. "All those people, I'd never heard of them," remembers Snider. "Most of the people that I guess I pattern myself after I got from sitting around listening to them at Kent Finlay's house."⁴⁸

Before long, Snider blossomed into one of the best

songwriters and most dynamic and entertaining performers in the nation. Kristofferson regards him as "a true songwriter, with the heart and humor of John Prine, the wild unpredictability of Roger Miller, and a fresh, original spirit and freedom of imagination that's absolutely his own."⁴⁹ Finlay makes clear, however, that despite Snider's talent, he put (and still puts) a lot of hard work into his writing and performance: "He was so dedicated, so determined." At Cheatham Street, Snider met and became friends with Eddie Shaver, who later played in Snider's band and toured with him. It was Finlay whom a distraught Snider called first on New Years Day, 2001, to tell him about Eddie's tragic death the night before. Snider played his haunting song, "Waco Moon," written in response to Shaver's death, for the first time at a Cheatham Street song swap, later including it on his CD, *New Connection* (Oh Boy Records, 2002).⁵⁰

Now featured along with Kris Kristofferson, Janis Ian, Shawn Camp, Dan Reeder, and Steve Goodman (deceased) on John Prine's Oh Boy Records, Snider's recent CD, *East Nashville Skyline* (2004), as well as earlier ones, has received critical acclaim, but Snider's success has not diminished his relationship with Finlay and Cheatham Street. Having co-written songs with Kent, Diana, and their children, Snider often returns to the old Cheatham Street stage, occasionally making it back for a Wednesday night Songwriters Circle. As he makes clear, Finlay is still "the first person I play a new song for."⁵¹

Before Snider's career really took off, he had worked as a waiter at Peppers at the Falls Restaurant, where he met Terri Hendrix, an aspiring young songwriter who was also employed at the restaurant at the time. Hendrix, a new transfer student at Texas State University, overheard Snider and other waiters talking about Songwriters Night at Cheatham Street. She had written a few songs, but as she recalls, "I was terrified to play in public."⁵² Nevertheless, she

worked up the courage and one night stepped inside the front door of Cheatham Street.

Inside, Hendrix met Finlay and songwriters Al Barlow and Ike Eichenberg. Also there, of course, was Snider. As Barlow

Advertisement, San Marcos Citizen.
Courtesy, Kent Finlay

lean back, just feel it, you know. I don't think I ever saw anyone that loved to play the guitar like Stevie."⁴⁰

Finlay also continued to play with his band, High Cotton Express, at Cheatham Street and other places in the area, including at Willie Nelson's annual Fourth of July picnic, but the demands of running a honky tonk were confining. Family responsibilities also took up an increasing amount of his time. In 1978, Finlay had married Diana Becker, a journalism major at Texas State University who also has co-written songs with him and other songwriters. By early 1983, two of the Finlays' three

in Cheatham Street. As Finlay emphasizes, the stove was there for more than just heat on those Tuesday nights: "We had gas heat in there, but we had wood warmth."⁴³

Aaron Allan, a prolific writer, member of the Texas Country Music Hall of Fame and DJ's Hall of Fame who now hosts the Double A Show on KCTI-AM 1450 Radio in Gonzales, Texas, fondly recalls when he first started coming to Songwriters Night in 1983 or 1984. At that time, there would often be only six or ten writers there who would each perform four or five songs. "It was more intimate than it is now," he remembers, "we



Charlie Sexton and Kent Finlay, c. mid-1980s. Courtesy, Kent Finlay

children had been born. In order to focus more on his own music and family, Kent sold the Cheatham Street business to Mike Willey, an Austin resident, former student of Texas State University, musician, and booking agent.⁴¹

Because of the new owner's financial problems, however, the Cheatham Street business ended up back in Finlay's hands within a relatively short period of time. Finlay continued to operate the honky tonk until nearly the end of the 1980s, when he again sold it. For a brief period under new ownership, the business featured mainly Tejano bands. Not until the grand re-opening of Cheatham Street on New Year's Eve, 1999, did Finlay once again return to operate the honky tonk.⁴²

The idea to create a special night for songwriters at Cheatham Street grew out of Finlay's desire to provide writers with a chance to showcase their work. He then discussed the idea with Alex Abravenel, a writer living in San Marcos who "was part of getting it all started." In the summer, writers performed on stage with the aid of a sound system, but during the early days, they sat around an old wood stove in the winter, even though there was gas heat

just sat around the old wood stove in a semi-circle of chairs and passed the guitar back and forth." What Allan, who for several years served as the master of ceremonies at Willie's annual Fourth of July picnics, particularly enjoys about Songwriters Night at Cheatham Street is the listening atmosphere that Finlay has nurtured: "That's what I like about San Marcos...it's kind of like a church, so, it's a listening thing."⁴⁴

James McMurtry, John Arthur Martinez, Hal Ketchum, Justin Treviño, Jimmy Collins, Al Barlow, Jimmy and Tommy Ash, and a number of other budding songwriters who later developed important careers in music also came to Songwriters Night during those years. Barlow vividly recalls his first trip to Cheatham Street on one of those "magical" Tuesday nights:

I'd never experienced anything like it. We walked into the smokey room and took a seat around an old woodstove blazing in the center of the room. Of course, Kent noticed my old guitar and asked me if I was a songwriter. I told him I had a few little old

rich legacy. John Michael Whitby, Asleep at the Wheel's piano player, stepped in to help continue the tradition on Monday nights for awhile, but more recently, Finlay has booked the South Austin Jug Band to play every Monday night.⁵⁹

In 2000, when Randy Rogers, a promising young writer and Mass Communications and Public Relations major at Texas State University who performed regularly at Songwriters Circle, expressed interest in getting a gig at Cheatham Street, Finlay told him that, if Rogers put together a band, Finlay would stay open on Tuesdays so they could have a regular weekly gig. As Rogers recalls, "It just blew my mind that I'd be able to have a night of my own there. It lit this fire in me to put it together, and to practice, and to get a band together. Kent changed my life."⁶⁰

After discussions with Eddie Foster, a steel player in San Marcos, Rogers and Foster put together a band that debuted at Cheatham Street on October 3, 2000. By December, just a few months later, the Randy Rogers Band, which soon attracted large audiences in the area, had produced its first CD, *Live at Cheatham Street*. In 2002, when the reconstituted band produced its first studio CD, *Like It Used to Be*, Rogers and

songwriters—brothers Jimmy and Tommy Ash. For years, Jimmy and Tommy, two of Finlay's most highly respected songwriters, have helped to raise the bar for performers at the weekly Songwriters Circle.⁶²

Since re-opening at the end of 1999, Finlay has often used Tuesday and Thursday nights to support song swaps and other up-and-coming writers, most notably, Colin Brooks, Adam Carroll, Shelley King, Jeff Plankenhorn, Floramay Holliday, Ruthie Foster, Angie McClure, Adam Kay, Dub Miller, Colin Gilmore, Trish Murphy, Django Walker, Ryan Turner, J.R. Castro, Jason Beckett, Jackson Parten, and Foscoe Jones. In addition, veteran writers—among them, Ray Wylie Hubbard, Willis Alan Ramsey, Clay Blaker, Aaron Allan, Lisa and Roberta Morales, Gary P. Nunn, Bob Livingston, Shake Russell, Slaid Cleaves, Susan Gibson, Jack Ingram, Walt Wilkins, Davin James, Hayes Carll, Max Stalling, and Australians Bill Chambers and Audrey Auld—have joined Finlay on occasion for a special songwriters' show, "Kent and Friends." In turn, some of Finlay's favorite writers—Adam Carroll, Terri Hendrix, Dub Miller, Randy Rogers, and Houston Marchman—have

Since re-opening at the end of 1999, Finlay has often used Tuesday and Thursday nights to support song swaps and other up-and-coming writers.

fellow band members—Brady Black (fiddle), Geoffrey Hill (lead guitar), Les Lawless (drums), and Jon Richardson (bass) began to expand their fan base throughout Texas and the Southwest.

The band's hard work, along with Finlay's steady encouragement and mentoring, soon paid even more dividends. In July, 2004, the band played its first international gigs at major festivals in Italy and France. Before a jam-packed crowd at Cheatham Street on August 26, 2004, they celebrated the release of their new CD, *Rollercoaster*, produced by Radney Foster. The new CD includes one of Finlay's songs, "They Call It the Hill Country." By this time, Rogers had attracted the attention of several major record companies. On July 30, 2005, he signed a major record deal with Mercury Records. Despite the band's growing stature on the charts in major markets, Rogers makes clear how he feels about the small place that launched him, about Cheatham Street's important role in Texas music history. "You walk in there and get chills...that's how I feel about it."⁶¹

Finlay also decided to open on Sundays from four to eight o'clock p.m., usually featuring top local bands, such as the Grant Mazak Band, Island Texas, Big Square Sun, the Ash Family, and others. In the case of the Ash Family, Finlay showcases a large family band that not only demonstrates rich vocals and complex harmonies, but also features great

returned to Cheatham Street to record live CDs.

Recently, Finlay has received recognition from the Center for Texas Music History, the City of San Marcos, and the New Braunfels Museum of Art and Music for his longstanding contributions to Texas music history. On October 2, 2003, the New Braunfels Museum of Art and Music held its annual dinner with Finlay as its guest of honor. Several songwriters performed that evening, including the Blue Grass Nibblers, Willis Alan Ramsey, Allison Rogers, Ponty Bone, Susan Gibson, Aaron Allan, Randy Rogers, Van Wilks, Foscoe Jones, Monk Wilson, Denim, Geronimo Treviño, Michael O'Connor, Craig Hillis, and Al Barlow. Charlie Gallagher, Executive Director of the museum, presented Finlay the museum's first annual "Lone Star Arts Award."

Finlay has often cooperated with Texas State University faculty and students to allow the use of Cheatham Street for broader social, artistic, and educational purposes. Graduate students in the Creative Writing program at Texas State University have read their short stories to happy-hour audiences, and university and community groups have held plays on the legendary honky tonk's stage. In addition, Cheatham Street has been used for weddings, receptions, birthday parties, and to entertain Kids with Cancer. Finlay laughingly remembers that a beauty pageant was once held

recalls, "One cold, rainy night, [she] walked in the place with her guitar in tow. She was a shy little woman, and not at all the self confident entertainer she is today. But she'll be the first one to tell you that it was Kent Finlay's encouragement, and the opportunities he presented her with, that ignited that spark in her."⁵³ Although Hendrix was very nervous when she performed that night, she received a warm reception and fell in love with the nurturing warmth of the songwriters' culture. "Had I not been treated with such warmth and respect, even though I was an absolute beginner," she remembers, "I wouldn't have come back."⁵⁴

What particularly impressed Hendrix was the way in which Finlay and other songwriters supported each other without letting egos, cliques, and competition get in the way. In fact, she believes that one of Cheatham Street's most enduring characteristics is the "lack of ego" on Kent's part. "He doesn't have any bags he's trying to get rid of," she fondly observes.⁵⁵ Now a very dynamic performer and writer, Hendrix used the

she had met at Songwriters Night on her first trip there, to perform a rousing *a cappella* rendition of "Old Man River." Hendrix remembers that Bowen, a regular at Songwriters Night over the years, had offered her encouraging words after her very first performance. She also laughingly recalls that her trip to Songwriters Night had other historical significance: "Rick gave me my first beer my first night at Cheatham Street."⁵⁷

Although Hendrix is an astute businesswoman who handles all aspects of her own business, she particularly appreciates the non-contractual basis on which she and Finlay operate when she plays at Cheatham Street. She attributes this to his honesty and integrity. "When we play there," she emphasizes, "I don't have a contract with Kent. I shake his hand."⁵⁸

When Finlay re-opened Cheatham Street on New Years Eve, 1999, he did so with renewed purpose and a clear commitment to showcase good song writing and Americana roots music, in particular. Still working his "day job" as a teacher in the San Marcos Consolidated Independent School District at the time,

"When the annals of Texas Music are finally written, I have no doubt that Cheatham Street Warehouse will be compared to Washington-on-the-Brazos...A humble little shed by the railroad tracks, it has nurtured, raised, and showcased the greatest musicians this state has had to offer for the past three decades."

—Joe Nick Patoski
Texas writer, 2003

Cheatham Street stage as a springboard for a career that has brought her critical acclaim around the nation. Finlay remembers that when Hendrix first asked him for advice, he told her "to get hungry." Her hard work and productivity have since really impressed him. As he stresses with a smile and sense of pride, "She got hungry."⁵⁶

Hendrix, since releasing her debut CD, *Two Dollar Shoes*, in 1996, has been highly productive, anchored by an outstanding band—Lloyd Maines (guitar, lap and pedal steel guitar, mandolin, dobro), Glen Fukunaga (bass), and Paul Pearcy (drums). In 1997, she released *Wilory Farm*, followed by *Live at Cibolo Creek* (1999) and *Places in Between* (2000). To honor the important historical role that she believes Cheatham Street has played in setting a precedent for other area venues, she returned to the small stage there to record her next CD, *Live in San Marcos*, which was released in 2001. Although *The Ring* (2002) and *The Art of Removing Wallpaper* (2004) have since enhanced Hendrix's national Grammy-winning stature, she has never forgotten the culture of Songwriters Night at Cheatham Street. To open one of her many shows at Cheatham Street, she invited Rick Bowen, a classically trained baritone singer whom

he intended to open Cheatham Street from Wednesday through Saturday only. Wednesday nights, of course, would feature Songwriters Night (re-named Songwriters Circle), and the other nights would showcase top Americana artists in an attempt to balance honky-tonk shows with acoustic songwriter performances.

Although Finlay planned to remain closed on Sundays, Mondays, and Tuesdays, his plans soon changed. After a phone call from Ronnie Huckaby, he agreed to set up a "jam" night on Mondays when Huckaby (keyboards) and Mike Daily (pedal steel), both current members of George Strait's band and residents of San Marcos, would anchor a weekly show in which they and other musicians would play a set and then allow other performers to join them on stage for a couple of songs each. Jam nights often drew some of the most outstanding musicians in the area such as Redd Volkert, Bill Whitbeck, Brian Duckworth, Justin Treviño, Al Quaid, Levi Mullen, Phil Dalmolin, and Ricky Turpin, along with aspiring singers and musicians who put their names on a sign-up sheet each Monday night at the bar. Although Huckaby and Daily have since discontinued jam night at Cheatham Street, they left behind a

Susan Gibson, Shelley King, Houston Marchman, Al Barlow, Floramay Holliday, Randy Rogers, Jenni and HalleyAnna Finlay, Adam Carroll, Foscoe Jones, Phil Pritchett, Nathan Hamilton, Island Texas, River Train, and the Grant Mazak Band entertained the crowd for nearly ten hours before Todd Snider came out to close the special Sunday night show. In a performance that was nothing short of spectacular, Snider electrified the audience on behalf of the man who had played such an instrumental role in his career. Following Snider's performance, Kent Finlay, who was only a few weeks away from his bone marrow transplant, then prepared to express his appreciation to the crowd. There was hardly a single dry eye in the house when Kent, weak but determined, picked up his guitar and slowly worked his way to the stage. After struggling at first to find his voice, he then broke into song, lifting the audience on the power of his vocals and spirit. At the end of the song, he promised to come back healthy once he recuperated from the transplant.

Finlay has not allowed cancer, a recent divorce, or the unpleasant, tedious tasks involved in operating a honky tonk—such as fixing a stubborn leaky roof or dealing with plumbing problems—to dampen enthusiasm for what he still hopes to accomplish in the years ahead. "I go home thrilled every night," he points out. Rather than rest on his laurels, he looks forward to achieving even greater things down the road. When asked to name what he believes is his greatest contribution to the history of Texas music, he replies with characteristic modesty: "I'm still working on that. I haven't done it yet...I hope that I've

encouraged some people to write better songs...and I hope I have a few songs of my own that people enjoy."⁷⁰

For musicians, Finlay's role in Texas music history goes far beyond his own modest assessment. "I don't believe there is a more dedicated person than Kent," stresses Mike Daily, who still plays steel guitar in George Strait's band, "in keeping the focus on Texas Music and the belief in the bands and artist, and trying to give everyone possible a chance. Money and profit always seemed to be secondary to the music."⁷¹ For Tommy Foote, formerly a drummer in Ace in the Hole but now Strait's road manager, Finlay "was the first club owner I knew who put the music above his profit margin...I never thought of Kent as a club owner but a singer-songwriter who happened to own a club...[his] contribution cannot be overestimated."⁷² Bill Whitbeck regards Finlay as "a total champion of the songwriter," and sees Cheatham Street as a "great training ground for young writers."⁷³ John Arthur Martinez agrees. Of special importance to him is Finlay's generous support for "struggling artists" who write well. By giving writers an opportunity to hone their craft and gain performance experience on the Cheatham Street stage, Kent "has helped create an environment of creativity in the corridor between Austin and San Antonio, an area which has become the heartbeat of the Texas music scene." As Martinez emphasizes, "Many of us have taken the passion for songwriting, nurtured at Cheatham Street, back to our home communities across Texas and the U.S., so his influence is much bigger than any of us can measure."⁷⁴



Kent Finlay's signs honoring George Strait outside Cheatham Street Warehouse. Courtesy, Anita Miller

there to crown "Miss Honky-Tonk Angel of the World." He also allowed the Newton Street Regulars with the late Texas State University President Jerry Supple, a banjo player, and his wife, Cathy Supple, to play and sing on the historic stage.⁶³

In recent years, Cheatham Street has provided a venue for several distinguished songwriters and musicians who are graduates of Texas State University, including Darryl Staedtler, Colin Gilmore, Randy Rogers, and John Arthur Martinez. A Grammy Award winner, Martinez was attending Texas State University on a tennis scholarship in the mid-1980s when he discovered Songwriters Night. "I stumbled into a life-changing circle of creative minds," he recalls, "spearheaded by a humble professor of country music history, Kent Finlay...We songwriters would circle an old wood-burning stove while the listeners formed an outer circle around the writers."⁶⁴

After graduating from Texas State University with a degree in English, Martinez taught English and coached tennis at Marble Falls High School before devoting himself to a career as a singer-songwriter and performer. After getting considerable radio airplay with his second CD, *Stand Your Ground* (2001), Martinez's successful appearances on the television show, *Nashville Star*, led to his signing a major deal with Dualtone Records in Nashville to produce his recent CD, *Lone Starry Nights* (2004).⁶⁵

When Martinez made his first trip to Nashville in 1987, it was Finlay who went with him. "I'll never forget that trip," Martinez recalls, "because we wound up at a funky place called 'Professor Munchies,' not far from the creative Hillsboro Village Community, where I met, in the men's room, the legendary Harlan Howard—Mr. Songwriter in the eyes of many."⁶⁶ Finlay laughingly remembers how an excited Martinez came running out of the bathroom, telling him that inside he had just met Howard. Also there that night were songwriters Ed Bruce and Mickey Newbury. For Martinez, this was a particularly memorable experience: "I couldn't contain my excitement as a guitar pull broke out with these fine folks."⁶⁷

Martinez and Finlay have co-written more than a dozen songs, including "A Girl Named Texas" on Martinez's *Lone Starry Nights*, as well as "Spinning Our Wheels," on his debut CD, *Spinning Our Wheels* (1998). Finlay recalls that they used to meet in Austin or at the Blanco State Park to write songs together. Martinez, one of several writers who have slept on the Finlays' couch, often returns to play at Cheatham Street as one of Kent's favorites.⁶⁸

Likewise, Martinez has never forgotten

how the songwriters culture nurtured by Finlay shaped his growth. "Well, I didn't want to show up to writers night empty handed so it inspired me to try to write something new to share...Kent would point out the good in what I was doing and he would ignore the bad...He always told me that we have to write better songs than they're writing in Nashville." On one of those nights Martinez met songwriter Darryl Staedtler, who gave him an important piece of lasting advice. As Martinez recalls, "He told me to take the fisherman's approach to songwriting, hook, line, and sinker. He said you have to start with a great hook idea, often the title. He and Kent both agreed that...then you need a great first line that is strong enough to hold the listener from the start. And, finally, you need to leave the listener with something significant which sinks into their memory so they'll know what to request on the radio or at the stores."⁶⁹

In particular, Finlay has been a big supporter of the Center for Texas Music History (CTMH) at Texas State University, sponsoring benefit concerts on its behalf. On March 23, 2000, for example, in conjunction with Rod Kennedy and the CTMH, Cheatham Street hosted Kerrville Folk Festival "On the Road," a benefit concert for the CTMH. Finlay's daughter, Jenni, formerly worked for the CTMH, in fact. In the fall semester, 2004, at the invitation of Dr. Gary Hartman, CTMH Director, Finlay once again taught a course, "The History of Country Music," in the Department of History after a hiatus of about twenty-six years.

On September 21, 2003, musicians, friends, supporters, and family gathered at Cheatham Street for a special benefit to help raise money for a bone marrow transplant for Finlay, who had been diagnosed with bone cancer about four months earlier.

With the important help of singer/songwriter Shelley King, in particular, Cheatham Street employees Angie McClure, Jenny Doyle, and Sage Allen, along with many volunteers, set up a wonderful night of music that brought back many of Finlay's friends and employees from the early days. Monica Andrews, one of the original bartenders at Cheatham Street when it opened in 1974, helped to organize a silent auction with many items donated by Texas musicians, including a guitar donated by Monte Montgomery, who has been playing at Cheatham Street since before he entered his teens.

On that emotional night, Ray Wylie Hubbard, Shake Russell, Jack Ingram, Terri Hendrix, Chris Wall, Lars Albrecht,



For many musicians and songwriters, Finlay's own writing and performance skills have been underappreciated by the music business. His songs are masterfully crafted, and he delivers the lyrics and expresses emotions in the stories so cleverly and powerfully. "He deserves a lot more credit than he's gotten," emphasizes writer Aaron Allan, "I have great respect for him as a writer and as an artist, too."⁷⁵

On June 17-20, 2004, Finlay celebrated the 30th anniversary weekend of Cheatham Street. As the Randy Rogers Band, Shelley King, Alvin Crow, and Island Texas entertained festive audiences over the weekend, friends stopped by to show Finlay

oldest of the Finlay children, was influenced by Marianne, a folk singer who had played in Kent's band and with Shake Russell. As Jenni's mother recalls, Jenni at an early age emphasized that she wanted "to write songs like Daddy and sing like Marianne."⁷⁷

Kent and Jenni, who learned to play the guitar, saxophone, and fiddle, played together while she was in elementary school. They performed at Austin's South by Southwest Music Festival in 1989 and again on other occasions. They also played at the Democratic National Convention in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1988, where a ten-year-old Jenni sang a song co-written by Kent and

Not surprisingly, Finlay's three children (Jenni, Sterling, and HalleyAnna) are also musicians and songwriters who, having "grown up on the Cheatham Street stage," continue to play an important role at the honky tonk and in the Texas music industry.

their appreciation for the years of enjoyment he has provided. Many in the audience shared old memories and stories, especially on the 19th when Crow and his band played in front of a Texas flag on the same stage where they played thirty years earlier. "I recall Alvin Crow opening the back sliding door at the bandstand," remembers Steve Finlay, "and playing Orange Blossom Special as he watched the train go by."⁷⁶

Earlier that month, Finlay quit his day job when he retired from the San Marcos Consolidated Independent School District to devote more of his creative energies to Cheatham Street, recording, and his own writing. Among his goals is to build on the success of his song writing publishing company, Paper Napkin Music, Inc., to create his own independent record label and to showcase the work of songwriters, in particular. He and Gary Hickinbotham, a well-known sound engineer who teaches in Texas State University's Sound Recording Technology program, have developed a longstanding cooperative relationship to pursue this goal as well as others. Among their goals is to explore the possibility of live radio broadcasts from Cheatham Street that would be available on the world-wide web, and to make Finlay's songs more widely available to the public.

Not surprisingly, Finlay's three children (Jenni, Sterling, and HalleyAnna) are also musicians and songwriters who, having "grown up on the Cheatham Street stage," continue to play an important role at the honky tonk and in the Texas music industry. As toddlers, Jenni and Sterling learned to sleep on the pool tables while musicians played. By the time they began elementary school, they had written their first song and performed, along with Marianne Miller and her daughter, Emily, in the Martindale Fish and Tackle Choir. Jenni, the

Todd Snider. She played a hot fiddle breakdown at the end of the song. Afterward, a man impressed with Jenni's performance came up to her, complimented her, and introduced himself as a fellow musician who played the saxophone. Neither Jenni nor Kent knew who he was at the time. However, when the man later got up to address the convention delegates, they both realized that it was then-Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton.⁷⁸

After Jenni graduated from Belmont University in Nashville in 2001, she returned to San Marcos and worked temporarily for the Center for Texas Music History at Texas State University while helping her father manage Paper Napkin Music. She now works for Brad Turcotte's thriving indie label, Compadre Records. Although she lives in Plano, Texas, she continues to assist in the operations of Cheatham Street and Paper Napkin Music.

Sterling, who grew up idolizing Todd Snider, likewise got an early start writing songs and performing. As a kid, he played with Snider at the Blue Pearl (now The Coffee Pot) in San Marcos. Like Jenni, he was a drum major in high school, and he played in the high school mariachi band. A singer-songwriter, he began to play electric bass with Jackson Parten's band in 2002 and with Foscoe Jones in early 2003. He has also played bass with Susan Gibson, Jeff Plankenhorn, the Sidehill Gougers, the Ash Family, and other top musicians in Texas. More recently, he has fronted his own band, Sterling's Starship. He, too, continues to play an important role in the day-to-day operations of Cheatham Street.⁷⁹

HalleyAnna, the youngest of the Finlay children and currently a freshman at Texas State University-San Marcos, has also gained valuable experience on the Cheatham Street stage. She wrote her first song and learned to play the guitar as a very young kid, and in the eighth grade began playing happy hour gigs at Cheatham

Street. She, too, performed at the Blue Pearl. Influenced heavily by the songs of Jewel, Kasey Chambers, and Slaid Cleaves, she plays cover songs along with originals. Kent used to take her with him when he and Cleaves would meet to co-write songs at the playscape in the children's park in San Marcos. HalleyAnna, who at times works at Cheatham Street, performs at Songwriters Circle, and plays bass guitar in Sterling's Starship, intends to remain involved with her father's honky tonk.⁸⁰

Whatever Finlay's future endeavors, Songwriters Circle will

It is also clear from an old picture of Finlay, Hondo Crouch, and Jim Cunningham in Terlingua that hangs behind the bar that the spiritual influences of Hondo will continue to give shape and character to the old warehouse along the tracks in San Marcos. At the end of every Songwriters Circle, when Finlay pulls up a chair out in the audience and listeners move in closer to hear him finish the show with a few of his songs, it is quiet enough to hear a pin drop. For those who close their eyes and perhaps allow themselves to be transported back in

"It's late at night, I slip out back. The folks are sleeping, well, I'm dressed in black. The place I'm going to is by the railroad tracks."

—Dave Teichroeb

singer-songwriter, "Cheatham Street," 2003

continue to be at the core of his plans. That night holds a special place not only in his heart, but also in the hearts of songwriters who, in turn, regard Finlay with special affection. To honor him and raise money for Finlay's medical fund, Dave Teichroeb, a singer/songwriter from Guelph, Ontario, who lived in San Marcos and performed regularly at Cheatham Street at the time Finlay underwent his bone marrow transplant, produced a compilation CD, *Kent Finlay's Songwriters' Circle*. The CD contains songs by a number of writers who often perform on Wednesday nights. It surprised no one that Finlay, after recuperating from his transplant, made his first post-transplant appearance at Cheatham Street on a Wednesday night. "It never has been a money maker night," he points out, "but it sure is a great night for keeping our integrity."⁸¹

time, they might well find themselves sitting out under the stars with Finlay, Hondo, Willie, Gary P. Nunn, Dotsy, and Jerry Jeff Walker in Luckenbach. As the audience sings softly with Finlay on the final verse of his mournful song, "They Call It the Hill Country," a sense of loss permeates the warehouse. The audience is left to reflect on more than the environmental consequences of so-called economic progress in Central Texas. One senses that Finlay is also mourning the passing of a cultural era shaped significantly by Hondo. As Dave Teichroeb puts it so well in his song, "Cheatham Street," it may well be, however, that the ghost of Finlay's spiritual guru from Luckenbach still haunts the creaky warehouse every Wednesday night: "At this old honky-tonk down Cheatham Street, yeah, you can still hear old Hondo tapping his feet."⁸² ■

Notes

1. On the quotes by Ford and Barlow, see www.cheathamstreet.com.
2. "Fife, TX." The Handbook of Texas Online. <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/FF/hnf18.html> [Accessed Wed June 9 9:45:34 US/Central 2004].
3. Kent Finlay, interview with author, June 25, 2002.
4. Gary Hartman, "The Roots Run Deep: An Overview of Texas Music History," in Lawrence Clayton and Joe W. Specht, eds., *The Roots of Texas Music* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2003), 3-36, provides an overview of Texas music history that stresses its diversity and cross-fertilizing cultural influences. See also Bill C. Malone, "Texas Myth/Texas Music," *Journal of Texas Music History* 1 (Spring 2001): 4-11. George Lipsitz, *Rainbow at Midnight: Labor and Culture in the 1940s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), ch. 13, discusses the class-based roots of rock-and-roll in the blues and country music—traditional musical forms of black and white working-class communities.
5. Kent Finlay, interview with author, June 25, 2002. On the broader context in which the country music industry thrived as Finlay came of age in the post-World War II era, see Bill C. Malone, *Country Music, U.S.A.* (Austin: University of Texas Press, second rev. ed., 2002), chs. 7-8, and Joe W. Specht, "Put a Nickel in the Jukebox: The Texas Tradition in Country Music, 1922-1950," in Clayton and Specht, eds., *The Roots of Texas Music*, ch. 3. Richard A. Peterson, *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), emphasizes the role of the music industry in creating and shaping the development of country

- music. For a class-based analysis of country music in the South, see Bill C. Malone, *Don't Get Above Your Raisin': Country Music and the Southern Working Class* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), and Jeffrey J. Lange, *Smile When You Call Me Hillbilly: Country Music's Struggle for Respectability, 1939-1954* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004). The best, most well-researched treatment of the role of Jimmie Rodgers in the growth of country music in the 1920s and 1930s is Nolan Porterfield's *Jimmie Rodgers: The Life and Times of America's Blue Yodeler* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979). On West Texas, see also Porterfield's "'Sandstorm': Reflections on the Roots of West Texas Music," *Journal of Texas Music History* 2 (Fall 2002): 39-44, and Joe Carr and Alan Munde, *Prairie Nights to Neon Lights: The Story of Country Music in West Texas* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1995).
6. Interview with author, June 25, 2002; "Kent Finlay is back at Cheatham Street to stay," *San Marcos Daily Record*, December 30, 2001.
7. Kent Finlay, interviews with author, June 25, July 30, 2002; Diana Hendricks, conversation, October 28, 2004. For a brief history of Luckenbach, see Glen E. Lich and Brandy Schnautz, "Luckenbach, Texas," in Roy Barkley, Douglas E. Barnett, Cathy Brigham, Gary Hartman, Casey Monahan, Dave Oliphant, and George B. Ward, eds., *The Handbook of Texas Music* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2003), 193-94.
8. Kent Finlay, interviews with author, June 25, July 30, 2002. For the history of Luckenbach, see Glen Lich, "Luckenbach, Texas." The Handbook of Texas Online. <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/LL/hn148.html> [Accessed Jun 10

- 20:08:03 US Central 2004].
9. Kent Finlay, interview with author, July 30, 2002.
10. For a brief biographical sketch of John Kenneth Threadgill and his role in Texas music history, see Alan Lee Haworth, "John Kenneth Threadgill." The Handbook of Texas Online. <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/TT/ft58.html> [Accessed Jun 10 19:58:12 US/Central 2004].
11. Kent Finlay, interview with author, July 30, 2002. See also Laurie E. Jasinski, "Cheatham Street Warehouse," in Barkley, et al, eds., *Handbook of Texas Music*, 48-49.
12. Steve Finlay, e-mail to author, July 27, 2004.
13. Kent Finlay, interview with author, July 30, 2002.
14. Steve Finlay, e-mail to author, July 27, 2004.
15. Kent Finlay, interview with author, July 30, 2002.
16. On the origins of the progressive country movement, see Jan Reid, *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock* (Austin: University of Texas Press, New Edition, 2004).
17. Ibid., 280-285; Damon Arhos, "Austin City Limits," in Barkley, et al, eds., *Handbook of Texas Music*, 10-11. For a discussion of the relationship between "redneck rock" musicians, especially Willie Nelson and Jerry Jeff Walker, and a number of well-known Texas literary outlaws in the late 1960s and 1970s, see Steven L. Davis, *Texas Literary Outlaws: Six Writers in the Sixties and Beyond* (Fort Worth, Texas: TCU Press, 2004), passim.
18. Kent Finlay, telephone conversation with author, July 13, 2004.
19. Mike Daily, e-mail to author, January 9, 2005.
20. Kent Finlay, interviews with author, June 25, July 30, 2002; "Kent Finlay is back at Cheatham to stay," *San Marcos Daily Record*, December 30, 2001; Tommy Foote, e-mail to author, February 1, 2005.
21. Mike Daily, e-mail to author, January 17, 2005.
22. Kent Finlay, interviews with author, June 25, July 30, 2002; "Kent Finlay is back at Cheatham to stay," *San Marcos Daily Record*, December 30, 2001; Daily, e-mail to author, January 9, 2005.
23. Foote, e-mail to author, February 1, 2005.
24. Daily, e-mail to author, January 17, 2005.
25. Quoted in "Kent Finlay is back at Cheatham Street to stay," *San Marcos Daily Record*, December 30, 2001. On the role of the Broken Spoke in Texas music history, see Tanya Krause, "Broken Spoke," in Barkley, et al, eds., *Handbook of Texas Music*, 38.
26. On the history of Gruene Hall, see Brandy Schnautz, "Gruene Hall," in Barkley, et al, eds., *Handbook of Texas Music*, 126.
27. Kent Finlay, interview with author, July 30, 2002.
28. Daily, e-mail to author, January 17, 2005.
29. Kent Finlay, interview with author, July 30, 2002.
30. Ibid.; Daily, e-mail to author, January 11, 2005. For Strait's discography, see his internet website: <http://www.georgestrait.com>.
31. Ev Swinney, e-mail to author, July 8, 2004.
32. Department of History Personnel File, James Kent Finlay, and Class Rosters File, Spring 1979, Department of History Archives, Texas State University, San Marcos; Kent Finlay, interview with author, July 30, 2002.
33. Clay Blaker, telephone conversation with author, May 16, 2003; Daily, e-mail to author, January 11, 2005; Foote, e-mail to author, February 1, 2005.
34. Mike Daily, e-mail to author, January 11, 2005. For Blaker's discography, see his internet website: <http://www.clayblaker.com>. On D Records, see Linda Hellinger, "Pappy Daily," in Barkley, et al, eds., *Handbook of Texas Music*, 75. See also the internet website of the Glad Music Company, a publishing company created by Pappy Daily in 1958: <http://www.gladmusicco.com>.
35. Blaker, telephone conversation with author, May 16, 2003.
36. Bill Whitbeck, interview with author, August 19, 2002.
37. Ibid.
38. Kent Finlay, interview with author, July 30, 2002.
39. Bill Whitbeck, interview with author, August 19, 2002.
40. Kent Finlay, interview with author, July 30, 2002. On Vaughan's career, see, for example, Joe Nick Patoski and Bill Crawford, *Sievie Ray Vaughan: Caught in the Crossfire* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1993).
41. Kent Finlay, interview with author, June 25, 2002; Tad Hershorn, "Cheatham Street switches hands," *San Marcos News*, March 20-26, 1983.
42. Jasinski, "Cheatham Street Warehouse," 48.
43. Kent Finlay, interview with author, July 30, 2002. For a collection of interviews with some of Texas's most distinguished songwriters, see Kathleen Hudson, *Telling Stories, Writing Songs* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001).
44. Aaron Allan, interview with author, June 30, 2002. Allan, whose songs have been covered by Stoney Edwards, Claude Gray, Chet McIntyre, Willie Nelson, the Osborne Brothers, Charley Walker, and others, recently held a party at Cheatham Street to celebrate the release of his CD, "Time Is" (2005). On Allan's career, see Jim Gramon, *Legendary Texas Storytellers* (Plano, Tx.: Republic of Texas Press, 2003), 136-150, and Tony Wilson, "Aaron Allan likes to keep it simple: 'Me and My Guitar,'" *San Marcos Daily Record*, January 28, 2005.
45. Al Barlow, e-mail to author, February 2, 2005.
46. Ibid.; Todd Snider Road Journal, Volume 5, May 2003, http://www.toddsnider.net/journal_may03.html; John Arthur Martinez, e-mail to author, October 25, 2004.
47. Diana Hendricks, conversation with author, October 28, 2004.
48. Quoted in Richard Skanse, undated interview with Todd Snider, <http://www.lonestarmusic.com>.
49. For Kristofferson's quote, see: <http://www.ohboy.com>.
50. Kent Finlay, interview with author, July 30, 2002.
51. Ibid.; Todd Snider Road Journal, Volume 5, May 2003, http://www.toddsnider.net/journal_may03.html.
52. Terri Hendrix, interview with author, August 29, 2002.
53. Barlow, e-mail to author, February 2, 2005.
54. Hendrix, interview with author, August 29, 2002.
55. Ibid.
56. Kent Finlay, interview with author, July 30, 2002.
57. Ibid. For Hendrix's discography, see her website, <http://www.terrihendrix.com>. See also Rob Booth, "Terri Hendrix—No Tacky Wallpaper Here," *The Texas Rising Star* 2 (July 2004): 7.
58. Hendrix, interview with author, August 29, 2002.
59. Kent Finlay, interview with author, July 30, 2002; Rose Marie Eash, "An art gallery for Texas music: 27 years of nurturing Lone Star sounds," *San Marcos Daily Record*, June 2, 2001.
60. The quote is from an interview with Randy Rogers on the Texas Troubadours website, <http://www.texastroubadours.com>.
61. <http://www.randyrogersband.com>. For the quote, see <http://www.texastroubadours.com>. See also Jeff Walker, "No Place Like Home: Rising Country act Randy Rogers returns to Cheatham Street to play with his mentor Kent Finlay," *San Marcos Daily Record*, October 27, 2004.
62. The Ash Family recently released a CD, "Bread and Wine" (2004), engineered and mixed by Gary Hickinbotham at the Firestation Studio, produced by Jim and Tommy Ash and Gary Hickinbotham, and mastered by Jerry Tubb at Terra Nova Digital Audio, Inc., Austin, Texas.
63. Kent Finlay, telephone conversation with author, July 13, 2004.
64. "JAMsession with John Arthur Martinez," *Austin Songwriter*, September, 1999, 3. I would like to thank songwriter Regan Brown for calling my attention to this interview with Martinez.
65. See the biography section on Martinez's website, <http://www.johnarthurmartinez.net>.
66. John Arthur Martinez, e-mail to author, October 25, 2004.
67. Ibid.; Kent Finlay, telephone conversation with author, July 22, 2004.
68. Ibid.; <http://www.johnarthurmartinez.net>; Diana Finlay, interview with author, October 28, 2004.
69. John Arthur Martinez, e-mail to author, October 25, 2004.
70. Kent Finlay, interview with author, July 30, 2002.
71. Daily, e-mail to author, January 17, 2005.
72. Foote, e-mail to author, February 1, 2005.
73. Whitbeck, interview with author, August 19, 1902.
74. John Arthur Martinez, e-mail to author, October 25, 2004.
75. Aaron Allan, interview with author, June 30, 2002.
76. Steve Finlay, e-mail to author, July 27, 2004.
77. Quoted in Diana Finlay, conversation with author, October 28, 2004.
78. *Austin American Statesman*, February 10, 1989; Kent Finlay, interview with author, June 25, 2002.
79. Diana Hendricks, conversation with author, October 28, 2004.
80. Ibid.
81. Kent Finlay, interview with author, July 30, 2002. The compilation CD, which was conceived, recorded, mixed, and mastered by Teichroeb at Peach Tree Studio, contains songs by Rick Bowen, Gregg Andrews, Becky Purcell, Mel Mason, Regan Brown, Stan Harlan, Angie McClure, and Teichroeb.
82. Teichroeb's recent CD, *Canadian Whiskey*, Peach Tree Studio, 2004, is largely the product of a three-year stint in San Marcos during which he performed regularly at Cheatham Street and was influenced by the singer-songwriter culture nurtured by Kent Finlay. For a full discography, see his website: <http://www.Davet.ca>

San Antonio's West Side Sound

Allen O. Olsen



The Texas Tornados, courtesy of Reprise Records. Photo: Will Van Overbeek

It is a rare privilege indeed when a scholar has the opportunity to bring to the public's attention a musical genre that has been largely unstudied in the past.¹ The understanding of our nation's musical heritage is enhanced whenever these less-well-known genres are recognized and examined, especially those that have a rich history steeped in multi-ethnic traditions. San Antonio's West Side Sound is just such a genre, having drawn from a broad array of regional influences to become a truly distinct musical style. Outside of South-Central Texas, however, the West Side Sound is a largely unknown phenomenon. Even within San Antonio itself, there are many who would have difficulty defining the West Side Sound. The goal of this article is to explain what the West Side Sound is and to examine its origins and development as a unique component of Texas music.

The West Side Sound is a remarkable amalgamation of different ethnic musical influences found in and around San Antonio in South-Central Texas. It includes blues, conjunto, country, rhythm and blues, polka, swamp pop, rock and roll, and other seemingly disparate styles. All of these have somehow been woven together into a sound that has captured the attention of fans worldwide. In a sense, the very eclectic nature of the West Side Sound reflects the larger musical environment of Texas, in which a number of ethnic communities over the centuries have exchanged musical traditions in a prolific "cross-pollination" of cultures. The result has been the development of a rich and complex regional musical style, of which the West Side Sound has become an integral part.

Some of the musicians who helped develop San Antonio's West Side Sound in its various forms are well known to both Texans and others across the country and around the world. The style was first brought to national prominence with Sunny Ozuna's 1963 hit, "Talk to Me." "She's About A Mover," the 1965 Top Twenty hit by the Sir Douglas Quintet soon brought additional recognition to the Alamo City's music scene.² Two musicians who were part of that band, Augie Meyers and the late Doug Sahm, went on to

build nationally and internationally successful careers. Also famous around the world is the ubiquitous Flaco Jiménez, who has five Grammy Awards, and has recorded with such prominent artists as Bob Dylan, the Rolling Stones, and Dwight Yoakam.

Sahm, Meyers, and Jiménez, along with Freddy Fendder, once again brought the West Side Sound to a global audience during the 1990s with their musically eclectic super group, the Texas Tornados.³ The late Randy Garibay was a less-well-known but also very influential member of the West Side Sound. His contributions to the evolution of the genre have made him somewhat of a legend in San Antonio, and his passing in early 2002 has been difficult for musicians and fans throughout the state.⁴

However, most of the other musicians involved in the development of the West Side Sound are not as well known, but

they all played an important role in shaping this genre, beginning as early as the 1950s. Charlie Alvarado, Armando Almendarez (better known as Mando Cavallero), Frank Rodarte, Sonny Ace, Clifford Scott, and Vernon "Spot" Barnett all contributed to the creation of the West Side Sound in one way or another. Alvarado's band, Charlie and the Jives, had such regional hits in 1959 as "For the Rest of My Life" and "My Angel of Love." Cavallero had an influential conjunto group called San Antonio Allegre that played live every Sunday morning on Radio KIWW.⁵

Almendarez formed several groups, including the popular rock and roll band Mando and the Chili Peppers. Rodarte led a group called the Del Kings, which formed in San Antonio during the late 1950s, and brought the West Side Sound to Las Vegas as the house band for the Sahara Club, where they remained for nearly ten years.⁶ Sonny Ace had a number of different groups during this period, including Sonny and the Rhythm Rockers, Sonny and the Montclairs, and Sonny Ace and the Twisters. Regional hits included covers of the Louis Prima songs "Just a Gigolo" and "Oh, Marie." Ace's own compositions included "Take My Love," "You Tear My Dreams



Flaco Jiménez with multiple Grammy Awards.

Apart,” and “Darling of Mine.”⁷

Clifford Scott is best known for his song “Honky Tonk,” from which the unique saxophone solo became a model for San Antonio sax players for years.⁸ Scott and Spot Barnett also served as mentors for many younger Mexican-American saxophone players, including Charlie Alvarado, Rocky Morales, and Frank Rodarte. Scott and Barnett certainly were a source of inspiration for Doug Sahm and Augie Meyers. Barnett’s band, The Spot Barnett Combo, was the house band at San Antonio’s legendary Ebony Club, and he also played regularly at the famous Eastwood Country Club. Barnett’s first recording, “The Ebony Shuffle,” became a regional hit. Later, Barnett had a combo called the Twentieth Century Orchestra, in which a fifteen-year-old Doug Sahm sat in when members of the group were unable to make a gig.

In its present form, the West Side Sound is a multifaceted musical entity. At its core are the influences of rock and roll, blues, country, conjunto, swamp pop, and rhythm and blues (also known as R&B). To that end, a key component is the role of the horn section and its relationship to the guitar. Texas music historian Alan Govenar has noted that Texas musicians Eddie Durham and Charlie Christian pioneered this interplay between horns and guitars in the state’s jazz scene. Both established the guitar “as a rhythm instrument to underlie the voice and horn sections.” According to Govenar, another Texan, T-Bone Walker, was responsible for furthering the role of the electric guitar, a role that would “supersede” the saxophone as a premier solo instrument. In so doing, Walker transformed the relationship between the horns and the guitar as the “rhythm and blues band sound became tighter and depended more on the interplay of the electric guitar with the horn section, piano, and drums.”⁹

This orchestration is a key element in the West Side Sound. Perhaps more than any other San Antonio musician, Randy Garibay contributed to the voicing of the guitar as a rhythm

and solo instrument for the West Side Sound during the last decade. Garibay’s signature song, “Barbacoa Blues,” is exemplary of that interplay between guitar and horns. The guitar never completely replaces the horns, however. According to Spot Barnett, the contribution of the horns in San Antonio’s West Side Sound is the voicing. Barnett says that, “From the musician’s point of view, we have a voicing. The trumpet player basically took the lead note in the chord, and depending on

how much power, whether we wanted the chords to lean high or lean low, is whether we put the tenor on the third.” Barnett further elaborates on the role of intervals. “All right, say for instance we wanted to have a big, round full C chord. Okay, on the bottom, we would put [an] E, and a Bb...Then, on the top of the chord, we would put D, G, and C on top. Now, that’s our sound there.”¹⁰

Over the years, the West Side Sound absorbed Mexican-American, African-American, and Anglo-American influences, such as conjunto, blues, R&B, country, swamp pop, and rock and roll. This happened largely through the contributions of Doug Sahm, Augie Meyers, Flaco Jiménez, Sonny Ozuna, and Randy Garibay. Jiménez, Ozuna,

and Meyers often included polkas and boleros in their musical repertoires.¹¹ Sahm and Meyers, close friends since they were 11 or 12 years old, were influenced by black music, but they also were big fans of Hank Williams, Lefty Frizzell, Jimmie Rodgers, and other country artists.¹² Sahm and Meyers would more fully express these country influences after they became involved in Austin’s “Progressive Country” music scene of the 1970s.¹³

Because of their diverse influences, the West Side Sound musicians developed an eclectic genre that cut across ethnic and racial boundaries to include a broad range of styles. In addition to borrowing from a variety of ethnic genres, many of these bands were themselves racially and ethnically integrated. As previously noted, the African-American musician, Spot Barnett, and his Twentieth Century Orchestra often included a



Randy Garibay, promo for *Barbacoa Blues*.

young, white Doug Sahm. Charlie Alvarado's band, Charlie and the Jives, has been called the "United Nations Band," because it featured musicians from several ethnic backgrounds. As Alvarado says, "I had James Kelley, Irish, and I had Pineapple, Hawaiian mix, and I had Jitterbug Web, black. I had Benny Easley, black, and myself, Chicano. They said 'You got a United Nations band there.'"¹⁴

What is particularly intriguing about the multi-ethnic origins of the West Side Sound is that this music is rooted in the 1950s, at a time when much of the rest of the Deep South was undergoing violent upheaval in the struggle over civil rights and racial equality. For a better understanding of how these musicians overcame contemporary social barriers and cultural differences to create this unique musical form, it may be helpful to look briefly at some case studies involving inter-ethnic human relationships.

Elisabeth Gareis's case study of five German exchange students in the United States suggests that there are six key factors contributing to successful inter-ethnic relationships: culture, personality, homophily, an adjustment state,

Chicano Rodarte, as well as the Anglos Doug Sahm and Augie Meyers, were nurtured in a multi-ethnic environment. For example, as little boys, Sahm and Meyers listened to African-American bands at San Antonio's Eastwood Country Club. This was possible, because the club's owner, Johnny Phillips, was a friend who shopped at the Meyer's family store, and he allowed the youngsters to hang around the club and watch the musicians.

Another factor in this willingness to exchange musical influences may be related to what some researchers have called "elusive culture." Elusive culture has to do with how young people define their own sense of identity, in part, by borrowing, or choosing not to borrow, from surrounding cultural influences. In a study of adolescent adjustment carried out in a Toronto, Canada, high school, Daniel A. Yon argues that "Elusive culture...gestures towards a view of culture as on-going processes...implicated in the ambivalence and contradictions of social life and cultural practices rather than serving as a counter force to them." According to the idea of "elusive culture," young people have difficulty identifying themselves within a particular group. They can overcome this, however "when the desire to

Morales and other Mexican-American musicians, as well as Anglos, admired Barnett and Clifford Scott during this early formative period.

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communicative competence, and proximity. Of these six, homophily and proximity are most relevant to our discussion. Homophily, defined as similarity between friends, certainly was an important factor in how West Side Sound musicians from different ethnic groups developed a love and respect for each other and for a broad range of ethnic musical genres.¹⁵

Rocky Morales, an original member of the premier West Side Sound band, the West Side Horns, and a long-time sax player for Doug Sahm, commented on the level of admiration and affection he and others had for fellow African-American band leader Spot Barnett. "He was the greatest influence for everybody at that time [in the 1950s]."¹⁶ Morales and other Mexican-American musicians, as well as Anglos, admired Barnett and Clifford Scott during this early formative period. Garibay, Meyers, Sahm, Rodarte, Barnett, and others all shared a passion for what they called "soul music." When Frank Rodarte was asked how it was that Chicanos can play the blues, he replied, "The good Lord has control over that. He knows how he distributes his talent. He gives it to whites, to blacks, to everybody, he gives it soul."¹⁷

Proximity is also important in understanding how these musicians got along so well musically. Sahm, Rodarte, and Meyers all grew up on the East Side of San Antonio. That neighborhood was predominantly African-American, so the

'know' cultures is made rigid."¹⁸ In order to do this, young people must be able to explore their personal identities in relation to the identities and cultures of others.

A number of examples of this inter-cultural quest to formulate their own individual identities can be seen among the young musicians of the West Side Sound. Charlie Alvarado, founder of Charlie and the Jives, formed his sense of self-awareness playing in orchestras as a teenager in the multi-cultural setting of San Antonio.¹⁹ Meyers and Sahm developed much of their musical identity listening to various acts that played the Eastwood Club, the Ebony Club, and other venues. Perhaps most revealing are the observations on this subject by West Side Sound Chicano pioneer and bassist extraordinaire Jack Barber:

There are some Chicanos that are raised in San Antonio, and they just stay San Antonio. They stay Mexican, or Chicano, or whatever you want to call it. They stay that way. There are a lot of black people that just stay black on the east side, you know, they don't play anything more progressive than what they're doing...I think it's a chosen few that want to know more.²⁰

Thus, the conditions were in place to make this "elusive culture" more attainable for these young San Antonio

musicians. As Jack Barber suggests, there also existed an internal desire on the part of the musicians to go beyond their own culture to explore others.

Intercultural studies researcher Shi-Xu does not agree with the “mainstream pedagogy of intercultural contact and communication,” because it allows for “power saturation of intercultural encounters, where power is defined as textual practice of domination, exclusion, or prejudice.”²¹ Texas music historian Manuel Peña might agree with this assessment, since he argues that a “dialectic of conflict” has existed between social classes and ethnic groups in Texas for over a century and a half.²² These assessments are marginally applicable to the situation at hand, however. Only two of the musicians, Joe Hernandez in the 1970s and Randy Garibay in the 1990s, were actively political. With regards to the assertions of Shi-Xu, the majority of the musicians of the West Side Sound decided to put aside their cultural differences at a very young age.²³

Another important factor in the ability of the West Side Sound musicians to blend together such a diverse array of ethnic musical traditions is the unique racial and cultural

Antonio as “‘heaven on earth’ when compared to other southern cities.”²⁶

There were several factors that contributed to this “moderate racial climate” in San Antonio during the 1950s and 1960s: the relatively small size of the black community (7% of the overall population); minimal contact between whites and blacks, since African Americans were relegated primarily to the east side of the city; the existence of a large Mexican-American population (approximately 40% of the overall population), which helped to obscure color lines in the city; the existence of several large desegregated military bases in and around San Antonio; and the leading role played by certain religious leaders, who worked to chip “away at the community consensus and prepare the ground for racial peace and cooperation.”²⁷ In regard to the last point, it should be noted that, while most Texas communities resisted the Supreme Court’s 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling to desegregate all public schools, many of San Antonio’s public school districts had integrated by the fall of 1955, far more quickly than most other southern cities.²⁸

As can be seen both in the intercultural studies and historical

30 Harry Burns, a leader of the local branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), characterized San Antonio as “‘heaven on earth’ when compared to other southern cities.

environment of San Antonio. Because of the unusual ethno-cultural situation of San Antonio as experienced by these young musicians, Peña’s thesis also can be challenged. When asked if Anglos or Chicanos had the right to play the blues, African-American Spot Barnett responded by saying “music is music. You take the same notes to play the same everything...we might write in prejudices, and add in prejudices, but that’s not how God gave it out. He gave us twelve different sounds and let us figure it out scientifically; how to, you know, how to look at it. See, God puts the puzzle there, and then he leaves it to us to figure out.”²⁴

All of the musicians interviewed for this article stated that bigotry was not a major factor in their lives in San Antonio during the 1950s. Indeed segregation did exist *de facto* in the city, but, according to Spot Barnett, the police often looked the other way when individual African Americans challenged segregationist customs.²⁵ Historian Robert A. Goldberg asserts that “Segregation was woven into the fabric of San Antonio life, but it did not elicit violence or impassioned defenses.” Goldberg further asserts that, “Blacks in San Antonio opposed racial segregation and inequality, but the moderate racial climate tempered their opposition.” Harry Burns, a leader of the local branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), characterized San

development of San Antonio during the 1950s, the city’s young people probably had more opportunities than their contemporaries elsewhere in the South to interact across racial and ethnic boundaries. Because of this relative freedom to explore other cultures in a more moderate racial climate, these young San Antonio musicians developed a unique, multi-ethnic musical genre, the West Side Sound, which reflected the poly-cultural environment of the city.

In addition to a “moderate racial climate,” which allowed local residents to interact more freely, there were numerous venues and outlets around the city through which different types of music could be shared. There were dozens of San Antonio radio stations by the 1950s. The city’s leading station, WOAI, went on the air in 1922. Founded by G.A.C. Holff, the station upgraded from 500 to 5,000 watts in 1925, and, in 1928, the station joined the first national radio network, NBC. In 1934, the state’s four largest stations, WBAP in Fort Worth, WFAA in Dallas, KPRC in Houston, and WOAI, merged under the supervision of the new Texas Quality Group Network.²⁹

Perhaps the most popular musical genre in San Antonio during the 1950s and 1960s was country music. San Antonio had a number of country radio stations to listen to, including some that transmitted from outside of the state. Country music lovers had access to a number of T.V. and radio programs in San

Antonio. KONO 860 AM had a daily show called the "Cowboy Jamboree" that could be heard from 8 to 11 P.M., in addition to a "Western Swing" program that aired each day at 12:30 P.M. KMAC 630 featured the daily program, "Hillbilly Hit Parade." San Antonio's own Adolph Hofner and his honky tonk swing band could be heard Fridays on KTSA 550 at 12:30 P.M. WOAI-TV Channel 4 carried Saturday night broadcasts of "Red River Dave's Barn Dance" and featured local musicians, such as Charley Tompkins, who was billed as the "First King of Cowboys."³⁰

One of San Antonio's best-loved programs, the "Louisiana Hayride," was broadcast from outside of the state. It aired on KWKH, a 50,000 watt "hillbilly" station in Shreveport, Louisiana, that broadcast as far west as New Mexico. The Hayride featured top country acts, such as Webb Pierce, Faron Young, Kitty Wells, Slim Whitman, Jim Reeves, George Jones, Johnny Cash, and a young Elvis Presley.³¹

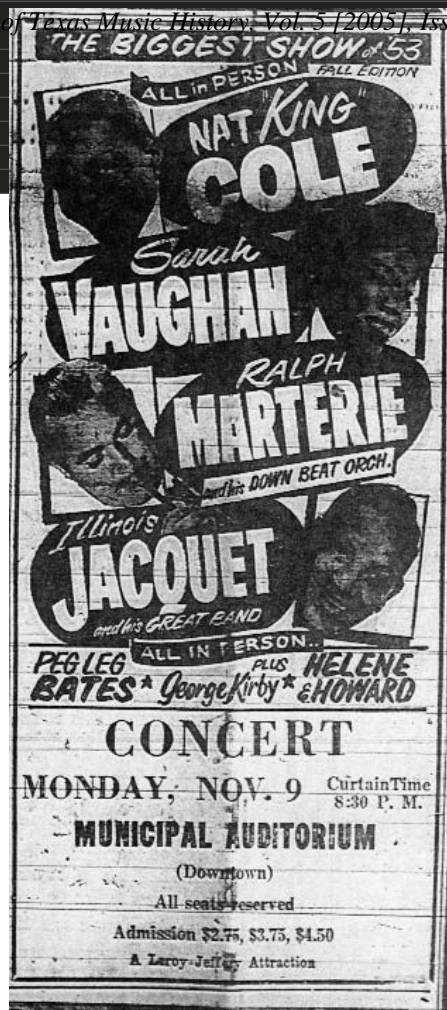
The summer of 1955 was a special time for country music fans in the Alamo City. One of the most publicized events was a visit by Roy Rogers and his horse, Trigger, to San Antonio's Freeman Coliseum. Rogers's arrival on June 18th was scheduled to be broadcast nationally on NBC. *The San Antonio Light* and other newspapers promoted the event, which was to include several appearances by the beloved star of radio and movies.³² When Rogers did arrive, the *Light* reported that "Roy sang, danced, told stories, performed eight magnificently trained palominos and shook hands with the small fry."³³ Also, in 1955, to mark Disney's release of the film "Davy Crockett," San Antonio sponsored its first "Davy Crockett Week" beginning on August 17th. Celebrations included square dances in downtown streets, a "b'ar grinnin'" contest, which awarded a prize to the kid with the best grin, and a frontier costume award contest.³⁴

The large Mexican-American pop-ulation of San Antonio also had a number of T.V. and radio stations that broadcast different forms of Latin music. In 1955, the Spanish-language station KCOR-TV 41 debuted.³⁵ This first Latin-owned station in the United States featured numerous programs hosted by Jorge Sareli and other popular local figures. These shows sometimes served as incubators for promoting young Texas musicians. Such was the case in 1956, when Jorge Sareli featured a weekly conjunto band called Las Caminantes, whose accordionist was

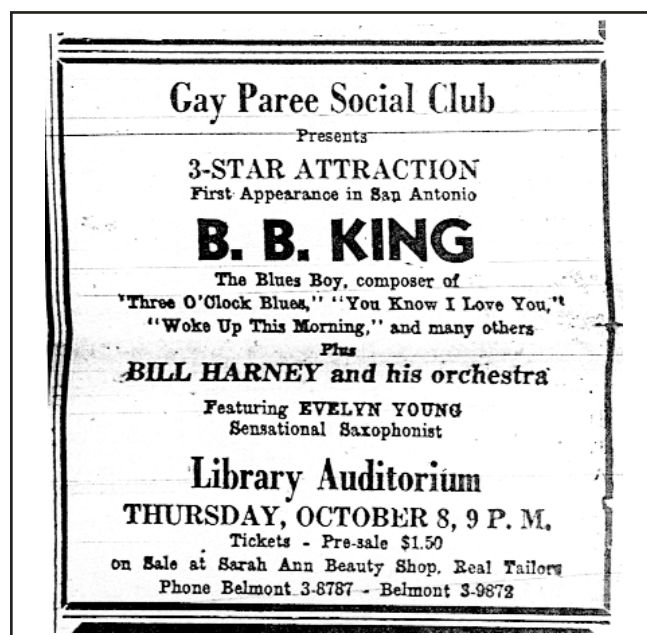
a young Flaco Jiménez.³⁶ San Antonio Allegre, led by Armando Almendarez, was another conjunto group that performed Sundays on KIWV radio and played at local venues, such as the Fiesta Club on Pleasanton.³⁷

Mexican-American touring acts also frequented the city. Okie Jones y su Famosa Conjunto, who were quite popular in the Spanish-language music circuit, came to San Antonio in September 1955 to play at the Municipal Auditorium located downtown at what once was Auditorium Circle.³⁸ Artists also came from Mexico and Hollywood to promote their films. After MGM released *Sombrero* in 1953, starring a very young Ricardo Montalban, the actor appeared for the film's premiere in San Antonio at the Aztec Theatre on the corner of St. Mary's and Commerce.³⁹ The Alameda Theatre featured Spanish-language films, and famous Mexican artists, such as Antonio Badu, headlined

shows that included other performers from Mexico.⁴⁰ Several mariachi bands from Mexico and elsewhere also toured through San Antonio. An ad from the newspaper *La Prensa* in February, 1956 promoted a group called Los Michoacanos as one of the great attractions of Fiesta week and informed readers that the band would appear for seven days at the National Theater.⁴¹



1953 Advertisement for Nat King Cole, courtesy of the *San Antonio Register*.



1952 Advertisement for B. B. King, courtesy of the *San Antonio Register*.

One of the remarkable things about San Antonio during the 1950s is that one of the city's smallest ethnic groups, African Americans, seemed to have a disproportionately strong influence on the local music scene. Jazz and R&B were especially prevalent. In 1944, Don Albert opened the original Keyhole Club at the intersection of Iowa and Pine. Albert, a great jazz musician in his own right, was one of the first local club owners to allow integrated audiences. He brought a number of jazz giants, such as Louis Jordan, Nat "King" Cole, Louis Armstrong, Dizzy Gillespie, and the Ink Spots, to his establishment for the enjoyment of Anglo, Hispanic, and African-American customers.⁴²

During the 1940s and 1950s, these great jazz players, along with many prominent R&B artists, appeared at the Seven Oaks Country Club on Austin Highway, at the Library Auditorium at 210 West Market, and at the Municipal Auditorium.⁴³ The Ebony Club on Nebraska Street (now Martin Luther King, Jr., Boulevard) hosted some of the most popular African-American touring acts of the day and, as previously mentioned, featured

City's love affair with rock music started about 15 seconds after the genre had a name."⁴⁵ This may be a bit of an overstatement, but several early West Side Sound musicians did quickly embrace rock and roll and began reforming their bands to accommodate the new rock and roll market. Armando Armandarez broke ranks with San Antonio Allegre in 1956 and formed Mando and the Chili Peppers. In 1958, Charlie Alvarado started Charlie and the Jives. Denny Esmond soon formed a group called The Goldenes, which featured Augie Meyers. Sahm had a band called Doug Sahm and the Markays that recorded regional hits, such as "Crazy, Crazy Daisy" and "Two Hearts in Love."⁴⁶ In 1959, Frank Rodarte became the bandleader of the Del Kings and later moved the group to Las Vegas. Even Flaco Jiménez began to mix rock and roll into his polka repertoire.

These artists and others played at such clubs as the Fiesta on Commerce Street, the Cabaret on Houston Street, and the Las Vegas on Dolarosa Street. Although Mexican Americans made up the majority of these night clubs' clientele, all of these

In the end, it was this hybridization of Chicano, Black, and Anglo influences coming from a variety of musical and cultural traditions that blended with rock and roll and gave birth to the West Side Sound by the late 1950s.

Spot Barnett's Twentieth Century Orchestra as its house band by the middle of the 1950s.

As important as these different venues were, the club that served as the main seedbed for the emerging West Side Sound was the Eastwood Country Club, far out on Nebraska Street in the town of St. Hedwig. As Texas music historian Karla Peterson points out, "The club, owned by Johnnie Phillips, was instrumental in helping young up-and-comers to practice their music, as well as giving well-known black performers a place to play." Here locally influential musicians, such as Barnett, a regular, and Clifford Scott, who sat in when Lionel Hampton's Orchestra was on vacation, mingled freely. Sometimes, Phillips called on Doug Sahm, Rocky Morales, Frank Rodarte, and Randy Garibay to back up Bobby Bland, Bo Diddley, and other touring acts that played the Eastwood. This gave these younger artists a chance to work with nationally prominent acts and to further synthesize their eclectic musical influences. The Eastwood Club was thoroughly integrated from its inception in 1954. Phillips once pointed out that "The Eastwood was one of the few places where people, no matter what color they were, were always welcome."⁴⁴

The final factor that solidified the early West Side Sound was the emergence of rock and roll in the mid-1950s. *San Antonio Express News* columnist Jim Beal, Jr., wrote that, "The Alamo

venues were integrated by the late 1950s. Many of these musicians also played in the officer's clubs and NCO clubs on the desegregated military bases around the city."⁴⁷ While these young artists continued to mature musically, they were conscious of the transformation they were undergoing, as they blended their blues, jazz, country, and conjunto influences with the new genre of rock and roll. One of the elder statesmen of the West Side Sound, Charlie Alvarado, commented on the difference in the musicians' approach to rock and roll as compared to earlier styles:

The big difference was that it was more like a job [before]. It was more like a job to me. I had to have my eyes peeled on the charts to get the right notes and everything. When rock and roll came along, you already knew the instrumentation and the chord progressions. Of course blues is just the first, the fourth, and the fifth depending on what key you are in. And you go from there. Once you know how to play that, then your improvisation comes in. You just stay within the changes. And it was just in a way different way. I was involved with the crowd while I was playing instead of just having my head down in the notes.⁴⁸

In the end, it was this hybridization of Chicano, Black, and Anglo influences coming from a variety of musical and cultural traditions that blended with rock and roll and gave birth to the West Side Sound by the late 1950s.

The West Side Sound exploded onto the national stage during the 1960s. In 1963, Sunny Ozuna's San Antonio group, Sunny and the Sunglows, had a national hit with "Talk to Me," which earned the band an appearance on Dick Clark's *American Bandstand*.⁴⁹ In 1964, Sahm and Meyers teamed up to form the Sir Douglas Quintet. Houston producer and promoter, Huey Meaux, suggested they form the band and give it a British-sounding name and appearance as part of an effort to capitalize on the success of the Beatles and other groups who were part of the so-called "British Invasion" of the mid-1960s. A year later, the Sir Douglas Quintet had its first big hit with "She's About A Mover."⁵⁰

"Talk to Me" and "She's About a Mover" are very representative of the West Side Sound of the early 1960s. The former song is a slow R&B number that utilizes horns, which are spaced in intervals of major thirds, much like those used in mariachi, corrido, and bolero styles. In "She's About a Mover," a song that seems to be influenced by Ray Charles, Doug Sahm yells out "Oh yeah, what I say!" at the end of several verses. There is also evidence of a Mexican-American polka styling in the song. The bass drum strikes resoundingly on the first and third beats while the snare follows on the second and fourth. In addition, Augie Meyers intentionally works to make his Vox organ sound like a conjunto-styled accordion.⁵¹

Several years passed before the musicians who created the West Side Sound had success again at the national or international level. In the meantime, these pioneers of the West Side Sound took the genre in a number of new directions before they converged again musically in the 1990s. Within San Antonio itself, the West Side Sound became chiefly Latin-influenced during the 1970s. Although not from San Antonio himself, Joe Hernandez, of Little Joe y La Familia, based in Temple, Texas, frequented the Alamo City during his tours of South Texas. Hernandez's band had originated as Little Joe and

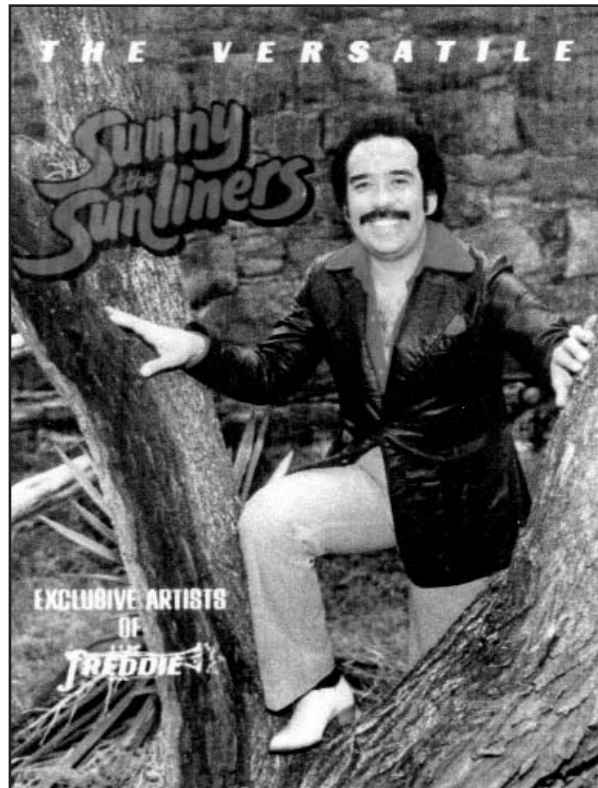
the Latinaires in 1959, wearing tailor-made suits and playing mostly pop music. By the early 1970s, however, the group was caught up in the burgeoning Chicano movement. They traded in their suits and middle-class *orquesta* image in favor of a more "hippie" look and began to mix polkas, corridos, rock and roll, and jazz into their repertoire, which also included songs with overt political messages.⁵² According to the band's keyboard

player, Sauce Gonzalez, the abandonment of the suits was a cultural and political statement that reflected their blending of the hippie counter-culture with the growing Chicano movement. Hernandez and the group frequently appeared in San Antonio at such venues as the downtown Market Square.⁵³

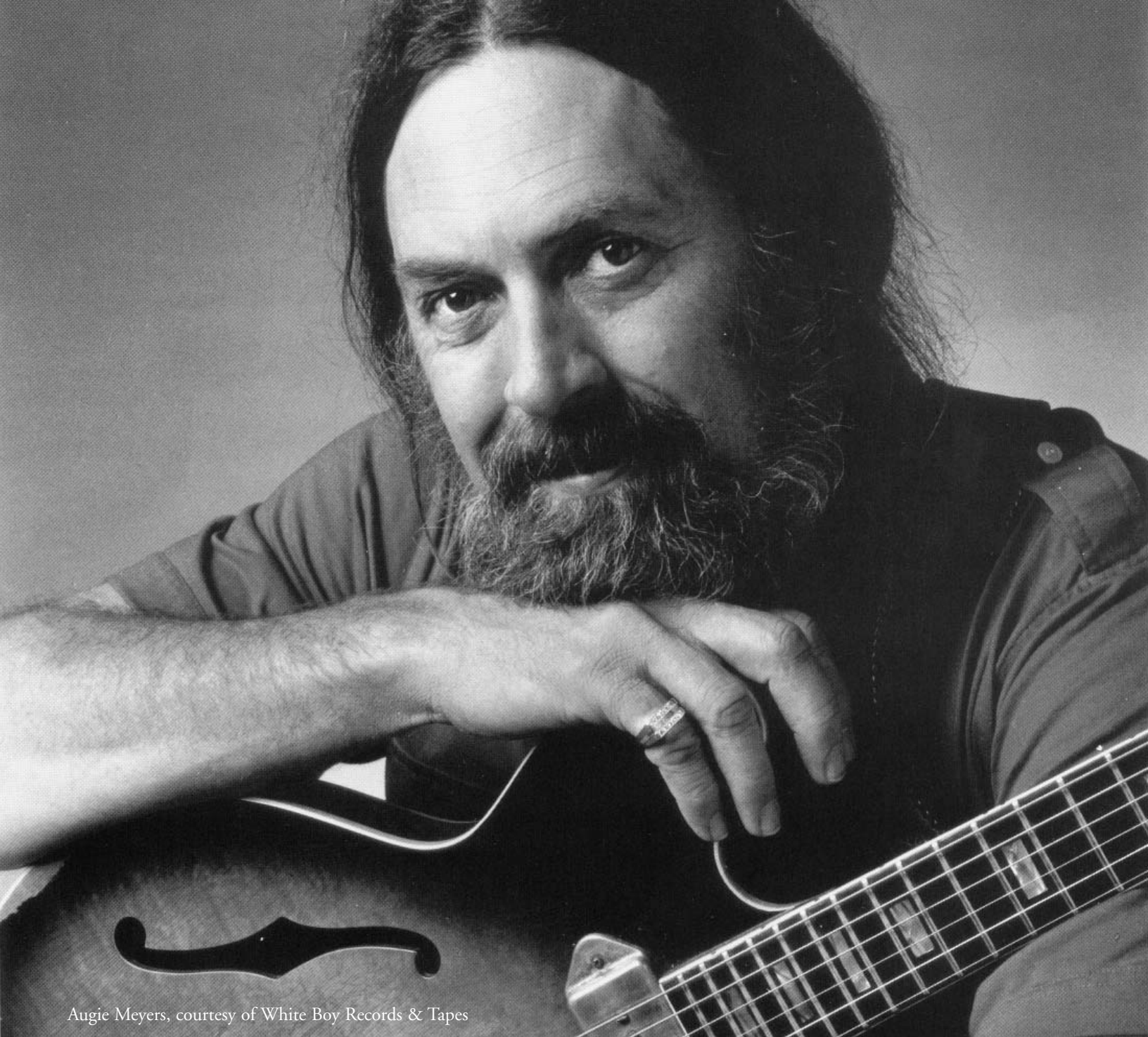
Of those musicians who had an impact on the West Side Sound, Joe Hernandez certainly was one of the most politically-oriented. At times, he spoke openly about police mistreatment of Mexican Americans in Texas cities, such as Dallas and Houston.⁵⁴ San Antonio native Frank Rodarte commented on Hernandez's political activism and willingness to use his musical career to address social issues. "He was writing more about the things that were happening at the time in the city like the abuse of police

brutality, about abuse of the citizens...Abuse of the brown people by the white establishment. And sometimes even brown police officers abusing the [Mexican] people, too."⁵⁵

Frank Rodarte was one West Side Sound pioneer that continued to draw heavily from African-American musical influences throughout the 1970s. Most of the founding bands, such as Charlie and the Jives, actually broke up during this time, but Rodarte remained very active. Documentary movie producer Jeremy Marre filmed Rodarte during a 1978 performance with his Jalapeño Blues Band at the Bexar County Jail in San Antonio.⁵⁶ In the film, Rodarte and his band are playing an upbeat blues shuffle called "Last Meal," and the narrator mistakenly reports that the song is a comment on the brutality of prison life. Rodarte refutes that claim. He insists that the song is not political but, instead, is intended to be humorous. "See, the song is called 'Last Meal,' and they're [the prisoners] getting a kick out of it, because he's requesting all



Sunny Ozuna, courtesy of Freddie records.



Augie Meyers, courtesy of White Boy Records & Tapes

these [things like] blue banana split. For his last meal he's requesting all these things."⁵⁷

The 1970s also was a transitional time for Flaco Jiménez, one of the other leading figures of the West Side Sound. In 1973, Doug Sahm recruited Jiménez to play alongside Ry Cooder and Bob Dylan on Sahm's album *Doug Sahm and Band*. Working with such a high-profile and eclectic group allowed Jiménez to expand even further beyond his traditional conjunto roots. In an interview with Aaron Howard, Jiménez told of how Sahm helped introduce him to the larger music world. "Doug told me 'you're not supposed to play just that simple, traditional conjunto music.' There are so many players who stayed in the same crater like my papa did. Doug showed me there were other worlds out there."⁵⁸

Ry Cooder also brought Flaco Jiménez out into "other worlds" even more.⁵⁹ Cooder, a musician and a musicologist, greatly appreciated the Tex-Mex style of Jiménez and his accordion. Jiménez recalls that Cooder "checked out conjunto and found out my history. He tracked me down. I never heard of him, but then he opened my eyes" and that meeting of the minds would prompt Jiménez to play for the first time in the larger international arena.⁶⁰ Since working with Dylan and Cooder, Jiménez has played with Dwight Yoakam, Charlie Musslewhite, and, on the Rolling Stones' "Sweethearts Together," from their 1994 CD *Voodoo Lounge*.

The West Side Sound also migrated northward up Interstate-35 to Austin during the early 1970s. Austin was the epicenter of the Progressive Country movement, in which hippies, rednecks,

college students, and other disparate groups seemed to set aside their socio-economic and ideological differences and revel in this new musical hybrid that celebrated blues, country, folk, rock and roll, R&B, and even reggae. In his book, *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*, Jan Reid discusses the fact that Willie Nelson and many other musicians relocated to Austin in the early 1970s, because they were disillusioned with the state of the music industry in Nashville, New York, Los Angeles, and elsewhere. Nelson and others who moved to the Capitol City combined their diverse musical influences to spawn Progressive Country, sometimes called "Redneck Rock." Doug Sahm and Augie Meyers also were part of the 1970s migration to Austin. Both had grown weary of the San Francisco "hippie" scene, in which the Quintet had played for years. As Reid points out, "Sahm got extremely tired of the routine with the Sir Douglas

ago before they began extensive touring throughout the Southwest. Which is kind of amusing considering all the Tex-Mex originals, polkas, and Dixieland they play in comparison to pure country. And which gets real funny because every member of the high time octet is a San Antonio product."⁶⁴

It is somewhat ironic that Meyers and Sahm were steeped in the unique musical environment of San Antonio, yet they were thought of by many fans as being an integral part of the Austin music community. In reality, Meyers and Sahm had simply brought the West Side Sound to Austin and made it part of the evolving musical environment there. Veteran Austin musician, Danny Roy Young, believes that much of the Austin music scene developed as it did because of Doug Sahm's presence there.

(The Texas Tornados CD) featured a mix of ballads, country, R&B, conjunto, and rock and roll, sung in both English and Spanish.

Quintet, lapsed into semi-retirement for a while, then, in 1973, enlisted a superstar array of sidemen that included Bob Dylan and Dr. John and resurfaced with a country-rock-blues album."⁶¹ That album, of course, is the Doug Sahm and Band record, which also features Flaco Jiménez.

It was around this time, in the early 1970s, that Doug Sahm began spending more time in Austin. Reid acknowledges Sahm's contribution to the Austin scene, saying that "his music was still more a reflection of the diversity of San Antonio," pointing out that Sahm used a "scatter-gun approach," moving effortlessly from one genre to another. This approach proved to be widely popular in Austin. Sahm soon became a regular in Austin clubs, such as the famed Armadillo World Headquarters and Soap Creek Saloon. In so doing, Sahm not only brought the unique diversity of San Antonio's West Side Sound to Austin, but he also contributed significantly to the eclectic sound that has become a hallmark of the Austin music scene."⁶²

Soon after Sahm moved to Austin, Augie Meyers arrived with his group, the Western Head Band. During the group's first performance there, Meyers quickly recognized the tremendous growth of the Austin music scene. Between songs, he turned to the audience and said, "Austin just keeps growing, don't it?"⁶³ Joe Nick Patoski, who later wrote Selena's biography, commented on The Western Head Band two years after Meyers started playing in Austin:

Their loose, easy going type of dance music definitely has a countrified flavor to it and the group first made their reputation here in Austin two years

Young says that the Progressive Country movement, lauded so publicly by *Rolling Stone*, "Started developing...in large part because of Doug, and all the players, all the hipsters, and all the artists all started coming up [from San Antonio and South Texas] to this part of the country...This was giving us something different; it had this great creative energy, and a huge part of it was that San Antonio sound. It was that great, great, Tex-Mex background...it was that conjunto/country, etc." Lucky Tomblin, a singer-songwriter and long-time friend of Sahm, says that "It was just a mix of all those styles. The conjunto, the Chicano, and the country-western."⁶⁵ Although this topic deserves further study, it is clear that, in regard to Austin in the 1970s, the West Side Sound had an important impact on the Progressive Country scene, which, in turn, helped redefine mainstream country music.

The most recent phase in the evolution of the West Side Sound occurred during the 1990s, with an unprecedented national and international groundswell in popularity of Latino music and culture. According to *San Antonio Express-News* columnist Ramiro Burr, one reason for this upswing in interest, especially among young Latinos, is that it became "OK, that it is uniquely American, to celebrate one's own culture, and that of our neighbors as well."⁶⁶ This celebration of collective culture had always been an essential part of the development of the West Side Sound. During the explosion of interest in Latino music during the 1990s, Meyers and Sahm came together once again, this time with Flaco Jiménez and Freddy Fender (born Baldemar Huerta), to create the super group, the Texas Tornados.

Meyers, Sahm, Jiménez, and Fender actually formed the

Texas Tornados in 1989. The following year, they released their first album, *Texas Tornados*. The CD was very much a reflection of those earlier influences from San Antonio's unique West Side Sound. It featured a mix of ballads, country, R&B, conjunto, and rock and roll, sung in both English and Spanish. In 1991, the album charted on Billboard's rock, Latin, and country charts, and also won a Grammy.⁶⁷ The West Side Horns, a horn section formed by several veteran San Antonio musicians, often

commented that, one of the two CDs they produced, *Juke Box Music*, included some of his favorite musicians. "We had George Raines from [Austin] on drums, and Jack Barber [on bass]," as well as one of Antone's favorite San Antonio vocalists, Randy Garibay. Following the recordings, Antone and his record label helped sponsor a tour of the group that included Los Angeles and New York.⁶⁹

Sahm's second release on the Antone's label, *The Last Real*

I went down Nogalitos, looking for barbacoa and Big Red; Yes, I went down Nogalitos, looking for barbacoa and Big Red; I could have had some menudo, but I had some cabeza instead!

backed up the Tornados when they toured nationally and internationally. Spot Barnett, a founding member of the Horns, recalls that the group was the "icing" on the cake when they played behind the popular Tornados:

Now, this is what we did all through Europe. And I'm talkin' about London, Paris, Germany, Holland, Switzerland. They would put the light on us when we were actively playing...Yeah, we gave the show class. We gave it the icing.⁶⁸

Other members of the West Side Horns include Rocky Morales, Louis Bustos, Al Gomez, and Sauce Gonzalez, who played keyboards with Sonny Ozuna on *American Bandstand* in 1963 and with Joe Hernandez during his heyday in the 1970s. Having the West Side Horns join the Texas Tornados to perform a variety of musical styles was perhaps the ultimate fruition of the West Side Sound. Because of the band's tremendous popularity worldwide, the unique musical amalgamation born in San Antonio in the 1950s was finally making its way out to nearly every corner of the globe during the 1990s. Sadly, this marriage of diverse musical talents did not last long. Dough Sahm died suddenly in 1999, and the Texas Tornados have remained largely inactive ever since.

Sahm also had been quite active as a solo artist at the same time that the Texas Tornados were becoming so internationally popular. He went back to his West Side Sound roots with two releases, *Juke Box Music* and *Last Real Texas Blues Band*, both released on Antone's Records. These CDs reflect a variety of regional influences, including Guitar Slim, T-Bone Walker, and other Texas and Louisiana blues artists. In 1988, Clifford Antone, owner of the legendary Austin blues club, Antone's, heard Sahm and Randy Garibay performing songs from some of these artists. Antone told them, "Let's record this; don't wait any longer," and they soon went into the studio. Antone later

Texas Blues Band, came in 1994 and included the West Side Horns. It featured covers by Lowell Fulson, T-Bone Walker, and several Louisiana "Swamp Pop" tunes, such as "Bad Boy" and "I'm a Fool to Care." The CD was recorded live at Antone's in Austin. Although it did not win, the record was nominated for a Grammy in 1995.

Sahm had developed a large international fan base long before he joined the Texas Tornados, and his worldwide popularity continued to grow throughout the 1990s. Debora Hanson, Sahm's personal manager during the final years of his life, recalls how popular he was in Europe. At a concert in Lucerne, Switzerland, in 1998, Sahm and his Last Real Texas Blues Band played at a casino in which the proprietors opened several doors to let the large crowd in. Hanson remembers that it was "wall to wall people. You couldn't get through the crowd; it was that tight." Perhaps, because of poor planning on the part of the casino's management, the musicians were brought into the building at the opposite end of the room from the stage and had to force their way through the massive crowd to get to the front of the hall. The band's normal routine was to start without Sahm to get the crowd warmed up and then bring him out on stage. When the time came for Sahm to appear, however, Hanson had to push people out of the way, so that Sahm could finally reach the stage. A similar situation occurred after the show, as hundreds of adoring fans tried to get close enough to touch Sahm.⁷⁰

In Belgium, during the same tour, Sahm and the band were being transported in a van to and from the stage area at an outdoor festival. After the show, Hanson ushered the musicians into the van in an attempt to leave quickly. According to Hanson, when Sahm got into the van, "The fans were literally coming in right behind Doug." Hanson told the driver to "Drive on," but he would not move, because the frenzied fans were still trying to come through the door. Finally, in desperation, Hanson had to push her way to the front of the

van. Crawling over a startled Rocky Morales, she shut and locked the door and insisted that the driver “get going.” The driver finally began moving.⁷¹

Flaco Jiménez also gained further national and international recognition during the 1980s and 1990s. In addition to the Grammy he won with the Tornados, he received one for Best Mexican-American Music Performance in 1987 with *Ay Te Dejo en San Antonio*, another for Best Mexican-American Music Performance in 1995 with *Flaco Jiménez*, in 1996 as Best Mexican-American/Tejano Music Performance with the same recording from the previous year, and yet another Grammy in 1998 for the Tejano category with *Said and Done*. Jiménez says that, what works best for him is to play a combination of polkas, boleros, country, and even rock and roll. Jiménez, and most conjunto musicians, also have drawn from the musical traditions of the large German-American population around San Antonio. In fact, the accordion and the polka tradition probably entered the Mexican-American musical repertoire in the mid-1800s, as a result of the large influx of German immigrants into Central Texas around that time. As Jiménez describes it, “I mean, you know, sharing cultures, sharing music, blending different kinds of music together man, it’s just fun, fun, fun and having a good time. It’s the main thing.”⁷²

Jiménez recorded his latest two CDs, *Sleepy Town* and *Squeeze Box King*, in his own studio. In keeping with his West Side Sound roots, these CDs feature a mix of country, conjunto, and rock and roll, with lyrics in both English and Spanish. Like Doug Sahm, Jiménez has become very popular in Europe and elsewhere throughout the world. The popularity of his accordion playing has spawned numerous conjunto bands in such seemingly unlikely places as Japan and the Netherlands.

Another key figure in the development of the West Side Sound was the late Randy Garibay. He never became as well known outside of Texas as Sahm, Meyers, and Jiménez, but Garibay’s rendition of the West Side Sound style, steeped heavily in blues and R&B, resonated well beyond the San Antonio music community. His three CDs, *Chicano Blues Man*, *Barbacoa Blues*, and *Invisible Society*, reflect a strong blues and R&B influence, but they also reveal the impact Mexican-American music had on Garibay, who grew up as a child of migrant Mexican farm workers. His signature song, “Barbacoa Blues,” which features Al Gomez on trumpet and Garibay on lead guitar, blends blues with distinct Chicano lyrics. His soulful voice, which has been compared to Bobby Bland’s, immediately cuts through to the listener:

*I went down Nogalitos, looking for barbacoa and Big Red;
Yes, I went down Nogalitos, looking for barbacoa and Big Red;
I could have had some menudo, but I had some cabeza instead!*

Garibay won a number of awards during his career. In 1994 and 1995, he won the Pura Vida Hispanic Music Award. In 1996, he received the West Side Rhythm and Blues Award, and just before Garibay died in 2002, Charlie Alvarado presented him the first Jiveman Award.⁷³ Garibay also was chosen as the featured performer at the 1998 Chicano Music Awards. Chicano filmmaker Efrain Guterrez perhaps paid Garibay the highest compliment of all when he used eight of his songs in the soundtrack for his 2001 film *Lowrider Spring Break en San Quilmas*. Before he passed away, Garibay teamed up with Ricardo Montalban and Cheech Marin in an ongoing effort to make Chicanos more “visible,” as he put it, to mainstream America. Garibay called it the “Power of visibility for Chicanos.”⁷⁴ To that end, he wrote the title track for his 2001 CD, *Invisible Society*. It is a hard rocking tune that carries a strong political message:

*I fought your wars, washed your cars
I even shined your shoes.
I cooked your meals, worked your fields
But me you still refuse.
Invisible society – is what you want to see.
Invisible Society – won’t even look at me.*

Garibay’s songs represented how far some parts of Texas society had progressed, in terms of cross-cultural interaction, but they also reflected the persistent barriers to true social equality. For generations, Mexican Americans had faced widespread discrimination in employment, education, and other areas. This began to slowly change in the latter half of the twentieth century, but only after Mexican-American activists, including such musicians as Randy Garibay and Joe Hernandez, convinced other Americans to recognize the social, political, and economic significance of Mexican Americans.

Another pioneer of the West Side Sound who has left an indelible mark on Texas music is Clifford Scott. Before his death in 1993, the man who was known by his friends as “Scotty,” played throughout San Antonio. He did release one record, “Mr. Honky Tonk is Back in Town,” on the New Rose label in 1992.⁷⁵ Frank Rodarte has referred to Scott as his “mentor,” and, along with Randy Garibay, San Antonio jazz bassist George Prado, and others, Rodarte had the honor of playing at Scott’s funeral. Rodarte recalled, “His sister requested that I play at his funeral...I did ‘Honky Tonk’ at the open casket...We played all of Clifford’s favorite songs,” such as “There Is No Greater Love” and “As Time Goes By.”⁷⁶ In addition to the great respect he earned from fellow musicians, Clifford Scott’s legacy is his unique tenor saxophone style, which is still celebrated by Rodarte, Charlie Alvarado, Spot Barnett, Rocky Morales, Al Gomez, and Louis Bustos, of which

the latter four are current members of the West Side Horns.

The West Side Horns still perform today, both as a band and as a back up group for such acts as Cats Don't Sleep, Randy Garibay's former band. Garibay's brother, Ernie, now leads Cats Don't Sleep. Randy's daughter, Michelle Garibay-Carey, who sang a soulful rendition of "At Last" on *Invisible Society*, also performs with the group and with the modern jazz group, Planet Soul. The West Side Horns also performed on the recent CD, *I Heard it on the X*, by the eclectic Texas group Los Super Seven.

Augie Meyers continues to make and market his own CDs, including his latest, *Blame it on Love*, and he recently played organ on Bob Dylan's CD, *Love and Theft*. Although semi-retired, Flaco Jiménez still performs in the Alamo City and occasionally tours Europe. Frank Rodarte has a Catholic music ministry called Unidos that plays weekly in churches throughout San Antonio. Rodarte and his musical partner, Danny Ornales, also perform in small venues around the city.⁷⁷

The West Side Sound musicians made substantial, if largely overlooked, contributions to the development of Texas and American music. They are a remarkable example of people from different ethnic and racial backgrounds who made a conscious decision to transcend social barriers and share their culture with others. The city of San Antonio has long been a

unique place, especially as a major urban center in the South, and its uniqueness has allowed for a more pluralistic, multi-cultural environment to flourish. The West Side Sound is a dynamic musical manifestation of that multi-culturalism present in San Antonio.

As a topic of scholarly research, the West Side Sound phenomenon deserves more attention. It should be recognized as a distinctly Texas genre that blends African-American, Mexican-American, Anglo-American, and even German-American influences into one complex yet broadly appealing style. In a very real sense, the West Side Sound reflects the rich and diverse cultural influences that have made Texas music so unique and dynamic. As historian Gary Hartman notes, "Partly because Texas was less strictly segregated than the Deep South, and partly because the rugged environment of the western frontier necessitated cooperation among traditionally disparate groups, people of different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds interacted somewhat more freely in Texas than in other parts of the South, exchanging musical ideas and influences in the process."⁷⁸ The West Side Sound represents the open acceptance of such diverse cultural backgrounds and goes beyond simple tolerance to actually embracing the best that each of these ethnic groups has to offer. ■

Notes

1. See Jim Beal, Jr. "Rockin' S.A.: Local Scene Always had a Spanish Accent," *San Antonio Express-News*, Section G, Page 1, October 4, 2000; Hank Harrison *San Antonio Jazz: The Golden Years*, (San Antonio: KLRN Learning Place, 1998); and Allen O. Olsen, "The Native Born Troubadours of San Antonio and the Roots of the West Side Sound," *Buddy*, April 2002. The author would like to thank Beal, Harrison, and the many musicians who gave of their time for oral interviews. Thanks also to Sauce Gonzalez, who has legal rights to the names *Sauce and the West Side Sound* and *Sauce and the West Side Horns*.
2. *Texas Monthly* has recently dubbed this song the number one Texas song of all time. See "The 100 Best Texas Songs," *Texas Monthly*, April 2004.
3. "Hey Baby, Que Paso?" is one well-known example. This song helped give rise to the city's "Puro San Antonio" tourist promotion.
4. During the early years of the West Side Sound, Garibay played with San Antonio bands, such as the Del Kings and Charlie and the Jives.
5. *La Prensa* March 11, 1956, 2, March 18, 1956, 2, and March 25, 1956, 2.
6. The Del Kings became *Los Blues* toward the end of their tenure at the Sahara and made one record for United Artists in 1971.
7. Jim Beal, Jr. "Rockin' S.A."
8. Few know of Scott's influence, as well as the fact that Scott joined Lionel Hampton's orchestra. See author's interviews with Spot Barnett, March 10, 2004, Charlie Alvarado, May 10, 2004, Rocky Morales, March 3, 2004, and Frank Rodarte, January 30, 2004.
9. Alan Govenar, "The Blues," *The Handbook of Texas Music*, edited by Roy Barkley, et al., (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2003), 25.
10. Author's interview with Spot Barnett, March 10, 2004, 28.
11. For very good studies of these Latin styles and others, see Guadalupe San Miguel, Jr., "Música Tejana: Nuestra Música," *Journal of Texas Music History*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 24-35; See also the following by Manuel Peña: *Música Tejana: The Cultural Economy of Artistic Transformation*, (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 1999), *The Texas-Mexican Conjunto: History of a Working Class Music* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), and *The Mexican-American Orquesta: Music, Culture and the Dialectic of Conflict* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999).
12. Author's interview with Augie Meyers, February 9, 2004, 2. Meyers says that he and Sahm, at the ages of 12 and 13, were able to sit in at the Eastwood Country Club and listen to such famous musicians as T-Bone Walker, Bobby Bland, and Albert King.
13. See Jan Reid, *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock* (Austin: Heidelberg Publishers, 1974); See also Cory Lock, "Counterculture Cowboys: Progressive Texas Country of the 1970s and 1980s," *The Journal of Texas Music History*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 15-23.
14. Author's interview with Charlie Alvarado, May 10, 2004, 13. In the formative period of the genre, Alvarado's "For the Rest of my Life" featured a multicultural variant of the West Side Sound. The song is clearly rhythm and blues, but the harmonies are in thirds, as is the sax solo, both of which are exemplary of the mariachi and bolero styles of voicing in thirds.
15. Elisabeth Gareis, "Intercultural Friendship: Five Case Studies of German Students in the USA," *Intercultural Studies*, April 2000, Vol. 21, Issue 1., 79-158.
16. Author's telephone interview with Rocky Morales, March 3, 2004.
17. Author's interview with Frank Rodarte, January 30, 2004, 11.
18. Daniel A. Yon, "Urban Portraits of Identity: on the problem of knowing culture and identity in intercultural studies," *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 2000, 144.
19. Author's interview with Charlie Alvarado, May 10, 2004. Alvarado's exposure to African-American music came at a very early age when he and his brother shared a radio set on which they listened to such styles as Bebop. Alvarado later listened to San Antonio's Scratch Phillips and his "Ebony Theater," which aired on KCOR TV channel 41. Charlie and the Jives later appeared on that show.
20. Author's interview with Jack Barber, August 5, 2004.
21. Shi-Xu "Critical Pedagogy and Intercultural Communication: creating discourses of diversity, equality, common goals, and rational-moral motivation," *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 3, 2001, 279.
22. See Peña's *The Texas-Mexican Conjunto*, 164, in which he argues that "the existence of ethnic differences have often been the friction that sets off the spark of conflict in intercultural contact."
23. In *Critical Pedagogy and Intercultural Communication*, 283, Shi-Xu agrees that, although groups interact from the point of view

- of an ongoing power struggle, people do have the power to transform themselves. This is what the West Side Sounds musicians did.
24. Author's interview with Spot Barnett, 25. All of the musicians interviewed agreed that race is not an issue here. This refutes assertions made by music historians, such as Jon Michael Spencer, who insist that only African Americans can legitimately play black music. See Jon Michael Spencer *Blues and Evil* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1993).
 25. Interview with Spot Barnett; also see Robert A. Goldberg, "Racial Change on the Southern Periphery: The Case of San Antonio, Texas, 1960-1965," *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (Aug., 1983), 349-374. On page 351, Goldberg says "The city had never passed a segregation ordinance, but custom and the Police Department enforced racial segregation." Segregation was enforced in settings such as public education, public facilities, and civic activities. However African Americans did not express their displeasure of the existing order with more assertive methods that often were used elsewhere throughout the Deep South during this period.
 26. Goldberg, *Racial Change on the Southern Periphery*, 351. I am indebted to Dr. Thomas Clarkin of San Antonio College's history department for bringing this article to my attention.
 27. Ibid., 350-352. Goldberg does an excellent job of describing the difficulties facing blacks in the city before 1960 and how religious leaders worked closely with city leaders to peacefully address segregationist issues.
 28. See "San Antonio Taking Calm Attitude Toward Mixing of Races in Schools," *San Antonio Light*, June 24, 1955, 14 A; "More San Antonio School Districts Integrate," *San Antonio Register*, July 22, 1955, 1; and "Stop Political Quibbling on Integration," *San Antonio Light*, August 28, 1955, 2B. The Catholic schools in San Antonio desegregated the year before. However, blacks still faced segregation in the Alamo City at lunch counters, movie theaters, and the annual policeman's ball. What is striking is that these issues were settled peacefully and without much incident.
 29. Bernard Brister, "Radio," *The Handbook of Texas Music*, 191-192.
 30. *San Antonio Light*, June 25, 1955, p. 2A; March 8, 1956, p. 4F; April 29, 1956, 4F.
 31. Cathy Brigham "Louisiana Hayride," *The Handbook of Texas Music*, 191-192.
 32. *San Antonio Light*, June 10, 1955, 24 and June 17, 1955,
 33. HEB took out a full page add on June 16, in which the grocery chain offered prizes, such as free tickets to the show, 45 Roy Rogers buck horses, and 60 Roy Rogers pup tents.
 34. David Nevin "Roy Rogers Puts on More Show than Rodeo," *San Antonio Light*, June 19, 1955, 8D.
 35. *San Antonio Light*, August 19, 1955, 1 and August 24, 1955, 1. The article of June 19 reported that the winner of the pre-school frontier costume award went to two Mexican-American siblings, Julio and Esmerelda Benavides.
 36. *San Antonio Light*, June 10, 1955, 22.
 37. Author's interview with Flaco Jiménez, April 2, 2004, 15; *La Prensa*, February 16 and February 12, 1956, 2; *La Prensa*, February 23, 1956, 2; and *La Prensa*, March 1, 1956, 2.
 38. *La Prensa*, March 25, 1956, 2.
 39. *La Prensa*, September 13, 1955, 2. This is one of the few large advertisements that the newspaper used to promote a conjunto group. This paper represented mostly middle-class Mexican Americans, who often looked down on the music of working-class Mexican Americans. For an analysis of the cultural tensions between working and middle-class Tejanos, see Peña's *Música Tejana and Texas-Mexican Conjunto*.
 40. *San Antonio News*, April 7, 1953, 3A.
 41. *La Prensa*, May 8, 1958, 16, and May 12 through 18, 16.
 42. *La Prensa*, March 19, 1956.
 43. Hank Harrison, *San Antonio Jazz: The Golden Age*, San Antonio: KLRN, 1998.
 44. Author's interview with Spot Barnett; *San Antonio Register*, October 16, 1953, 7, October 30, 1953, 7, November 2, 1953, 7, November 6, 1953, 7, November 13, 1953, 7, July 8, 1955, 7, and September 23, 1955, 7.
 45. Karla Peterson "Eastwood Country Club," *The Handbook of Texas Music*, 91. More open and frequent jam sessions were held at Club Ebony where Spot Barnett and the various combos he led there often invited Doug Sahm, Rocky Morales, Randy Garibay, and others to play with them.
 46. Beal, "Rockin' S.A."
 47. Author's interview with Augie Meyers.
 48. The *San Antonio Light* ran a four-part series on the rock and roll craze, largely reiterating the fears that local authorities had regarding the raucous nature of the genre. See the *Light* June 17-20, 1956.
 49. Author's interview with Charlie Alvarado, 8.
 50. Joe Nick Patoski "Uno, Dos, One, Two Tres, Quatro," *Journal of Texas Music History*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 12-14; Author's interview with Sauce Gonzalez and Spot Barnett, June 4, 2004. Gonzalez recalled that, while the band was told that they would be performing live, they did resort to lip-syncing.
 51. Coincidentally, Meaux also managed Sunny and the Sunglows. Apparently, neither Meyers nor Sahm really liked the "Fab Four."
 52. Interview with Augie Meyers. The Sir Douglas Quintet later moved to San Francisco and played at the Avalon Ballroom and Golden State Park. They had a minor hit in 1969 with "Mendocino."
 53. Peña, *The Mexican-American Orquesta*, 233. Peña calls this musical mixing within a song "bimusicality."
 54. Interview with Sauce Gonzalez and Spot Barnett, June 4, 2004.
 55. Documentary film producer Jeremy Marre's *Tex-Mex: Music of the Texas Mexican Borderlands*, (Newton, New Jersey: Shanachie, 1982). Hernandez, and later Garibay, were the only two who frequently spoke out on political issues. While Flaco Jiménez recorded a number of boleros during the 1960s, he admits that he did it more to put bread on his table than for his personal views of race and politics. See author's interview with Flaco Jiménez.
 56. Author's interview with Frank Rodarte, 12-13.
 57. Marre, *Tex-Mex*.
 58. Author's interview with Frank Rodarte 12. The narrator of *Tex-Mex* made another mistake, this time in his analysis of Flaco Jiménez's "Pantalone Blue Jeans," by saying that the song is about a young Chicano who cannot find his place in Anglo society. Jiménez refutes this claim. See author's interview with Flaco Jiménez, 33, as well as Ingrid Kokinda's 1986 oral interview with Jiménez in the University of Texas at San Antonio's Institute of Texan Cultures Archives, OHT 781.764 J61, 8.
 59. Aaron Howard, "Flaco Jiménez about fame and music on the Texas border," accessed at <http://www.rootsworld.com/interview/flaco.html>.
 60. Author's interview with Flaco Jiménez, 30.
 61. Howard, "Flaco Jiménez about fame and music on the Texas border."
 62. Reid, *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*, 1-12, 43. Reid notes that the best known musician to tire of Nashville and return to Texas was Willie Nelson.
 63. Ibid. See also author's interviews with Debra Hanson, Gary Hartman, Lucky Tomblin, and Danny Roy Young, September 10, 2004.
 64. Ibid. 83.
 65. Joe Nick Patoski *Papers*, Southwestern Writer's Collection/Texas State University, San Marcos, Box 408, Folder 3, Document 1.
 66. Author's interview with Debra Hanson, Lucky Tomblin, and Danny Roy Young, September 10, 2004.
 67. Ramiro Burr, *The Billboard Guide to Tejano and Regional Mexican Music*, (New York: Billboard Books, 1999), 44.
 68. James Head, "Douglas Wayne Sahm," *The Handbook of Texas Music*, 281.
 69. Author's interview with Spot Barnett, March 10, 2004, 29-30.
 70. Author's interview with Clifford Antone, September 10, 2004.
 71. Author's interview with Debra Hanson, September 10, 2004.
 72. Ibid.
 73. Author's interview with Flaco Jiménez, April 2, 2004, 37.
 74. Jackie Potts, "Randy Beltran Garibay," *The Handbook of Texas Music*, 114. Part of the Jivemen Award given to Garibay states that "The first award of The Jivemen goes to the artist who wrote 'Where Are They Now?'" Garibay was a member of Charlie and the Jives in the early 1960s.
 75. Author's phone interview with Randy Garibay, November 9, 2000.
 76. Karla Peterson, "Clifford Scott," *The Handbook of Texas Music*, 284.
 77. Author's interview with Frank Rodarte, January 30, 2004, 26.
 78. Unfortunately Rodarte never recorded his own material after *Los Blues Volume 1* in 1971.
 79. Gary Hartman, "Country and Western Music," *The Handbook of Texas Music*, 66. It should be noted that this is not to suggest that intolerance and racial discrimination have not had a strong presence throughout Texas history. They certainly have. However, Texas tended to have a more ethnically diverse population and a less rigidly structured system of racial segregation than many other southern states.

Honky Tonk Hero

by Billy Joe Shaver, assisted by Brad Reagan (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005).

"Billy Joe Shaver may be the best songwriter alive today" (Willie Nelson). "Our generation's Jimmie Rodgers" (Randall Jaimail). "Probably the last great cowboy poet" (*No Depression*). "He's as real a writer as Hemingway" (Kris Kristofferson). "If Carl Sandburg had come from Waco, his name would be Billy Joe Shaver" (Kinky Friedman). "Billy Joe is not all there" (Tom T. Hall). Yes, Billy Joe Shaver has earned the respect of songwriters and critics alike. It is sweet recognition indeed for a life that has had more than its share of highs and lows, and *Honky Tonk Hero* provides an opportunity to gain additional insight into the man who has written such classics as "Old Five and Dimers Like Me" and "I'm Just an Old Chunk of Coal."

The story goes something like this: Shaver's father abandoned him before birth, and his mother later left him behind to be raised, hardscrabble style, by his grandmother. He dropped out of school in the eighth grade and was tossed out of the U.S. Navy by the time he was twenty. Other jobs, such as truck driver, cowpuncher, sawmill worker (when he lost parts of three fingers in an accident), car salesman, and roofer (when he fell two stories to the ground and crushed two vertebrae in his back) proved to be just as transitory. Married three times to the same woman and divorced twice, Shaver lived the fast life of booze and drugs in the 1960s and 1970s while moving back and forth between Texas and Nashville, writing, pitching, and eventually recording his songs. After a "born-again" experience in the late 1970s, he cleaned up his act only to have tragedy strike again in recent years. Within a period of a year, both his mother and wife Brenda succumbed to cancer, and his only son, Eddy, died of a heroin overdose under what remain mysterious circumstances. Still later, Shaver suffered a heart attack on stage and underwent quadruple bypass surgery, but he never stopped writing songs.

If the story is largely a familiar one, it is because Shaver has repeated it in numerous interviews. This time around, though, he has the opportunity to tell things com-

pletely in his own words, natural and unvarnished, right down to the cussing. The cast of characters is impressive to say the least: Hank Williams, Elvis Presley, Townes Van Zandt, Willie Nelson, Harlan Howard, Bobby Bare, Kris Kristofferson, Waylon Jennings, Joe Jaimail, Darrell Royal, Guy Clark, Kinky Friedman, Dickey Betts, Johnny Cash, and Robert Duvall. Still, there are some odd omissions, incidents Shaver has touched on before. For example, there is no mention of the first time Billy Joe met Willie Nelson (in Waco or was it Houston?); or the humorous, bittersweet anecdote of Billy Joe trying to keep his wife Brenda, who was dying of cancer, alive as long as possible by telling her Townes Van Zandt would be waiting in heaven. Brenda, you see, hated Townes with a passion.

Honky Tonk Hero blends the spiritual and the earthly, and Shaver proudly wears his religion on his sleeve: "Forgiveness is divine and I forgive anyone who ever wronged me." Growing up in Corsicana, Shaver enjoyed going to church. He liked "talking to God," too, and the conversation has continued over the years. As for his priorities now, he is unequivocally clear, "I read the Bible every day. It's how I stay close to Jesus and you know what I say? If you don't love Jesus, go to hell."

Shaver pulls no punches when it comes to his friends either. On Waylon Jennings, "Waylon didn't pay attention to anybody but himself." On Bobby Bare, "I learned a lot from Bobby. Mostly what not to do." On Johnny and June Carter Cash, "They were the kind of people that swept things like that under the rug, even though just about everyone in the family carried some sort of addiction." On Kinky Friedman, "it's never a good idea to listen to Kinky, actually."

The presence of his wife Brenda permeates the pages. Theirs was a forty year love affair; yet, Shaver offers a surprising confession, "Did Brenda love me? I think she did." In addition to Brenda, two other women had a significant impact on Shaver. From his grandmother, Birdie Lee Collins Watson, he learned that life is best met head on with honesty, hard work, and

no complaining. Ms. Mabel Legg, a high school English teacher who recognized Billy Joe's talent in the seventh grade, also offered advice he never forgot: "As long as you are honest with what you write, you will always have something special to say."

And this is one of the pleasures of *Honky Tonk Hero*. While the narrative occupies a mere seventy-two pages, the remaining one hundred-sixteen pages reprint the complete lyrics to the recorded songs Shaver has written (up to 2004). Throughout, Ms. Legg's advice comes through loud and clear. Over the course of fifteen albums (the last two not included here) and one hundred-plus songs, Billy Joe also proves that life *is* poetry. And he rightfully affirms, "To me the song is poetry. That's all it is. It's the way I describe the world around me ... I believe my songs will live long after I'm gone."

Another special feature of *Honky Tonk Hero* is the inclusion of a cache of photographs, a family photo album if you will, which provide faces for his father Buddy, mother Tincie, grandmother Birdie Lee, and Brenda, along with poses struck with compadres such as Willie, Waylon, Robert Duvall, and Kinky Friedman. Especially poignant are the shots of Billy Joe and Eddy taken over the years, reaffirming their relationship as father and son, as well as friends and musical companions.

The photographs on the dust jacket are worth mentioning, too. The front cover dust jacket shot comes courtesy of the lens of legendary photographer Jim Marshall and dates to 1973 when it originally graced the cover of Shaver's first album, *Old Five and Dimers Like Me*. Marshall's Leica captured the relaxed, hell-bent naturalism of the outlaw poet from Texas. The back cover dust jacket photo, taken by Laura Wilson more than thirty years later, finds Shaver striking a similar pose, and if there is a bit more jowl in the cheek and gray in the hair, Shaver's smile and swagger, not to mention the belt buckle, are still the same.

Joe W. Specht

Showtime at the Apollo: The Story of Harlem's World Famous Theater

by Ted Fox, (Rhinebeck, New York: Mill Road Enterprises, 2003)

Today, New York City's sidewalks are undulating seas of earphones, wires and iPods. People still love music as much as ever, but more often than not they receive it directly from machine to brain. Not so long ago music rode from stage to crowd on waves of spotlight glare and breath in a city whose musical geography was marked out by performance landmarks: The Savoy Ballroom, CBGB's, The Fillmore East, and Birdland. And, if music is the destination rather than a mere travel companion, *no* destination is more storied than the Apollo Theatre. Ted Fox's *Showtime at the Apollo*—re-issued for the theatre's 70th anniversary—provides a decade-by-decade insider's history of the Harlem theatre that defined African-American performance for much of the twentieth century.

Take a Wednesday night in 1956, for example, and drop in on Amateur Night at the Apollo. A notoriously demanding crowd always assembles on Amateur Night. The terrified contestant who hits a flat note or fails to come across with honesty faces the wrath of "Pop" Johnson, handkerchief over his head and whistle in his mouth, perched in the right stage side box, "Porto Rico" and his deadly cap pistol, or Geech, the comedian who roams the aisles crying out for his girlfriend Hester. It's a tough crowd, but this Amateur Night, a brash young singer—recently arrived from Georgia with no dancing shoes, no costume, and a straw suitcase—takes the stage. James Brown absolutely slays them, blazes off to his destiny as "Soul Brother Number One," and a career intimately tied to the Apollo, where in 1962 he would record his epic *Live at the Apollo Theater*. James Brown was not an isolated case. Other Amateur Night winners over the years included Sarah Vaughan, Pearl Bailey, Frankie Lymon, Wilson Pickett, Screamin' Jay Hawkins, Dionne Warwick, Ronnie Spector, and Gladys Knight, and these were just the *amateurs*.

In the 1920s, Harlem was hugely popular among whites out for an evening of exoticism, out for a taste of jazz, booze, and dancing girls at theatres that show-

cased black talent while often closed to the black residents of the neighborhood. On 125th Street, Hurtig and Seamon's Music Hall was one of the many burlesque theatres in the area, and one of the many that hit hard times when Mayor Fiorello La Guardia cracked down on burlesque in 1933. In 1934, Hurtig and Seamon's reopened as The Apollo Theatre, under the control of Austrian immigrant Leo Brecher and a former schoolteacher from the Lower East Side, Frank Schiffman. Schiffman's son Bobby later joined the team as well, having practically grown up at the theatre. The Apollo soon became the act to beat, "a sort of uptown Met dedicated to furious jazz, coffee-colored chorus girls and grinning...comedians," according to the 1937 *New York World-Telegram*. In Harlem, Fox tells us, Schiffman "was God—a five-foot-nine inch, white, Jewish, balding, bespectacled deity." Depending on who you listen to, Frank Schiffman either ruthlessly exploited black artists and black patrons alike, building the Apollo into a monopoly while enforcing a blacklist against performers who would dare to play a competing venue. Or, Schiffman was the only theatre manager in town to hire African Americans, helped to desegregate 125th Street businesses, provided a constant source of revenue for black artists, and gave entertainment to Harlem residents at prices they could afford. Fox leaves the reader to judge, while showing us Schiffman's greatest talent—his knack for relentlessly building the Apollo up as a brand name. At the height of its cultural power (and a tough time for business) in the late 1960s and 1970s, Schiffman could draw top acts for less money than they would make at bigger halls, simply because "The Apollo" was, well, "The Apollo."

None of Frank Schiffman's success would have been possible, of course, without the musical talent, and this is where the book shines. *Showtime at the Apollo* gives the reader a backstage view of black music's evolution in America,—big band jazz, bebop, soul, R&B, gospel, funk—from the 1930s to the 1970s, growing and changing with the tastes of the nation's

most influential urban African-American community. The method of the book is anecdotal; Fox collects the stories, organizes them by decade, and steps out of the way. Classic tales, such as the James Brown Amateur Night performance, are matched by lesser-known gems. Billie Holiday stuns the room into mesmerized silence performing the racially-charged "Strange Fruit" over Schiffman's objections. The audience walks out one night when Nina Simone tells them that she will sing "Porgy" when she is good and ready. Charlie Parker sends a note through the stage door begging cash from the band to pay his bar tab to some gangsters next door. Buddy Holly, one of the many white performers to play the Apollo over the years, takes the stage and is told by a woman in the front row that, "It'd better sound like the record!" He brings the house down with an acrobatic version of "Bo Diddley." Marvin Gaye, petrified of the Apollo crowd, flies to New York, loses his nerve, and flies back to Detroit. The Apollo served as a famous stage for black comedy as well, giving Sammy Davis, Jr., his first big break. Flip Wilson served as the emcee for years, while the notoriously "blue" Redd Foxx shocked one generation, and a young Richard Pryor the next.

By the 1970s the city was in trouble, Harlem was falling apart, and the Apollo, as it always had, went with the neighborhood. Riots had happened before, in the 1940s and 1960s, but the people always returned. Now the violence of the streets spilled into the Apollo. In 1975, a man was shot and killed in the balcony in the middle of a Smokey Robinson show. Performers had their dressing rooms cleared out while onstage, and drug deals were common in the theatre's darkened spaces. Meanwhile, the business of black music had changed, too. By the 1970s, black performers who had once been nourished by Harlem's loyal fans now no longer needed them to sell out stadiums. The Apollo, with about 1,600 seats, seemed a relic of a bygone age. Black music was now America's music. Fox argues that black music always had been

America's music. Big band jazz is the invention of Dizzy Gillespie or Duke Ellington, but Paul Whiteman gets the credit as the greatest bandleader. Screamin' Jay Hawkins invents the wild theatrics of rock and roll, while Elvis sells millions of records.

The primary weakness of *Showtime at the Apollo* is perhaps unavoidable. It is so good at giving us a 360-degree tour of life in one theatre, that when America's racial climate begins to change in the 1960s, we are left to view it with curiosity, from a distance, and without comprehension. Did the Apollo—the leading black theatre in America—help to cause the Civil

Rights movement? Fox concludes that the “general acceptance of black culture into American popular culture was the beginning of something brand new, but it was also the beginning of the end for the Apollo Theatre...it is the final irony that the ultimate casualty of this revolution was the Apollo itself.” We are left wanting to know much more about exactly how this all happened, but we will have to settle for a description of one final performance—George Clinton and Parliament Funkadelic in 1980, with pot smoke thick in the air, and the teenage crowd chanting along with P-Funk “one nation, united, under a groove.”

Actually, though, there is a coda to the demise of the Apollo. Today, you can go up to 125th Street and see an occasional show—the Apollo was saved by private investors and government development funds in the 1980s. You can watch the amateurs of today strut their stuff if your local television station picks up *Showtime at the Apollo*. Now a cultural landmark, you can visit the Apollo gift shop, take a tour of the theatre, and imagine the night that James Brown showed up with his straw suitcase. Then, listen to *Live at the Apollo* on your iPod as you take the subway home.

Scott Gabriel Knowles



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