




The Post-World War II “Chitlin’ Circuit” in San Antonio

and the Long-Term Effects of Intercultural Congeniality

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During the 1940s and 1950s, black musicians — the giants of jazz, R&B, and blues — traveled the so-called “chitlin’ circuit,” a network of African-American music venues stretching throughout the American South and Southwest.¹ Although their music is now considered among the greatest that our nation has ever produced, at the time, these artists faced widespread racial discrimination, and most were not allowed to play in the more prominent venues available to white performers. This not only limited the black artists’ ability to earn money, but it also prevented their music from reaching a larger audience. As a result, some of the most talented musicians of the era would never enjoy the financial success or public recognition of their white counterparts.

Despite being shut out of most “whites only” clubs, hundreds of African-American performers were able to make a modest living for years traveling the chitlin’ circuit. Although the pay, prestige, and working conditions may not have been as great as that found in more mainstream locales, the chitlin’ circuit did offer a vibrant, open atmosphere in which black entertainers interacted freely, exchanging musical ideas and innovations and sharing a rather intimate relationship with their audiences.

The history of the chitlin’ circuit is a relatively new topic of academic inquiry, so, secondary scholarship on the subject is somewhat limited. One of the challenges facing historians who do study the development of the chitlin’ circuit is that primary documentation often is hard to find. Much of what information is available comes from oral histories, which can be

subject to biases and inaccuracies on the part of both interviewers and interviewees, in large part because the passage of time can contribute to lapses in memory or even a distortion of the actual facts.

Despite the limitations on scholarship pertaining specifically to the chitlin' circuit, there is a large and growing body of published work related to African-American musical traditions in general.² Most of these provide valuable insight into the importance of music in the daily lives of black communities and especially how live music venues, such as those found along the chitlin' circuit,

However, dramatic changes began taking place in the Alamo City shortly after the Second World War, and these changes would make the community's musical venues markedly different from most other stops along the chitlin' circuit. Most notably, the more popular San Antonio chitlin' venues would become fully racially integrated by the 1950s, something that would not happen in other major urban areas until at least the 1960s. For a variety of reasons, mostly having to do with the city's unique ethnic makeup and a more progressive attitude among certain club owners, musicians and patrons of all races

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provided a vital arena in which musicians, fans, and others could congregate, socialize, and share musical culture.

Traveling musicians have always been important in the evolution of African-American music, and those who toured regularly on the chitlin' circuit were simply continuing an age-old tradition of bringing fresh musical ideas into black neighborhoods and helping to create the kind of communal events that brought people together to share in a dynamic cultural exchange. Musicologist David Evans points out just how important such traveling musicians and their public performances were to the celebrating and shaping of African-American folk culture throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries:

In the towns, blues musicians would gather and perform at cafes and saloons, on sidewalks and street corners, in parks, in railroad and bus stations, and inside and in front of places of business. In the cities, blues were sung in vaudeville theaters, saloons, cabarets, and at house parties, as well as in parks and on streets.³

San Antonio, Texas, on the southwestern fringes of the chitlin' circuit, was in some ways typical of the numerous towns along this network of musical venues through which so many black artists toured. With a substantial African-American population, the city had a number of segregated clubs that catered primarily to black audiences and musicians, especially prior to World War II. These included the Shadowland on Blanco Road, which attracted such notable performers as Louis Armstrong and was alternately the home base of Troy Floyd's Orchestra and Don Albert and His Ten Pals during the late 1920s and early 1930s.⁴

and backgrounds began to mingle freely and exchange musical ideas and influences at a time when the vast majority of chitlin' circuit performers and their audiences elsewhere did not.

What developed in San Antonio as a result of this openness was an atmosphere of "intercultural congeniality," in which a remarkable degree of musical cross-pollination took place among people of different ethnic and racial backgrounds. This not only affected the ways in which artists and audiences of the 1940s and 1950s shaped their music, but it also allowed younger baby boomer musicians and fans in San Antonio, who were raised on this rich mix of ethnic influences throughout the local club scene, to develop dynamic and eclectic new musical styles that would help carry the community's cultural traditions to the world stage.

What factors helped compel many of the city's nightclubs to allow, and even encourage, racial intermingling at a time when most of the South remained mired in long-standing segregationist policies? For one thing, San Antonio had always been an ethnically diverse community, beginning with both Spanish and Indian settlers in the 1700s and continuing throughout the 1800s, as blacks, Anglos, Irish, Germans, Czechs, French, Poles, and others poured into the area. By World War II, the city had a number of military installations that included high numbers of black and Hispanic servicemen and their families. When President Harry Truman desegregated the Armed Forces in 1948, it had a ripple effect throughout the town's large military population that reached into the general civilian population, as well. By the 1950s, San Antonio was well ahead of other large southern cities, in terms of racial integration. In fact, when the Supreme Court declared segregation in public education to be illegal in 1954, San Antonio became the first major urban center in the South to desegregate its schools.⁵

Although the city's police department continued to occasionally crack down on what some authorities considered improper social interaction between the races, many of San Antonio's citizens, especially those who frequented local nightclubs, seemed to embrace a very progressive attitude regarding racial integration. One of the first places that this intercultural contact occurred on a large scale following the war was in San Antonio's east side night clubs, the very venues that had been such an integral part of the segregated chitlin' circuit.

The overall openness and congenial ambiance found at the Keyhole Club, the Eastwood Country Club, and other San Antonio venues played an important role in facilitating this intercultural exchange among musicians and audiences. These popular night spots, as well as such municipal venues as the Library Auditorium and the Municipal Auditorium, were frequent stops for Dizzy Gillespie, Nat "King" Cole, Della Reese, Sarah Vaughan, Muddy Waters, Illinois Jacquet, Count Basie, Louis Armstrong, B.B. King, Bobby "Blue" Bland, Louis Jordan, and many other prominent black artists of the day. Often, when such stars were in town, local musicians could be found in the audience or even joining the big touring bands on stage to swap songs and jam.

Of course, these famous performers came to San Antonio not only for the ambiance and camaraderie found among hometown

audiences and musicians, but also because the money was good. Both Johnny Phillips, owner of the Eastwood Country Club, and Don Albert, at the Keyhole Club, were known for paying musicians well. Likewise, the Municipal Auditorium, as well as the Library Auditorium, also paid what was considered at the time to be a substantial amount for national touring acts.

B.B. King was one such well-established artist who benefited from San Antonio's supportive musical environment. In 1952, King released a remake of Lowell Fulson's "Three O'Clock Blues," which soon reached Number 1 on *Billboard's* R&B charts. Hoping to capitalize on the song's success, King contracted with Universal Attractions in New York to sponsor and coordinate his first major tour. Later that same year, he worked with the Buffalo Booking Agency in Houston to extend the junket. King recalls that sales of the single, along with his tour of the South, helped increase his earnings from \$85 to as much as \$2,500 per week. His stop in San Antonio on October 8, 1952, during which he performed at the Municipal Auditorium for \$1.50 per ticket, a tidy sum at that time, reflected the growing trend toward greater economic opportunity, at least for some black entertainers.⁶

The Library Auditorium, once located at Auditorium Circle on the near east side of San Antonio and now the home of the Carver Community Cultural Center, was another frequent stop for African-American performers brought to the city by Don Albert, Johnny Phillips, and other musical promoters. In October 1950, the "Four-Star Blues Cavalcade," featuring legendary guitarists T-Bone Walker and Lowell Fulson, along with Big Joe Turner performing his hit song "Shake, Rattle, and Roll," appeared at the Library Auditorium, with advance tickets selling for \$1.75 each.⁷

Well-known touring acts also played at several of the better-paying night clubs, including the Eastwood Country Club, located far out on East Houston Street near the town of St. Hedwig. An ad from the African-American newspaper *The San Antonio Register* announced the appearance of Bobby "Blue" Bland, Little Junior Parker, and Joe Fritz at the Eastwood on September 3, 1953. Tickets were \$1.75 in advance and \$2.00 at the door. Although cheap by today's standards, these were substantial prices to pay for concerts and nightclub shows at a time when the median family income in San Antonio was less than \$5,500 a year.⁸

As significant as it is that, by the 1950s, venues in Central Texas and elsewhere were beginning to pay many black artists better wages, it is also important to remember that San Antonio was home to a remarkably open, racially-integrated, and culturally diverse musical environment, in which local clubs welcomed both musicians and audiences from a wide variety of backgrounds. The openly interactive musical environment provided by the Eastwood, the Keyhole, and other San Antonio



Portrait of Dizzy Gillespie, New York, N.Y., ca. May 1947, -William P. Gottlieb Photographer. Courtesy of Library of Congress Prints & Photographs Division.



The Keyhole Club, San Antonio, Texas, 1950s. Courtesy of Kenneth Dominique, UTSA Institute of Texan Cultures.



venues has become the stuff of music legend. The intercultural exchange seen in these clubs during the 1950s and 1960s helped set a precedent for the broad-ranging musical cross-pollination that would help make nearby Austin famous for its dynamic and eclectic music scene by the early 1970s.

The Keyhole Club originally opened in 1944 at the corner of Iowa and Pine on San Antonio's east side. It would later reopen on Poplar Street. An article from *The San Antonio Register* announced the club's grand opening:

San Antonio's newest and most beautiful nightclub... "Don's Keyhole" will hold its formal opening Friday evening, Nov. 3, according to an announcement made this week by the owner and manger, Don Albert.⁹

Albert, who was a concert promoter and an accomplished jazz musician who performed with his own band from 1929 to 1940, used his status in the music world to bring many legendary artists to his club, including Louis Armstrong, Dizzy Gillespie, the Ink Spots, Louis Jordan, Count Basie, John Coltrane, Della Reese, and Duke Ellington. Not only did these performers respect Albert, but they appreciated the fact that he paid them well. Audiences certainly seemed eager to attend shows at the Keyhole, regardless of somewhat higher ticket prices. As Vernon "Spot" Barnett, who occasionally played in the club's house band, noted "People paid good money to be at the Keyhole."¹⁰

Tasty, home-cooked food was another feature that attracted musicians and patrons to the venue. Don Albert's son, Kenneth Dominique, recalls that his father loved to cook. "He cooked gumbo — which he liked — gumbo, fish, shrimp, oysters." Local pianist Mary Parchman remembers that the musicians also contributed to the cuisine at the Keyhole. "We would cook. We would take turns cooking. We would put our money all in a big pot [to] buy groceries... I remember Della Reese making the best spaghetti you ever tasted."¹¹

In addition to national acts, local entertainers of various types also performed regularly for Keyhole crowds when the touring bands were not playing. One man, who went by the name of "Iron Jaws," picked up tables and chairs with his teeth. Texas guitarist Sam Moore remembers that, "He [was] dancin' while he had that table in his mouth... That's something to see. People flocked there just to see that." Dominique also noted that "You could see the teeth print on the table after he'd finished with it." Another entertainer known as "Peg Leg Bates" often tap-danced on his wooden leg. Local radio personality Scratch Philips teamed up with another man called "Patch" for a comedy duo named "Patch and Scratch," which told jokes and tap-danced. A singer known as "Big Bertha" also was quite popular for her blues. "Oh yeah, Big Bertha was a devil of a blues singer," recalls

Sam Moore. "I mean, really good, and dance while she was belting the blues." Charles Bradley, a regular at the Keyhole, playfully observed "I don't know how well known she was, but she was pretty big around here; pretty big period!"¹²

In some ways, this diverse cast of characters who entertained regularly at the Keyhole reflects the club's openness to performers and audience members of all races and backgrounds, especially considering that the venue was integrated from the time it opened in 1944. June Parker, who was a regular patron at the Keyhole and who later joined the house band at the Eastwood Country Club, has astutely noted that, "It was the first integrated club here in San Antonio. So...everybody wanted to go there...And the people were just congenial. We didn't have any confusion." Anglos, Latinos, and African Americans regularly interacted with each other at the Keyhole Club. More than simply tolerating each other, these groups seemed to readily accept each other and share in a genuinely congenial atmosphere. Jack Judson, a Keyhole regular and an Anglo comments that, "There was never any kind of problems between the races or other types

In April 1950, Don Albert reopened his Keyhole Club on the city's west side at 1619 West Poplar. However, tensions between the San Antonio police and nightclub patrons erupted again, following the election of a new Commissioner of Fire and Police, George M. Roper. On June 22, 1951, Roper ordered the Keyhole shut down because of an allegedly unsafe roof. Albert and his business partner, Willie Winner, hired attorney Van Henry Archer, Jr., who in turn obtained a restraining order the very next day from Judge P.C. Saunders of the 37th District Court of Bexar County. Commissioner Roper's attempts to quash the restraining order in hearings with Albert and his attorney proved unsuccessful, and, in October of that same year, the case went before the Court of Civil Appeals, Fourth Supreme Judicial District of Texas in San Antonio. Associate Justice Jack Pope made his final ruling on October 17, 1951, stating that the closing of the Keyhole was not "due process of law. It is no process at all." Since police never produced any clear evidence that the roof was, indeed, defective, the court reprimanded Roper by ordering that he, the fire marshal, the police chief, and the building inspector

Anglos, Latinos, and African-Americans regularly interacted with each other at the Keyhole Club.

of people. Everybody was friendly with each other dancing on the floor. People bumped into each other, and nobody cared. Everybody was havin' a good time."¹³

Although these nightclub patrons may have been willing to disregard the artificial ethnic and racial boundaries of the time period, San Antonio police officials seemed determined to enforce the long-standing tradition of *de facto* segregation in such venues as the Keyhole and the Eastwood Country Club. As one club goer recalls, "If a black person danced with a black person you wouldn't have no trouble. But if a white woman danced with a black man, it's trouble with the police. They'd sure try to close you down."¹⁴

Don Albert's son, Kenneth Dominique remembers that, "[The police] didn't want to see this mixture, so they gave Dad a hard time." In order to put pressure on the club owners, authorities sometimes threatened to close down the Keyhole for other reasons, including alleged fire and safety code violations and drinking alcohol after midnight, which was illegal in public places in San Antonio at that time. Nevertheless, the club's regulars found ways to overcome such challenges. "What they would do after twelve o'clock at night — you couldn't buy a drink — so everybody had their little drinks in the coffee cups," June Parker remembers. She laughed as she recalled, "And when the police would come they would be smelling coffee cups!"¹⁵

pay all court costs.¹⁶ For Don Albert and the patrons of his club, this not only was vindication for their treatment at the hands of local law enforcement officials, but it also seemed to indicate that a significant portion of the citizenry of San Antonio was not willing to allow racial discrimination to undermine the vibrant music scene that was flourishing in the city.

Music fans — both white and black — continued to flock to the Keyhole throughout the 1950s, not only because of the great music Albert booked, but also because there was a genuine atmosphere of camaraderie and intercultural congeniality, something quite remarkable for a major southern city, considering the lingering policies of segregation and racial discrimination throughout the region at that time.

To a large extent, a similar scenario also could be found at the popular Eastwood Country Club, opened by Johnny Phillips in 1954. Located on East Houston Street out past San Antonio's east side, the Eastwood also attracted some of the era's most prominent blues, jazz, and pop artists. June Parker, the piano player in the club's house band, referred to the Eastwood as "Utopia, baby!" Both Phillips and his patrons paid good money for such popular entertainers as Fats Domino, Pearl Bailey, B.B. King, the Drifters, Ike and Tina Turner, Etta James, Bobby "Blue" Bland, Gatemouth Brown, T-Bone Walker, Little Richard, Chubby Checkers, Bo Diddley, Della Reese, Big

Joe Turner, and others. As guitarist Curly Mays pointed out, Phillips consistently paid both local and touring musicians quite well. "You didn't have to worry about being short; he had [the money] there for you." Singer Beverley Houston agreed, saying, "[Phillips] made money, and we made money."¹⁷

Curly Mays, a native of Beaumont, began playing at the Eastwood in 1963 and soon became a regular there. Mays was a very talented guitarist who had appeared at the Apollo Theater in Harlem and toured with Etta James, the Isley Brothers, Ike and Tina Turner, and others between 1960 and 1963. As part of his act, Mays played a Fender Stratocaster with his teeth and, sometimes, with his feet while reading a paper or book. Mays, like many of the venue's other artists, have noted that there was a strong sense of camaraderie among musicians and audience members of all races at the Eastwood.¹⁸

Another very popular performer at the club was an erotic dancer named "Miss Wiggles." Miss Wiggles was well-known for performing erotic gestures while seated upside down in a chair. As Austin singer-songwriter Lucky Tomblin recalls, "She was awesome. Number one, she was gorgeous. She was tall, and she was an athlete. I mean, she could dance, and she would do regular dance maneuvers, and then she'd get on a chair and throw her legs around it like a propeller. Stand around in that chair, and she could contort herself around into amazing positions."¹⁹

Much like Don Albert at the Keyhole Club, Johnny Phillips welcomed patrons of all races and ethnic backgrounds at the

Eastwood. Although he did ban interracial dancing during the 1950s in order to avoid problems with local authorities, Phillips went out of his way to make sure the Eastwood Country Club was a place where Latinos, blacks, and Anglos could mingle after hours on a nightly basis. As pianist June Parker recalls:

When I played at [the] Eastwood, it was out of the city limits, so we had all races coming after hours, because the club stayed open until 3 [or] 4 o'clock in the morning...So you had all nations of people coming out there. We had three shows a night, and after integration...it really got full of all races. The people wanted to mix up. [Laughs.] Sometimes we had more other races than we had blacks!²⁰

By contrast, Parker noted that when she toured elsewhere in the South, she and the band encountered very little racial intermingling and usually had to find lodging in segregated hotels, at times with all band members sharing one bed. Parker, herself a lifelong musician who has observed intercultural contact for more than 50 years, added, "Music is universal. It will draw any color. Music, it's something you hear and it will draw you, just like a magnet." Johnny Phillips, like Don Albert at the Keyhole Club, wanted the Eastwood to be a place "where people, no matter what color they were, [are] always welcome." As Curly Mays noted, "Anybody could come out there, black, white, and Hispanic."²¹

In terms of race relations, both the musicians and patrons of the Keyhole Club and the Eastwood Country Club clearly were quite progressive for the time. Music was the common denominator that brought them together, and the overall sense of camaraderie and congeniality allowed them to build a true musical community that defied national norms.

Although this intermingling of cultures in San Antonio may seem unusual, some scholars suggest that ethnic communities are more prone to intercultural exchanges than is commonly believed. In her studies of ethnic groups in Australia, Amanda Wise observed an eagerness among disparate ethnic groups to participate openly in cultural events, such as public dances, that included musicians and dancers from a variety of ethnic backgrounds.²² As Wise points out, these groups do not necessarily have an inherent resistance to sharing their cultural traditions. Often they simply need an opportunity in which they can mingle in a setting which provides an atmosphere of intercultural congeniality. In the case of San Antonio, such venues as the Keyhole Club and the Eastwood Country Club provided just such a setting in which the city's three major ethnic groups — Anglo, Latino, and African American — could feel comfortable sharing in a musical communion.

The atmosphere of intercultural congeniality found in these



Fats Domino (second from left) and Miss Wiggles posing with two patrons at the Eastwood Country Club, circa 1963. Courtesy of Curley Mays.

venues not only affected the ways in which musicians and patrons interacted during an era of widespread racial segregation. It also had a profound impact on a younger generation of musicians, who would draw from the eclectic musical influences and the spirit of camaraderie found in these establishments in order to create a whole new sound and style that would reverberate throughout Texas and, eventually, around the world. Perhaps most notable of these younger musicians were Doug Sahm and Augie Meyers, whose bands, the Sir Douglas Quintet and the Texas Tornados, would gain large international followings. Also very important were Clifford Scott, Vernon "Spot" Barnett, Charlie Alvarado, Rocky Morales, and Randy Garibay, all of whom would help form the so-called "West Side Sound," which would be crucial to the future success of Sahm and Meyers.

San Antonio saxophone legend Clifford Scott played for a time in the house band at the Keyhole Club during the 1940s. As a teenager, Scott already was performing with such Texas bands as Amos Milburn and the Aladdin Chicken Shakers. When Lionel Hampton came through San Antonio in 1942, he heard the fourteen-year-old Scott at the Keyhole Club and recruited him to tour with his band. Of course, Hampton had to get permission from Scott's parents to hire the teenaged

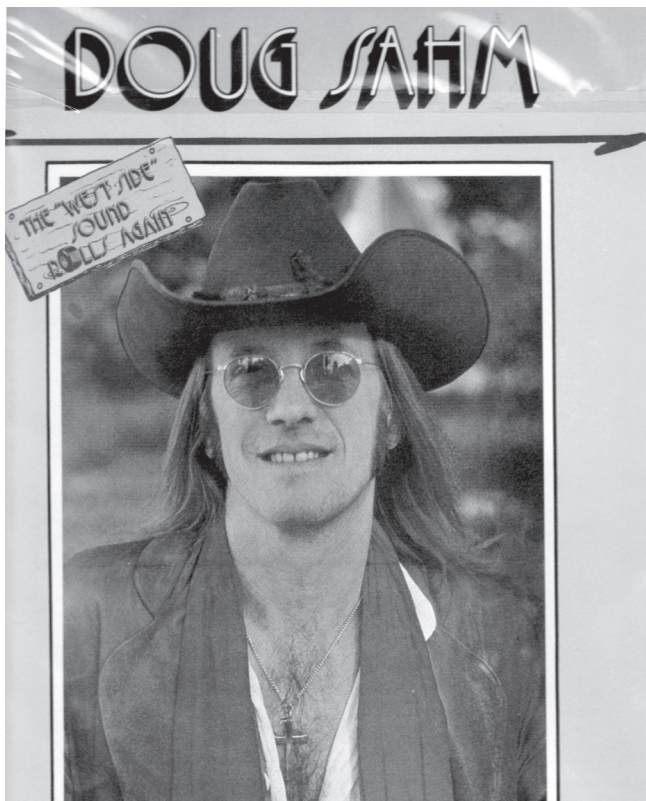
sax player, but they acquiesced after their son promised to return home to complete high school, which he did in 1946. Scott gained considerable recognition as a member of Lionel Hampton's band, and also for co-authoring the popular song "Honky Tonk." In 1956, Clifford Scott and Bill Doggett co-authored and recorded a follow up to the earlier hit. Their "Honky Tonk, Part 2" became a standard for many up-and-coming sax players in San Antonio, including Charlie Alvarado, Frank Rodarte, and Rocky Morales.²³

Audience members at the Keyhole Club certainly enjoyed Scott's lively performances. "I remember Clifford Scott when he used to walk on the tables and play his saxophone," said Ed Mosley. "He would go all outside, go around the corner, and come back in like the Pied Piper. People would follow him back in the club."²⁴ Scott also was pivotal in mentoring young musical prodigies, especially Vernon "Spot" Barnett. As Barnett recalls:

I remember, in [Douglass] Junior [High] School 1948, Clifford would come because he lived next door to my aunt. And he would come to the junior school, and make sure that we was goin' in the right direction. And this was like he had already been out on the road with Lionel Hampton and still was a teenager.²⁵

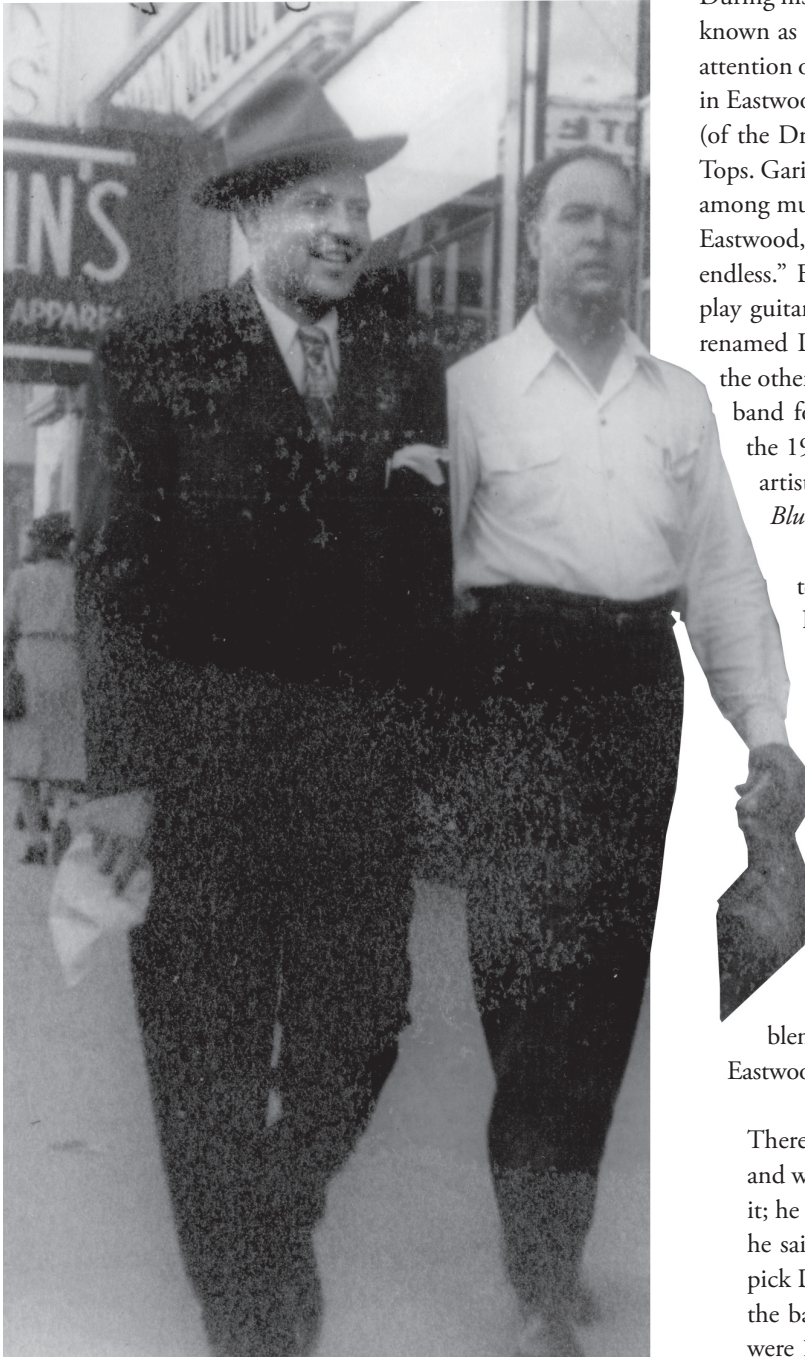
Scott's mentoring was crucial to the early development of Barnett, who says he "cut his teeth" at the Keyhole. In 1956, Barnett became the leader of the house band at Club Ebony on Nebraska Street, now Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard. One of his groups, Twentieth Century, recorded local hits including "The Ebony Shuffle" and "Twentieth Century." Perhaps more important to Barnett's career, however, was the experience and exposure that he gained at the legendary Eastwood Country Club, where he occasionally played in the house band. Barnett's growing popularity at these local venues prompted fellow musician Doug Sahm to claim that the sax player "was literally king of the east side." After 1964, Barnett left San Antonio to tour with many of the famous musicians who had played at the Eastwood, including Ike and Tina Turner and Bobby "Blue" Bland.²⁶

West side saxophonist Charlie Alvarado also played off and on in the Eastwood house band following a stint with the U.S. Marines. "Sometimes Johnny Phillips would say he needed somebody to do a show, and he'd call me," Alvarado remembers. In addition to being a source of employment, the Eastwood provided an important setting for musicians to socialize, and, in some cases, pursue romantic interests. As Alvarado recalls, he and others sometimes went to the club when "we didn't have a girl to spend the night with." Alvarado's status in the local music community continued to grow, especially after 1959, when he formed his own group, Charlie and the Jives, which had the regional hit "For the Rest of My Life" on Sarge Records.²⁷



Doug Sahm's album *The West Side Sound Rolls Again*, featured Augie Meyers, Ernie Durawa, Sauce Gonzalez, Louie Bustos, Rocky Morales, and Charlie McBurney. Photo courtesy of Al Olsen.

Another very influential sax man who performed regularly at the Eastwood between 1960 and 1963 was the late Rocky Morales, also from San Antonio's west side. At the time that Morales played the club, Johnny Lefridge was the leader of the house band, which backed up such celebrities as Tina Turner, Bo Diddley, comedian Redd Fox, and local favorite, Miss Wiggles. Morales would go on to play for years with Doug Sahm as an



Johnny Phillips (left) with Don Albert in San Antonio, Texas, 1945. Courtesy of Kenneth Dominique, UTSA Institute of Texan Cultures.

integral part of the West Side Horns, the Last Real Texas Blues Band, and the Texas Tornados.²⁸

Guitarist Randy Garibay, who died in 2002, also was a native son of San Antonio's west side. He became one of the most highly-regarded and well-liked musicians to emerge from this younger generation of performers who built on the eclectic traditions of the Keyhole and the Eastwood Country Club. During his high school years, Garibay played with a local group known as the Pharaohs. By the early 1960s, he had caught the attention of Johnny Phillips, who occasionally hired him to play in Eastwood's house band. Garibay backed up Clyde McFadder (of the Drifters), Big Joe Turner, Little Richard, and the Four Tops. Garibay acknowledged the importance of the camaraderie among musicians and the great diversity of music played at the Eastwood, saying that "the styles of music played there were endless." By the early 1960s, Frank Rodarte hired Garibay to play guitar with his group the Del Kings, who would later be renamed Los Blues. As the Del Kings, Rodarte, Garibay, and the others traveled to Las Vegas, where they became the house band for a while at the Sahara Hotel and Casino. During the 1990s, Garibay established himself as a successful solo artist by releasing three regionally acclaimed CDs, *Chicano Blues Man*, *Barbacoa Blues*, and *Invisible Society*.²⁹

Perhaps the best-known Texas musician to "cut his teeth" at the Eastwood was Douglas Wayne Sahm. Before he died in 1999, Doug Sahm made a huge impact on Texas music through such groups as the Sir Douglas Quintet, the Last Great Texas Blues Band, and the Texas Tornados. His career began at the age of ten, when his mom billed him as "Little Doug" Sahm, and he started playing a variety of instruments on local radio stations. Before long, this child prodigy would be performing alongside some of San Antonio's most seasoned musicians. Sahm and his lifelong friend, keyboardist and accordionist Augie Meyers, both grew up on the city's predominantly black east side and were strongly influenced by the blending of musical traditions that was taking place at the Eastwood and other nearby venues. As Meyers recalls:

There was a club called the Eastwood Country Club, and we'd go there and listen. Johnny Phillips owned it; he was a customer in my mom's grocery store. So he said, 'Y'all bring the boys out there. Go by and pick Doug up.' He'd set us down in a chair right by the bar. We'd sit there and listen to his music. We were 12 or 13 years old.

At that tender age, Sahm and Meyers were able to hear T-Bone Walker, Bobby "Blue" Bland, Albert King, Louis Jordan, and a

variety of other prominent touring artists. By the 1950s, Sahm was playing regularly at San Antonio's Tiffany Lounge, and he also sat in frequently with Spot Barnett's band at Club Ebony. Sahm's remarkable versatility, including his ability to play guitar, bass, violin, saxophone, and steel guitar, as well as sing, made him a very popular local entertainer. Johnny Phillips often called on Sahm to perform on a number of different instruments in the Eastwood house band as he backed up many of the nationally-touring acts that came through town. With a solid grounding in country, blues, R&B, and rock and roll, Sahm and Meyers would take their early musical influences from the Eastwood and elsewhere and reshape them into a unique and eclectic sound that eventually would propel them to international fame, especially with the highly successful Texas Tornados.³⁰

The San Antonio clubs that helped form the western fringes of the chitlin' circuit from the 1940s to 1960s, were substantially different from most other chitlin' circuit venues located elsewhere throughout the South. Although they sprang up as part of the larger network of nightclubs intended to provide black artists and black patrons their own arena in which to perform and enjoy music, the Alamo City's post-World War II chitlin' circuit venues welcomed people of all races and ethnic backgrounds long before this was commonly practiced in other parts of the country. This willingness to embrace and even promote a multi-ethnic cultural environment in the city's nightclubs, despite occasional interference from police and other more socially conservative elements, was a direct reflection of the unique racial dynamics of San Antonio that set it apart from other urban areas in the South and made it one of the most fully-integrated southern cities of the time.

As important as this more open attitude toward inter-ethnic mingling was, it was also crucial that the owners, musicians, and patrons of these venues actively cultivated an atmosphere of congeniality, which made performers and audience members alike feel as if they were sharing in a genuine communal celebration of diverse cultures. At such places as Don Albert's Keyhole Club, regulars delighted in witnessing local artists, including Big Bertha, Peg Leg Bates, and Iron Jaws, share the stage with major national touring acts. The venue's casual ambiance, along with a steady stream of high-quality home-grown and nationally-known talent and good, home-cooked food, helped create and sustain an environment of intercultural congeniality that made musicians and fans eager to return to the clubs and mingle on a regular basis. When Johnny Phillips opened the Eastwood Country Club, he also made the extra effort necessary to welcome people of all backgrounds and to help create an environment in which performers and patrons

felt free to mingle and exchange cultural traditions.

This atmosphere of congeniality found at the Eastwood, the Keyhole, and other San Antonio locales would have an important and enduring impact on the development of Texas music, especially as younger musicians who grew up in this remarkably diverse musical environment began to carry these unique multi-ethnic influences out into the larger musical community. For example, Clifford Scott's early experiences at the Keyhole and other local clubs helped bring him to the attention of Lionel Hampton and make him a major player on the national music scene. Vernon "Spot" Barnett, who backed up Ike and Tina Turner, Bobby "Blue" Bland, and a number of other prominent artists at the Eastwood, later went on to tour nationally with many of these acts.

The benefits of learning to play music in the culturally diverse environment of these San Antonio venues certainly was not limited to African-American performers. Charlie Alvarado, one of many Chicano musicians to play in these establishments, spent a considerable amount of time sitting in with bands at the Eastwood before forming his own successful group, Charlie and the Jives. Randy Garibay's frequent appearances at these integrated clubs helped bring him to the attention of Frank Rodarte, who recruited Garibay to play with the Del Kings at the Sahara in Las Vegas, before later launching his own successful solo career. Likewise, Rocky Morales developed not only his unique musical sensibilities performing in these venues, but he also made personal friendships that would lead to a long career of working with many other prominent artists. Doug Sahm and Augie Meyers, both Anglos who often sat in with the house bands at the Eastwood and other clubs, developed a worldwide following, earning remarkable critical and commercial success with a number of different groups, including the Sir Douglas Quintet, the Texas Tornados, and the Last Real Texas Blues Band.

San Antonio's chitlin' circuit venues are historically significant, in part, because of their unparalleled support of racial and ethnic mixing at a time when such behavior was illegal in many places and certainly still frowned upon nearly everywhere throughout the South. The "intercultural congeniality" found in these clubs was by no means merely coincidental. It was a result of progressive attitudes shared by owners, performers, and audiences alike, who sometimes had to vigorously defend themselves against disapproving outside forces. This determination to provide venues in which music of all kinds could be enjoyed by people of all backgrounds certainly paid off for those who shared in the communal experience, and it helped set the stage for an entirely new generation of Texas musicians to reshape the music of the Southwest and the entire nation.★

Notes

1. "Chitlin'" is a derivation of the word, "chitterling," a popular dish in the American South made from pig intestines. For more on the chitlin' circuit and the commercialization of African-American music, see Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "The Chitlin' Circuit," *The New Yorker*, February 3, 1997 and Mark Anthony Neal, "Sold Out on Soul: The Corporate Annexation of Black Popular Music," *Popular Music and Society*, Volume 21, 1997.
2. For a detailed but very readable overview of African-American music, see Bill Wyman's *Blues Odyssey: A Journey to Music's Heart and Soul*, (New York: DK Publishing, 2001); For an extensive listing of other publications related to African-American music in Texas, see the Center for Texas Music History's online bibliography at: www.txstate.edu/ctmh
3. David Evans, "Blues," *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music: The United States and Canada*, (New York: Garland Publishing, 2001), 640.
4. For an excellent study of the musical life of Don Albert Dominique, see Christopher Wilkinson, *Jazz on the Road: Don Albert's Musical Life*, (Berkley: University of California Press, 2001); See also Sterlin Holmesly, "Texas Jazz Veterans: A Collection of Oral Histories," *The Journal of Texas Music History*, Volume 6, 2006, 28-51.
5. Allen O. Olsen "San Antonio's West Side Sound," *The Journal of Texas Music History*, Volume 5, Number 1, Spring 2005, 26-39.
6. B.B. King and David Ritz, *Blues All Around Me: The Autobiography of B.B. King*, (New York: Avon Books, 1996), 146-151. King recalls his salary increasing to \$1,000 per week; Also see Sebastian Danchin, *Blues Boy: The Life and Music of B.B. King*, (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1998), 32-34. Here, King remembers that he made as much as \$2,500 per week; For the advertisement announcing King's first appearance in San Antonio, see *The San Antonio Register*, October 2, 1952.
7. *The San Antonio Register*, October 30, 1953; Dancing and dining also were provided for, and at one time, Don Albert promoted many of the Library Auditorium events. For example, see ads for musical engagements by Jay McShann and Louis Armstrong, *The San Antonio Register*, February 25, 1944, and October 30, 1944, respectively; Don Albert was largely responsible for bringing these top names to both the Library and Municipal Auditorium as early as 1942, two years after his touring group was disbanded. See Wilkinson, *Jazz on the Road*, 213.
8. *The San Antonio Register*, August 28, 1953; *United States Census of Population: 1960*, General Social and Economic Characteristics of Texas, United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, (Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 1962), Table 76.
9. "Don's Keyhole to Open, Friday, Nov. 3," *The San Antonio Register*, October 27, 1944, 6. Admission for opening night was \$1.20 at the door;
10. See the documentaries "San Antonio Remembered: The Good Times," written and directed by Marlene Richardson (San Antonio: KLRN-TV, 1998), and "San Antonio Jazz: The Golden Age," by Hank Harrison (San Antonio: KLRN-TV, 1998). The quotation from Barnett is from "San Antonio Remembered: The Good Times."
11. See "San Antonio Remembered: The Good Times."
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Wilkinson, *Jazz on the Road*, 233-244.
17. Karla Peterson, "Eastwood Country Club," *The Handbook of Texas Music*, Roy Barkley, ed., (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2003), 91; See also "Utopia, Baby," *San Antonio Express-News*, February 26, 2006, pages 1 and 6H; According to Christopher Wilkinson, Phillips may have been part owner of the original Keyhole Club during 1947, a time in which Albert was having difficulty keeping the place open. In addition, Phillips occasionally helped to promote touring acts that came to the Library Auditorium along with Albert at that time. See Wilkinson, *Jazz on the Road*, 212.
18. Author's interviews with Lucky Tomblin, Danny Roy Young, Debora Hanson, and Gary Hartman, September 10, 2004; Recently, Curley Mays donated his photo collection to the Institute of Texan Cultures in San Antonio. The author is grateful to the Institute and Curley Mays for the use of some of those photos in this article.
19. Author's interviews with Lucky Tomblin, Danny Roy Young, Debora Hanson, and Gary Hartman, September 10, 2004; See also Olsen, "San Antonio's Westside Sound," 32, in which I incorrectly indicated that the club was on Nebraska Street, now Martin Luther King, Jr., Boulevard; Also helpful is www.sannyboylee.com/com/curleymays/feet.htm.
20. "Voices Carry," *San Antonio Express-News*, November 28, 2004, 1J.
21. Peterson, "Eastwood Country Club," Barkley, ed, *Handbook of Texas Music*, 91; "Utopia, Baby," page 6H.
22. Amanda Wise, "Hope and Belonging in a Multicultural Suburb," *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, Vol. 26, Nos. 1-2, February-May 2005, 171-186.
23. Karla Peterson, "Clifford Scott," *Handbook of Texas Music*, Barkley, ed., 284.
24. "San Antonio Remembered: The Good Times"; Author's interview with Spot Barnett, March 10, 2004, 6.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid; See also "Utopia, Baby," pages 1 and 6H; For the quotation from Sahm, see Jim Beal, Jr., "Pure Cool," *San Antonio Express-News*, February 28, 1999, page 10H.
27. Author's interview with Charlie Alvarado, May 10, 2004, 15; See also Olsen, "San Antonio's West Side Sound."
28. Author's interview with Rocky Morales, March 3, 2004.
29. Author's interview with Randy Garibay, November 9, 2001; Olsen, "San Antonio's West Side Sound."
30. Author's interview with Augie Meyers, February 9, 2004.