

The Journal of

TEXAS MUSIC HISTORY

2019

volume 19

Charlie Sexton at Clay's Antiques, 1967. Photo by Tracy Anne Hart www.thefightinggallery.com

Music and Oil in Beaumont: A History of the Magnolia Petroleum Band
Charlie Sexton: Too Many Ways to Fall
Jack Ingram and the Roots of the Texas Country Scene

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Letter from the Director



Director Jason Mellard with Corbin Mock, Randy Rogers, Jack Ingram, Wade Bowen, and Rich Kelly at the Roots of Texas Country event on campus in April. Photo by William Philpott.

For the nearly two decades this journal has been in publication, this space has contained the words of the Center's founding director and guiding spirit, Gary Hartman, as he shared the latest updates on the Center's programs documenting the rich musical heritage of the Lone Star State and Southwest. With Dr. Hartman's well-earned retirement, I have stepped into the Director's role and look forward to building on the foundation he has built for the Center's undergraduate and graduate course work at Texas State, music history events for the campus community and general public, and publication of original research in this journal and in the books of our John and Robin Dickson Series in Texas Music History at Texas A & M University Press. Dr. Hartman's contributions to Texas State University and the Texas music community are vast, and I want to take this opportunity to thank him on behalf of our audience.

Since coming on as Director, we have held campus events with the Chulita Vinyl Club dj collective and Texas Country artists Wade Bowen, Jack Ingram, and Randy Rogers. The Texas Country evening built on the research of a recent Center alum, Rich Kelly, and a portion of that work also appears as the Jack Ingram article in this issue. Developing such original research is among our key goals, and so it is fitting that a second article here, Jason Crouch's essay on Charlie Sexton's career, also began in one of our graduate courses. Bryan Proksch's article on the Magnolia Oil house band in the early twentieth century rounds out our 2019 edition with historical context on an oft-overlooked aspect of musical performance in Texas.

We look forward to campus events in the remainder of 2019 and into 2020 on the subjects of Texas dance halls, blues scholarship, and Houston hip-hop. Our Dickson Series at A & M is also going strong, with recent additions including Paul Oliver and Mack McCormick's "lost" manuscript

The Blues Come to Texas (brought to fruition by Alan Govenar) and Lee Zimmerman's *Americana Music: Voices, Visionaries & Pioneers of an Honest Sound*. By the time this journal comes to print, A & M Press will also have issued Brian Atkinson's new book *The Messenger: The Songwriting Legacy of Ray Wylie Hubbard* as the latest volume in the series. In the classroom, no one can fill Dr. Hartman's shoes, but the history department has been gracious enough to allow us to bring some new voices into our courses with instructors Craig Hillis, Kim Simpson, and John Cline, with more to come.

While this issue marks our nineteenth year of publishing the *Journal of Texas Music History*, it is also the twentieth anniversary of the Center's founding. To learn more about the Center and its programs, please contact us or visit our website. Thanks again for helping make the Center for Texas Music History such a success, and I hope you will continue to support the Center and its educational programs in the future.

As a reminder, the journal is also available online at **txstate.edu/ctmh/publications/journal**. There's no charge to receive the journal. Simply contact us at jasonmellard@txstate.edu, or krb121@txstate.edu and we'll be happy to put you on our mailing list. You can connect via our Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram accounts as well.

Of course, we couldn't have done any of this without hard work, encouragement, advice, and financial contributions from all of our friends and supporters. My sincerest thanks to Gary Hartman, Alan Schaefer, Kristi Madden, César Limón, Callie Lewis, Tammy Gonzales, John McKiernan-Gonzalez, Angie Murphy, Mary Brennan, Madelyn Patlan, Roberta Ruiz, the Center's Advisory Board, the Texas State University Department of History, and University Marketing. And thanks to all of you who are invested in the study, preservation, and celebration of Texas music history. Here's to the next twenty years!

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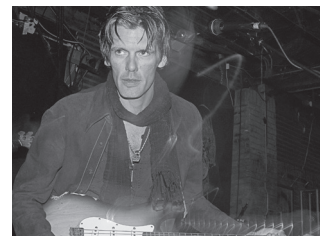
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In order to continue this success, we need your help. Your contribution will help fund publication of *The Journal*

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Music and Oil in Beaumont: A History of the Magnolia Petroleum Band

Bryan Proksch

The 1920s were a turbulent time for bands in the United States. The ensembles dominated American popular music from the late nineteenth century through World War I, more or less coinciding with the famed careers of P.S. Gilmore and John Philip Sousa. In the immediate post-war period, however, bands faced numerous challenges to their preeminence. On the one hand there was no heir apparent to Sousa, who was already in his mid-sixties and faced constant speculation that he would retire. Indeed, Sousa's force of personality would never permit retirement, but the Sousa Band's tours gradually shortened year by year through the 1920s as his audiences and profitability declined.

Changing tastes and pressure from jazz and a variety of up-and-coming forms of popular music were as much to blame for these challenges as newer forms of entertainment such as movies and radio. The idea of using bands as an educational mechanism at high schools and colleges was still relatively new, though professional and semi-professional municipal bands—the precursors of modern amateur community bands—were still providing regular entertainment at parks and concert halls in some locales. Industrial bands—ensembles connected to a corporation and staffed by employees—provided a crucial if short-lived bridge between the earlier professional band movement and later community-based organizations.¹

While bands affiliated with factories or other companies began appearing in the 1870s, what might be called an industrial band movement emerged in the years just before World War I. The Ford Motor Company Band in Detroit and the Anglo-Canadian Leather Company Band in Huntsville, Ontario, both achieved early prominence for different reasons. The Ford Band mostly performed in Michigan and undertook a well-publicized tour to the Pacific Coast in 1915. The Anglo-Canadian Leather Company Band rocketed to prominence when Sousa's famed cornet soloist Herbert L. Clarke assumed its directorship in 1918.² Neither ensemble was conceived of as an advertising group, though there were clear benefits to brand recognition. Henry Ford personally insisted on the Ford Band's creation as a "philanthropic work" designed to provide workers with a positive outlet for their creativity in the midst of a monotonous day

on the assembly line. It was one piece of his larger and then-controversial sociological reform efforts.³ The Anglo-Canadian Leather Company Band was formed by proprietor Charles Shaw, a cornetist himself who took lessons from Clarke and who by all appearances was simply a band enthusiast with the means to create his own private ensemble.

The most famous of the industrial bands was the ARMCO Band, intended for employees of the American Roller Mill Company of Middletown, Ohio. Founded in 1921 with a “God awful” rehearsal of employees at the Elks Hall, the ensemble flourished under Frank Simon, formerly a cornet soloist in Sousa’s Band.⁴ They started making recordings in 1922—unusual for an industrial band. In 1925 he started recruiting musicians for his band by offering them work at the steel mill, and in the same year the quasi-professional ensemble began making the regular radio broadcasts on WLW in Cincinnati. As with many other industrial bands, the ARMCO Band undertook a number of tours, including a trip to Canada. The inaugural convention of the American Bandmasters Association in 1930 was hosted by ARMCO, during which Sousa conducted the ensemble. Depression-era layoffs changed the nature of the band entirely beginning in about 1929. ARMCO now sponsored the band as a professional ensemble instead of an employee-based one. The band’s weekly radio broadcasts on NBC were met with nationwide acclaim. Their band march was the “ARMCO Triumphant,” and Peter Buys dedicated the “Iron Master March” to them in 1931. The band existed as a professional radio band sponsored by ARMCO from 1929 until its show was cancelled by the network in 1939.

A survey conducted by the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics in 1926 found that 151 large corporations had some kind of business-backed musical ensemble. A larger 1929 study conducted by the National Bureau for the Advancement of Music counted 267 corporate bands in the United States.⁵ Based on the number of photos and remarks about industrial bands not listed in that study that I have personally been able to find, it is safe to say that 267 is a gross underestimate and that at its height in the mid-1920s, the United States probably boasted 500 or more industrial bands. This was a time during which towns and cities of all sizes across the nation boasted a company band as a point of pride. As might be expected, industrial bands ranged in size, skill, and prominence relative to their sponsoring corporation’s size, moral support, and financial backing.

In late 1923 the Magnolia Petroleum Company refinery in Beaumont, Texas, made a substantial investment in their small existing orchestra to turn it into a functioning band. While the Magnolia Petroleum Band was neither a pioneer nor



1. Listening to the Magnolia Refinery Band, John Philip Sousa Directing. 2. Sousa at the helm. 3. After the concert.

Figure 1: Images of Sousa conducting the Magnolia Petroleum Band in January 1924.⁷ Courtesy of the Tyrrell Historical Library, Beaumont, TX.

unique as an industrial band, it was recognized as the premier ensemble of its kind in Texas if not the whole Gulf Coast after only a very brief existence. Sousa himself conducted the months-old ensemble for a noontime promotional concert on January 22, 1924, while touring through Beaumont with his own band (see figure 1).⁶ A proponent of connecting music and industry, the Magnolia Band presented Sousa with the very embodiment of his ideas and the great potential offered by such a union. Some 2,000 refinery workers were present for the concert, as well as students from the Magnolia Elementary School. Corporate dignitaries including Elmer E. Plumley (the manager of the refinery and member of the board of directors who provided key financial and moral support for the creation of the band) and J. D. Helmsley (who organized the concert and who would later help found KFDM radio) also attended, together with mayor Bismark A. Steinhagen and George J. Roark, director of the Chamber of Commerce.



The Magnolia Band played so well for Sousa that he thought the bandmen, all of whom were full-time refinery workers and only amateur musicians, were actually professionals playing a prank on him by greasing up and wearing overalls. Note how figure 1's image number two shows most of the bandmen, save the one facing the camera, in their working garb. A change of clothing evidently was not possible even for a visiting celebrity. In fact, the concert itself was unceremoniously cut short mid-march when the whistle marked the end of the lunch hour. Nevertheless, Sousa was sufficiently impressed with the Magnolia Band and the company's foresight in using capitalism to support local musical culture, and the townspeople and employees took substantial pride in their band.

By the end of 1924 Karl L. King, the famous leader of the Fort Dodge Municipal Band in Iowa and a leading publisher of band music, compared the Magnolia Band favorably to the Ford Band, "which has always stood in a class by itself among industrial bands," and thought it would in a very short time

become the "best in the country."⁸ Although the Great Depression eventually counted the Magnolia Petroleum Band as one of its many casualties, by then the group had already made significant contributions both to the music history of Texas and to the local musical history and culture of Southeast Texas.

Foundation

The earliest extant references to music at the Magnolia refinery in Beaumont come from the first volume of their corporate newsletter, the *Magpetco*, published in April 1920. A photo of the Magnolia Orchestra, really just six musicians seated at ease in a rehearsal space, shows a typical early-1920s small dance band of a violin, alto and bass saxophone, cornet, trombone, and piano, with various percussion instruments but no percussionist present. The alto saxophone player, Harry Cloud (1891–1987), was the company dentist (tasked with tending to some 400 appointments per month), though he had served as a bandsman in the US Army's 16th Cavalry prior to World War I.⁹ He founded and led the Magnolia Band up through early 1927. The more formal portraits of a men's quartet and a glee club thirteen men strong make for a stark contrast with the orchestra. It would seem the orchestra was not very good; it received no mention in the newsletter for over a year, and it is conspicuously absent from news items about corporate social events involving music.¹⁰ In the meantime Cloud was busy writing his regular "Dental Dope" column for the newsletter, issuing advice about how often one should brush his teeth with occasional comments that indicate he had a somewhat quirky sense of humor.¹¹

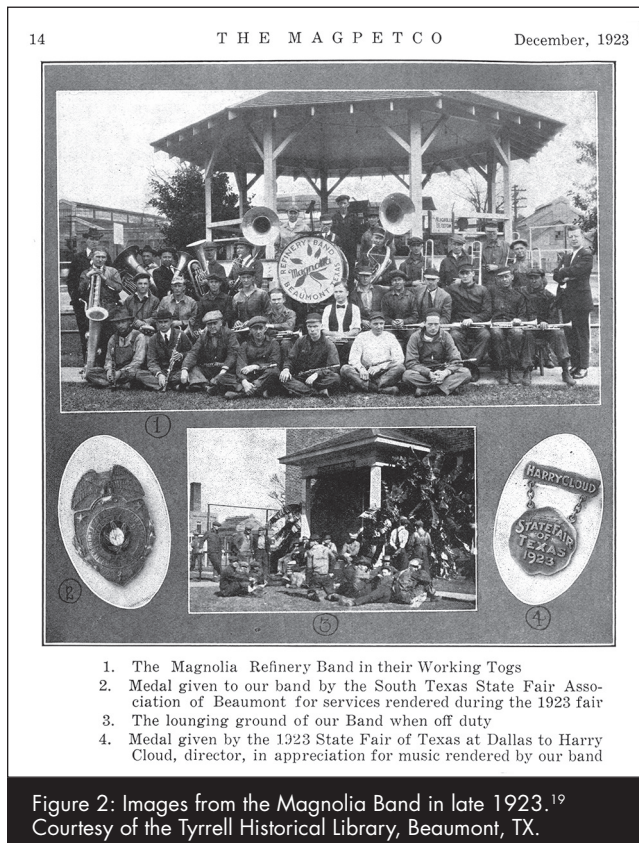
Towards the end of 1921 Cloud seems to have decided to turn more actively to leading bands. His Cashan Grotto Band (a Masonic lodge founded in 1916) performed for the refinery's first "monthly smoker," with some 700 employees in attendance.¹² The "delightful musical program" showed that the Cashan Grotto Band was "some band." Indeed, the performance seems to have gotten the attention of the Magnolia management, as within a few months the Magnolia Band of some 20 musicians played a "band recital"—basically an outdoor concert—on the refinery grounds during the lunch hour.¹³ Other corporate musical activities were also getting increased attention. The first performance of the "Magnolia Minstrels" (with Cloud conducting the Magnolia Orchestra) took place just weeks later. With music increasingly on their minds, the *Magpetco* editor included an essay about the "power of music" in the May 1922 issue, noting that it is a "social art" that encourages the "expression of a common feeling" and "uplifts character."¹⁴ Indeed one paragraph insists that everyone is musical and should give it a try. A follow-up essay in June 1922 encouraged the workers to "let your boy learn music."¹⁵

The corporation more heavily invested in its band from mid-1922 on. A note on “The Band” in February 1923 explained how company officials were “putting forth to establish good clean recreation of a form that helps to offset the monotony of every day work.”¹⁶ While the *Magpetco* author (perhaps Cloud) anticipated that the band would take years to develop, the article called for “experienced men, around whom we hope to build the best organization of its kind in this section” and for “all employees of the company [to] pull for the Magnolia Band and Orchestra to the end that we may take the same pride in them that we do in all other features offered by the company for the benefit and entertainment of employees.” Their rationale followed Henry Ford’s creation of the Ford Band a decade earlier exactly, with worker well-being ostensibly at the forefront over the value such an ensemble might provide to company brand recognition and publicity. While counterintuitive to today’s mindset, the company also sponsored a number of baseball teams and other recreational activities to that same end in a way that at least makes this initial assertion ring true to form.

The band’s first formal portrait proudly displayed their new military-style uniforms—and made the cover of the April 1923 newsletter. The original Magnolia Band uniforms featured two piping stripes down the front with “M.P.C.” embroidered on the collar—typical features for band uniforms of the time. Their original white cadet hats were replaced with darker hats already by late 1923. The corporate logo with a white magnolia flower was added to the uniforms a few years later. The gradual change from mixed tubas to new Sousaphones seen in formal photos beginning in October 1923 and the 1924 addition of a baritone saxophone to the existing bass saxophone indicates that the band’s budget could accommodate expensive instrument purchases at least on occasion (see figure 2).¹⁷

Now established with strong philosophical and financial backing from the corporation, the Magnolia Band achieved musical prominence in remarkably short order. Rehearsals occurred on company time, with uniforms and instruments provided at company expense. From 1923 on, the band’s routine involved regularly scheduled lunchtime concerts played every Tuesday and Friday on the refinery grounds, occasional evening public concerts played downtown in Community Hall, and various outdoor concerts played elsewhere in Beaumont. A concert played for the Texas Rotary Club’s state convention in Beaumont in March 1923 was a key event in proving the band’s value to the company, given the statewide audience in attendance and the way in which the bandmen’s “credible showing” and “neat, clean appearance [and] their gentlemanly conduct and bearing was a distinct credit to themselves and to the Magnolia Petroleum Corporation.”¹⁸

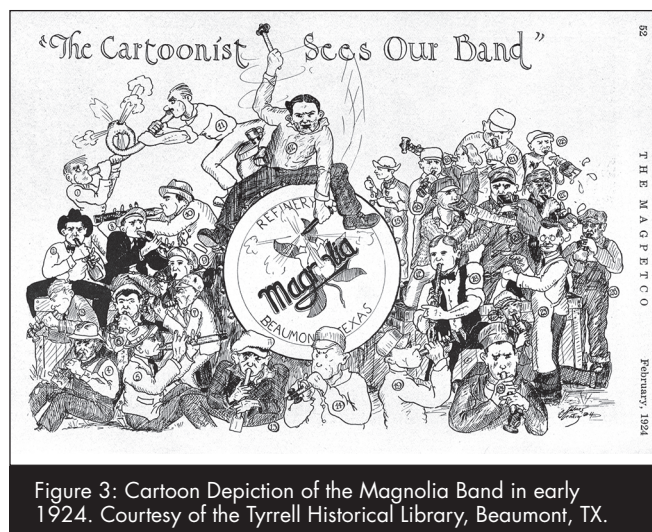
They made annual appearances at the South Texas State Fair, held in Beaumont, typically winning the trophy and medals for best band (see figure 2). It is unclear how much competition they actually had at the fair each year, though at various times in the decade Beaumont boasted having a few other bands, including Beaumont’s Permanent Italian Band and the



Beaumont City Band. Humble Oil, from just north of Houston, sent their own band to the fair in 1928, if not earlier.

The Magnolia Band was, at its heart, a communal endeavor in a symbiotic relationship with its parent corporation. Harry Cloud maintained his dentistry practice even as the band’s demands on his time increased. The same was true of the rest of the bandmen, who sacrificed their lunch hour twice each week to play for their colleagues. The amateur nature of the band was somewhat obscured in the larger *Magnolia Oil News*, the Dallas-based corporate-wide newsletter, which never mentioned that “Dr. Cloud” was a dentist and not a doctor of music. The original 28 members of the band included pipe fitters, railcar painters, brick masons, boiler shop workers, mechanics, and all variety of tradesmen (see figure 3).²⁰ Besides “Doc” Cloud (as the bandmen called him), only one member was white-collar: clarinetist L. E. Downs, who worked in the office as a clerk. The class distinction is evident

in a cartoon printed in early 1924, where a host of gruff figures blow on their instruments in stark contrast to the bow-tie wearing Downs (#18) and the suit-donning Cloud (#25). Equally notable was the absence of professional musicians hired by the corporation to populate the band or serve as section leaders, as was sometimes the case with such ensembles elsewhere.



Turnover in band membership was high, as might be expected given the difficult workplace environment for oil refinement in the 1920s. Of the original 28 members only five—E. E. Dickens (#24), H. M. Hodge (#10), Frank Sedivy (#27), Carl Quinn (#16), and A. B. Yoder (#4)—appeared in the band's final formal photo, celebrating their victory at the 1929 South Texas State Fair band tournament.²¹ The most noteworthy departure was Cloud, who was succeeded by Raoul A. Dhossche (1896–1971) sometime in the first months of 1927. Cloud would go on to a long and far-flung career as a band director. He remained in Texas long enough to be noted as a "band master of outstanding repute" for services rendered as a judge for a Texas Band Teachers' Association contest in Bryan, Texas, in May 1929.²² From there he went on to be the head of music at Palo Alto Boys' Military Academy in California. After a brief stint in Prescott, Arizona, he became the band director at Sparks Junior and High School in Reno, Nevada, in 1948.²³ He eventually returned to Galveston, Texas, where he died at age 96 in 1987.²⁴

Raoul Dhossche (pronounced "Dough-shay") replaced Cloud as the second and final Magnolia Band director and transformed the musical education of Beaumont's citizenry for a generation of students. He was a trained flutist born in France with a degree in music from the Royal Conservatory

of Ghent (Belgium).²⁵ He immigrated to the United States in time to serve as the director of the Army's 12th Cavalry Band during World War I, and he spent time as a freelance musician in New York City after his discharge.²⁶ He began as an assistant conductor alongside Cloud in October 1926. His first (and perhaps only) "Band News" column as director of the ensemble appeared "translated from the French" in the January 1927 issue of the *Magpetco*.²⁷ In spite of his initially limited English, his skill as a band director seems to have improved the ensemble's quality during its final years even as references to the band declined in corporate publications.

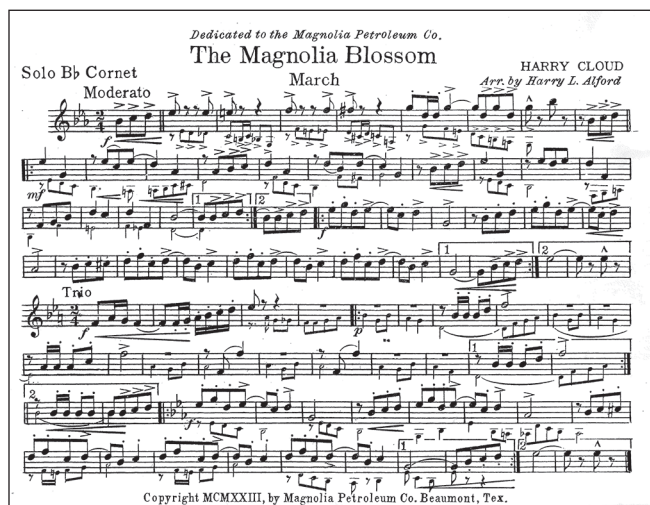
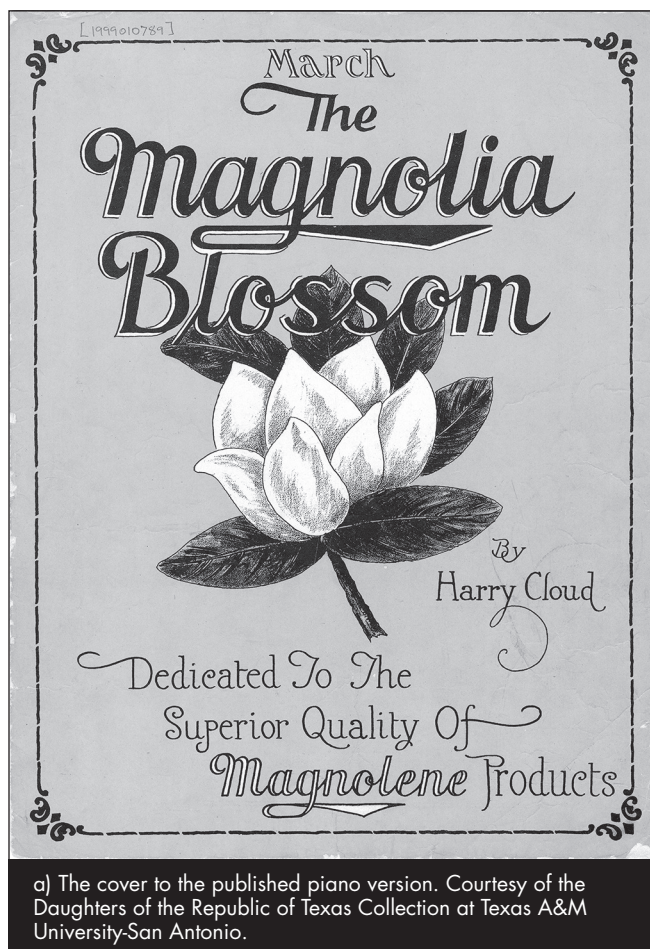
Repertoire and Compositions

The Magnolia Band's concerts presented a mixture of marches and classical arrangements, largely following the precedent set by Sousa's Band and typical of most band concerts during the first two decades of the century. The earliest program published for the group was for a May 1923 concert at Wiess Park in Beaumont. Included was a march by Harry Lincoln, Karl L. King's overture *The Princess of India*, a saxophone solo by Wiedoeft played by Cloud, and a xylophone solo. The trombone section was apparently good enough to be featured with two trombone "smears," Henry Filmore's famous "Lassus Trombone," and Will Kiefer's "Raggy Trombone."²⁸ The overture to Antônio Carlos Gomes's opera *Il Guarany* was an unusual selection for a December 1923 concert. Lighter operetta fare frequently appeared as their classical selections. The April 1924 performance of A. M. Laurens's (a pseudonym for C. L. Barnhouse) *Sky Pilot Overture* follows in that same trend. Marches by Sousa and King appeared frequently, as did foxtrots and other modern dances, together with solo features typical of the band repertoire of the day.

Any band worth its salt in this era had a theme march that was composed specifically for them and that would be played at least once at every concert. The Magnolia Band's *Magnolia Blossom*, written by their director Harry Cloud, served this purpose. The march is interesting on more than one account. In the first place it was actually published both for piano and as a full band arrangement by the company (see figures 4a and 4b). Note how Magnolia held the copyright and not a music publishing house (as would have been expected otherwise). The printing runs of both must have been exceedingly small, and apparently only one copy of all the compositions presented in this paper made it into a library collection.

The *Magnolia Blossom* itself is a well-written march, especially so considering Cloud was a dentist by trade. One distinct feature of the march is that the trio section modulates up a fifth to the dominant instead of down a fifth to the subdominant (see figure 4b). It likely was a simple mistake

Figure 4: Published versions of Harry Cloud's *Magnolia Blossom*, the signature march of the Magnolia Band.



on Cloud's part given that it was his first composition and he was not trained as a composer, but the resulting composition is thus very unusual. Another oddity is the return to the tonic in the final strain, whereas marches typically end in the subdominant.²⁹ The syncopations in the second strain are a typical ragtime feature of many 1920s-era marches, while the dogfight-like introduction and woodwind-dominated trio are idiomatic. Regardless, it is the only march this author is aware of that does not modulate to the subdominant in the trio.

The band had two additional feature compositions in its repertoire: the *San Jacinto March* and *Magnolia Triumphal*. Joseph Ricci, conductor of the Beaumont City Band, wrote the *San Jacinto March* for the dedication of the San Jacinto Life Insurance Building, on August 15, 1923. A 15-story office with a four-faced 17-foot diameter clock, the structure remains a distinctive Beaumont landmark today. The march was published in piano arrangement (see figure 5) and was apparently included in Magnolia Band concerts from time to time. Written in a lilting 6/8 meter à la Sousa's *Washington Post*, Ricci's harmonically adventurous piece starts with an introduction in A minor and a first strain in A major before



using a common-tone modulation to move directly to C major for the second strain that heads to F major in the following third strain. As part of his usual effort to promote ticket sales, Sousa agreed to include both this march and the *Magnolia Blossom* on the Sousa Band's evening program in Beaumont.³⁰

Harry Cloud's second foray into the world of march composition was the *Magnolia Triumphal*. Written sometime in early September 1924, it was apparently intended as a follow-up to the *Magnolia Blossom*, though it does not seem to have ever replaced that work as the band's standard-bearer.³¹ A 6/8 march in F major, Cloud dedicated it to the band itself instead of the corporation. Cloud goes to the correct key (B-flat) for the trio, and the march itself is markedly more amateurish than the *Magnolia Blossom* in terms of both melodic interest and harmonic simplicity. The published piano part includes a photo of the band on the cover instead of the company logo. While the *Magnolia Blossom* included an advertisement for Magnolene (Magnolia's trademark name for its refined oil) on its inside cover, the *Magnolia Triumphal* includes overt marketing or additional text.³² It does not seem that the band arrangement of the *Magnolia Triumphal* was ever published, and it was in all likelihood played from hand-copied parts.

The band's second director, R. A. Dhossche, does not seem to have followed Cloud's lead in composing material for the band, although the remote possibility exists that he may have written things now lost that were never mentioned in the newsletters or programs.³³ His only extant published composition—*Invocation* (1949), a trombone solo—dates to a much later era, while an undated manuscript of a "Graduation March" by him is still extant as well. The choice of a trombone for the solo is a curious one, given that he played the flute and both his wife and eldest son Victor played piano.³⁴

Travels and Broadcasts

The Magnolia Band's founding coincided with the growing importance of radio broadcasting, and while recorded radio transmissions would quickly lead to the decline of professional and industrial bands in the early 1930s, for the majority of the 1920s the Magnolia Petroleum Company's interest in both bands and radio created an immediate and successful partnership. In fact, many industrial bands, especially in the Northeastern United States, played regular live concerts on their company's AM radio station in the 1920s. For the Magnolia Band, based as it was in remote Texas, the radio provided an opportunity to garner praise from throughout the United States without the band ever stepping foot outside of Texas. The corporation also gained public appreciation and free advertisement through frequent write-in contests for the most distant listener.

The band made its first trip outside of Beaumont in October 1923 to present a concert at Magnolia's corporate headquarters

in Dallas and to play at the company's booth at the Texas State Fair. Thousands heard the band play over the course of the fair, and more still heard the band play on WFAA, a new clear-channel AM radio station owned and operated by the *Dallas Morning News*. A write-in contest offering five or ten gallons of Magnolene oil and the sheet music to Harry Cloud's *Magnolia Blossom* was won by a man in Lacombe, Alberta, who wrote, "Hoping to hear more concerts from WFAA by your band because it was sure enjoyed."³⁵ In total over 1,000 letters were received from 44 of the 48 states, as well as other locations in Canada and Mexico.

The band returned to Dallas two more times in close succession in December 1923 and April 1924. They performed for the company Christmas party at the Magnolia Club in December and for the Salesmanship Club and Lions Club of Dallas.³⁶ The Magnolia executives were so impressed by the quality of the band and the promotional value in the radio station contest that they soon thereafter organized a Dallas-based Magnolia Band of their own (discussed below).³⁷

On October 21, 1924, a year after their radio debut on WFAA, the Magnolia Band made local radio history by playing for the inaugural broadcast of Beaumont's first AM radio station, KFDM. The station was directly owned by Magnolia Petroleum, and its call sign abbreviated its motto "Kall For Dependable Magnolene." The band received its introduction from station announcer John W. Newton with the words "and now to the music of the Magnolia Band and Dr. Harry Cloud. Oil right, doctor."³⁸ The band quickly became a staple on the station, transmitting weekly concerts to the listeners in the region for the remainder of the decade.

The band's successes on WFAA and KFDM led to the occasional high-power retransmission of their concerts from Beaumont. A New Year's Day 1924 broadcast made use of the petroleum company's 391-mile-long private telephone line to Dallas for another write-in contest.³⁹ The company received 1,788 letters from nearly every state and much of Canada and Mexico.⁴⁰ This time a listener from Fort Resolution, Northwest Territories, nearly 3,000 miles away, won the contest for most distant listener. An orchestra director from Akron, Ohio, requested a copy of the "beautiful" *Magnolia Blossom* so that he could play it. A listener from Salida, Colorado, wrote, "your band is the best we ever heard over Radio." H. R. Seiter, director of the Tracy, Minnesota-based "Ladies' Tam-O-Shanter Band," wrote a lengthy letter expressing appreciation to Cloud for his "furthering of GOOD MUSIC [sic]" and the "success" of his "very pretty" *Magnolia Blossom*. Corporate publications make occasional mention of additional retransmissions on WFAA in the years that followed.

The band never undertook a national tour; however, they made annual tours of East Texas and Western Louisiana beginning in fall 1925, as well as occasional tours to other areas of Texas.⁴¹ The impetus behind the regular annual tours was to represent the refinery at the Louisiana State Fair in Shreveport each year for “Gas and Oil Day.” Although their first trip took only 33 hours from departure to return, the band somehow managed to perform short concerts in towns that they passed through as a gesture of goodwill. A member of the corporate “trade trippers” that accompanied the band mentioned that he stopped counting how many times the band played once he reached 100. By 1927 the tour was lengthened to three days to allow for more goodwill performances.

Magnolia-affiliated band in Dallas, though it had substantial differences from the Beaumont original.

After their successful trips to Dallas in late 1923 and early 1924, corporate executives at the headquarters in Dallas decided that they needed to create an ensemble of their own. A. J. Balcom assisted in forming the Magnolia Dallas Band, as it was initially known, which was directed by Paul E. Ashley and followed the model of the Beaumont ensemble closely in instrumentation and uniforms.⁴⁴ It also followed the Beaumont ensemble’s lead by broadcasting regular hour-long concerts on WFAA. The original makeup of the band was employees working in Dallas. However, these were white-collar office workers as opposed to their working-class brethren in

In towns like Beaumont, where residents had little access to classical music in live performance, bands served exactly this [educational] function and were seen as a way for the area to make up for the deficiency of cultural opportunities available in larger cities like Houston and Dallas.

For all the impact that the band had nationwide on the radio and in Dallas, the ensemble in the end was largely a local endeavor ostensibly directed at enhancing the cultural life of Magnolia’s employees and Beaumont’s citizenry. A letter of appreciation from the Beaumont Chamber of Commerce from fall 1924 notes how grateful the residents were for evening concerts in Magnolia Park: “Please be assured that the efforts of the Magnolia Petroleum Company in this direction furnishing to the public this recreational and educational entertainment is greatly appreciated by all.”⁴² Notice the “educational” reference. Bands at the time were seen as an extension of public cultural education, and Sousa in particular had been very vocal about how his performances presented “high class” classical works in juxtaposition with popular tunes and marches in such a way as to promote a better sense of culture among the population.⁴³ In towns like Beaumont, where residents had little access to classical music in live performance, bands served exactly this function and were seen as a way for the area to make up for the deficiency of cultural opportunities available in larger cities like Houston and Dallas.

Sister Bands and Offspring

The Magnolia Band was not a pioneer in the industrial band movement, except in Texas and regionally. However, their stature in Texas and their affiliation with big oil ended up inspiring several imitators. The most noteworthy of these was a

Beaumont. Individual employees made contributions as their skills permitted; the band’s drumhead was painted by Ned Davis, an engineer who did not actually play in the band.⁴⁵

As a director, Ashley had much different tastes in music than Cloud, and within a short time the Dallas band concerts featured trendier pieces over marches and classical arrangements. Within a few years it appears to have evolved into more of a dance band, even donning tuxedos instead of military-style uniforms. The change was likely one of utility and local needs; Dallas’s ritzy Magnolia Club (on the corner of McKinney Avenue and Harwood Street) needed an ensemble to match it for company events.

The first and only corporate-level mention of the Magnolia Olden Band, of Olden, Texas, appeared in the November 1929 issue of the *Magnolia Oil News*. E. M. Lindsey conducted the band of nearly forty members. It is unclear why the Olden ensemble received so little press in the Magnolia newsletters. It was not favorably located geographically, and their facilities were not as crucial to the company as Beaumont’s large refinery. Either way, its establishment just prior to the Great Depression, which ultimately claimed all the Magnolia Bands, meant that the ensemble was doomed to a short existence.

The Beaumont band also inspired local imitators. Petroleum Iron Works (a Beaumont shipyard eventually purchased by Bethlehem Steel) formed a band of its own at some point in

the mid-1920s.⁴⁶ This band might have been forgotten were it not for director, Everett Robert James, and his famous son, trumpeter and big band leader Harry James. Dhossche later recalled hiring the boy of 11 or 12 to play with the Magnolia Band as a ringer for their radio broadcasts at a rate of \$1 per concert.⁴⁷ Dhossche ended up being James's high school band director.

Decline and Disbandment

The 1928–29 concert season was marred by Black Tuesday in October and the onset of the Great Depression. In spite of the reassuring tone of the *Magnolia Oil News* regarding the company's finances, the Great Depression undoubtedly forced Magnolia Petroleum to reduce their association with the band, to the point where the Beaumont Music Commission took on at least some financial responsibility for the group.⁴⁸ By switching to at least partial municipal sponsorship, Dhossche and his bandsmen followed the precedents set by King's Fort Dodge Municipal Band and Herbert L. Clarke's Long Beach Municipal Band. The change was undoubtedly coupled with a severe budget cut, and clearly Depression-era Beaumont lacked the financial means to take on the Magnolia Band as a new expenditure. While lunchtime concerts continued along with the annual trip through Eastern Texas and Western Louisiana, Magnolia's corporate publications referred less and less to the ensemble even as those references became more and more nostalgic in tone. Dhossche now shared his time between the Magnolia Band, the Beaumont Symphony Orchestra, and Beaumont High School. The band still managed to travel to Galveston for a concert in March 1930 and on a May 1930 tour through Dallas to Abilene, likely their final tour.⁴⁹ By the summer of 1931 the band seems to have been relegated to local performances in Beaumont even as Dhossche's commitments to Beaumont High School increased.

Details of the band's activities from 1931 on are difficult to find, as the refinery discontinued their *Magpetco* newsletter at about the same time, also apparently for financial reasons. The corporate structure changed as well, as cutbacks in the *Magnolia Oil News* connected with Socony's (Magnolia's parent

corporation) merger with Vacuum Oil (based in New York state), relegated the Magnolia subsidiary to a very small piece of a new nationwide corporation. The last datable performance of the group that could be located was for the dedication of the Jefferson County Courthouse on January 17, 1932, at which they only played the national and Texas state anthems.⁵⁰ A short blurb in the newspaper flatly mentioned that the band's "dissolution has been announced" with the remark that their radio programs had very little advertising, that their programs were high-quality band music for those who possessed a "little higher level of musical intelligence than that possessed by dance-made flappers," and that the "depression casualty . . . is much to be regretted."⁵¹

When the Magnolia Band finally disbanded without fanfare sometime in early 1932, Dhossche had already been working full-time at Beaumont High School for many years. He would continue there until 1938, when he accepted a position at San Antonio Technical High School. A tribute concert was played for him by his former students and colleagues on August 25, 1938 in Beaumont, honoring his thirteen years as a high-school band director in town and his six state championships, but only a very brief mention of his previous work for the Magnolia Band.⁵² He would, over the course of his career, be elected a member of the American Bandmasters Association as well as the Texas Bandmasters Hall of Fame.

The ultimate demise of the Magnolia Band and the company's disinvestment in musical activities generally, together with Dhossche's transition to Beaumont High School, provides a telling moment in the history of the industrial band movement and the development of bands in the interwar era generally. Professional bands in the guise of the Sousa Band were no longer economically viable, and semi-professional industrial bands no longer had the corporate backing necessary to pay a trained director or core bandsmen. In need of a steady paycheck and already invested in their local communities, these professionals persevered to form high school and collegiate bands in cities and towns across the nation, and in the process transformed the American music education system into the band-centric shape that they still have to the present. ★

Notes

This essay would not have been possible without the support of several organizations. The Center for the History and Culture of Southeast Texas and the Upper Gulf Coast provided substantial research funding for archival travel. The Tyrrell Historical Library, Beaumont, Texas, generously provided scans from their copies of the *Magpetco*, the only complete set of the publication in existence. The Texas A&M–San Antonio Special Collections librarians were very helpful in scanning their rare copies of the *San Jacinto March* and the *Magnolia Blossom*. The Dolph Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin kindly provided access to their copies of the

Magnolia Oil News, for which I am also grateful. Finally, Renee Dhossche-Blaschke, the daughter of the second director of the Magnolia Band, R. A. Dhossche, was also very helpful and communicative with information on her father and his time with the band.

- 1 A catalog of industrial bands with brief notes on many of them appears in Kenneth S. Clark, *Music in Industry* (New York City: National Bureau for the Advancement of Music, 1929).
- 2 James T. Madeja, "The Anglo-Canadian Concert Band: A Unique Episode in the History of the Band Movement in North America,"

- Journal of Band Research* 26, no. 1 (1990): 1–13; Joseph Resendes, “Herbert L. Clarke and the Anglo-Canadian Leather Company Band,” *Canadian Winds* 16, no. 1 (2017): 37–40; Ed Terziano, *The Little Town Band That Grew and Grew* (Huntsville, ON: Forester Press, 1986).
- 3 From the report filed by the band’s director, Harry Philp, as recorded in Clark, *Music in Industry*, 283.
 - 4 A recording of Simon discussing the founding of the ARMCO Band and his time there was issued on LP under the title of *Salute to the ARMCO Band*. It can be found online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pK6wmtxurM0>. For a detailed study of the ensemble see Christopher L. Chaffee, “Music as Advertising: The Story of the ARMCO Band,” DMA diss., University of Cincinnati, College Conservatory of Music. 2003.
 - 5 Clark, *Music in Industry*, 5–7.
 - 6 Sources in this paragraph and the next for Sousa’s performance are taken variously from: “John Philip Sousa Directs Magnolia Band,” *Magpetco*, February 1924, 9–11 and “John Philip Sousa to Lead Magnolia Band at Noonday Concert at Oil Refinery,” *Beaumont Enterprise*, January 22, 1924, 1 and 9.
 - 7 Images from “John Philip Sousa Directs Magnolia Band,” *Magpetco*, February 1924, 10–11. The original photos/negatives are no longer extant. Special thanks to the Tyrrell Historical Library in Beaumont, Texas, for scanning the publication.
 - 8 “L. K. [sic] King Compliments the Magnolia Band,” *Magnolia Oil News*, November 1924, 13. Note the reversal of Karl L. King’s initials, repeated in the text of the news release. Unfortunately, the “unsolicited letter” itself is not extant.
 - 9 Cloud’s educational background is unknown, but he does not seem to have gone to dental school. According to the 1920 US Census he was working as a “dental stenographer” in Houston when Magnolia hired him. Under “occupation” for his 1917 World War I registration card, however, he wrote “musician.” His obituary (“Harry Cloud,” *Galveston Daily News*, August 28, 1987) listed him as a veteran of bands in both the US Army and Marines. I have not been able to corroborate that he was ever in the Marines; if he was, it would have been in the 1930s given I have not been able to find records for his activities in that decade.
 - 10 See for example “Our Dance,” *Magpetco* (April 1921), 18, regarding a dance in which music was provided by the “Victor Novelty Jazz Band” and not the Magnolia Orchestra.
 - 11 Harry Cloud, “Dental Dope,” *Magpetco* (April 1921), 24. A joke he told is recorded in “Personal Not Private,” *Magpetco* (October 1921), 23: “My hair is looking beautiful since I begun [sic] brushing it once a day. It stands up so nice and straight—just like a porcupine’s bristles.” “Dr. Harry Cloud Leaves on Vacation” *Magpetco* (August 1923), 29 also makes an oblique reference to his attempts to tell “funny stories” to the local Green Grass Club.
 - 12 “Magnolia Smoker Furnishes a Delightful Evening for Employees,” *Magpetco* (December 1921), 10. “Monthly smokers” seems to have been 1920s-era slang for an evening community social gathering.
 - 13 *Magpetco* (March 1922), 12. There are two pages of photos, showing the band seated on park benches in working clothes playing for a substantial crowd of predominantly male refinery workers in a small park near the refinery’s office building without a bandstand (as they later would have).
 - 14 “The Power of Music,” *Magpetco* (May 1922), 4–5.
 - 15 “Let Your Boy Learn Music,” *Magpetco* (June 1922), 4.
 - 16 “The Band” *Magpetco* (February 1923), 14.
 - 17 “Saxophone Sextet Organized,” *Magpetco* (April 1924), 17.
 - 18 “Magnolia Band Makes a Hit with Texas Rotarians,” *Magpetco* (April 1923), 22.
 - 19 Image from *Magpetco* (December 1923), 14. The original photos/negatives are no longer extant. Special thanks to the Tyrrell Historical Library in Beaumont, Texas, for scanning the publication.
 - 20 “The Cartoonist Sees Our Band,” *Magpetco*, February 1924, 52–53.
 - 21 The 1929 list of bandsmen accompanies their photo in the *Magnolia Oil News*, November 1929, 12.
 - 22 *Bryan Daily Eagle*, May 24, 1929.
 - 23 “Sparks Names Music Teacher,” *Nevada State Journal* (September 29, 1943), 7. This source briefly gives information about his time in Palo Alto. His residence in Arizona comes from his World War II registration card (1942).
 - 24 “Harry Cloud,” *Galveston Daily News* (August 28, 1987), 4.
 - 25 The information presented on Dhossche is gleaned from his biography as printed in “Two Fall Faculty Members Elected,” *Sul Ross Skyline* (June 12, 1940), 1; correspondence with his daughter Renee Dhossche-Blaschke; and his formal biography for his induction into the Texas Bandmasters’ Hall of Fame: https://www.pbmalph.org/pbmhalloffamebio.php?HOF_Number=117. Note that his website bio, written by Blaschke in 1997, has a number of inaccuracies dealing with his life through 1940 corrected here based on newspaper sources from the period.
 - 26 Dhossche’s daughter (interview with the author) noted with pride that he was a well-respected flutist in New York City who played with a variety of ensembles, including the Metropolitan Opera.
 - 27 “Band News,” *Magpetco* (January 1927), 25.
 - 28 “Magnolia Band Plays Concert at Wiess Park,” *Magpetco* (June 1923), 10.
 - 29 Marches ended in tonic in earlier decades when a *da capo* repetition was used, but this practice was long since ended by the 1920s.
 - 30 The use of local works and ensembles was typical of Sousa, who saw it as an effective way to promote ticket sales and his public image. “Sousa Will Play San Jacinto March,” *Beaumont Enterprise*, January 20, 1924, 8; “Sousa Band Draws Crowd,” *Beaumont Enterprise*, January 23, 1924, 2.
 - 31 Various newspapers reported on the march as “newly composed”: *Vernon Record* (September 23, 1924) and *McKinney Courier-Gazette* (September 30, 1924).
 - 32 It does not have a copyright listing or place of publication listed at all, let alone for Magnolia Petroleum, for instance. Similarly the inside cover does not include a blurb about Magnolia products as was the case for the *Magnolia Blossom*.
 - 33 In an interview his daughter noted that she had in her possession a couple of his compositions, but was unable to locate them for examination.
 - 34 The family played public recitals on occasion both in Beaumont and while they lived in San Antonio. A report on a 1937 recital in Lubbock, where Dhossche participated as an instructor for summer band camps, can be found in the *Lubbock Sunday Avalanche Journal* (June 13, 1937).
 - 35 “Radio Broadcasting,” *Magnolia Oil News* (January 1924), 7; “Our Band Broadcasts Again,” *Magpetco*, January 1924, 5. The two sources differ on the total quantity of lubricant offered in the contest.
 - 36 “The Magnolia Club of Dallas Entertained by the Magnolia Artists of Beaumont,” *Magpetco*, December 1923, 27–8; *Magnolia Oil News*, May 1924, 29–30.
 - 37 A photo of the band playing at the Texas State Fair appeared in the December 1923 issue of the *Magnolia Oil News*, 4.
 - 38 “Magnolia–KFDM was Pioneer in Field of Radio,” *Beaumont Sunday Enterprise*, ca. October 1955 (exact date unknown, taken from a clipping held at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin, ExxonMobil Archive Box 2.207/E89, Folder 3). Additional articles on the transmission are in the *Magnolia Oil News*, November 1924, 11.
 - 39 “Our Band Broadcasts Again,” *Magpetco*, January 1924, 5.
 - 40 “Where Our ‘Broadcast’ New Year’s Night was Received,” *Magpetco*, January 1924, 22–25.
 - 41 “Magnolia Band Goes to Louisiana State Fair,” *Magnolia Oil News*, December 1925, 10.
 - 42 “People of Beaumont Appreciate Magnolia Band,” *Magnolia Oil News*, September 1924, 11.
 - 43 Their radio concerts were similar in repertoire choices, and a listener in Guatemala wrote in appreciatively that the music “had some class to it, no jazz.” *Magnolia Oil News*, June 1925, 20.

- 44 The Dallas band was featured prominently and regularly in the monthly *Magnolia Oil News* beginning in 1925, undoubtedly because this publication was a company-wide newsletter published in Dallas. The *Magpetco* was the local newsletter published in Beaumont for refinery employees.
- 45 *Magnolia Oil News*, March 1925, 6.
- 46 W. Brock Brentlinger, "The Contribution of the Fine Arts to the Culture of Beaumont (1860–1930)," *Texas Gulf Historical and Biographical Record* 11 and 12 (1981–82), vol. 12, 26.
- 47 *San Antonio Light* (April 16, 1948), 1.
- 48 Brentlinger, "Contribution of Beaumont (1860–1930)," vol. 12, 26.
- 49 "Stirring Music of Band Draws Large Crowd to Concert," *Galveston Daily News* (March 3, 1930), 1 and 3; "Magnolia Refinery Band Makes Big Hit in Dallas and Abilene," *Magnolia Oil News*, July 1930, 5.
- 50 "Dedication of Courthouse Is Set Today," *Port Arthur News* (January 17, 1932), 1.
- 51 These quotes are from clippings in Renee Dhossche-Blashke's scrapbook entitled "The Magnolia Band;" unfortunately there is no date or place of publication attached to it. The last mention of the band in the present tense in corporate publications is to lunchtime concerts in "Magnolia's Beaumont Refinery," *Magnolia Oil News* (August 1931), 17–20. There are newspaper references in June 1931 (*Galveston Daily News*, June 7, 1931, page 10) about attempting to have the band play for the opening of a new bridge across the Sabine River, but no indication that the group actually played for the event could be found.
- 52 "Band to Play: Farewell Dhossche Concert Is Set Tonight," *Port Arthur News* (August 25, 1938), 9.

A black and white photograph of Charlie Sexton, a musician, playing a white Fender Telecaster guitar. He is wearing a dark jacket over a dark shirt and a scarf. He has long, dark hair and is looking directly at the camera. The background is a dark, cluttered studio space with various cables and equipment visible. The text "Charlie Sexton: Too Many Ways to Fall" is overlaid on the image in a white, serif font.

Charlie Sexton: Too Many Ways to Fall

Jason Crouch



Charlie Sexton's story reads like the quintessential Texas music fable: raw talent and sheer determination tempered by frustration and missed opportunities, much of it lived in the public eye. Sexton's career began as child prodigy guitarist in the Austin music scene, fostered by some of the most celebrated artists there. He became an international heartthrob in his teens, struggled with major label woes, and rubbed elbows and performed with jet-setting rock stars. He searched for his lyrical voice and found success in the recording studio as an acclaimed producer. The journey has been costly in many regards, but at this point in his life, Charlie Sexton is the essence of the Austin music scene distilled in one career and man. More than thirty-five years into his career, Sexton remains a vital guitarist, a commanding vocalist, and, now, an in-demand producer.

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Charles Wayne Sexton was born in San Antonio, Texas, on August 11, 1968, to Kay and Mike Sexton. A day short of his second birthday his brother, Will, was born. By 1972, Kay had moved with her two sons to Austin. He received his first guitar when he was about two years of age. "Before my brother was born, my mom and dad took a trip on the train. They went to San Diego, and they left me with my aunt. They were actually going to hitchhike to Altamont. Then the show got moved and they ended up going to Juarez instead and they brought me back a guitar from Mexico. And even before that, there were always guitars around; I had several uncles that played. My grandfather always had a guitar around. One of my earliest memories was watching the *Johnny Cash Show*. That was one of the shows we would watch with my grandfather. And pretty soon I had painted my guitar black. That was really funny 'cause I would try to do the intro, you know, [in high-pitched childlike voice] 'Hello, I'm Johnny Cash.'

Man, I was really little.” During these years, the only singing Charlie did was in church. But live music was already a major force in his young life. Kay would take her boys to all the acclaimed music venues to hear all varieties of music, not just country or blues. “We were going to shows all the time, since I was like five,” he says. “I was just obsessed. We were always going to shows, always seeing music. I was always that kid that would be dancing amongst all the rednecks and cowboys and hippies and bikers and whatever.” The list of acts he recalls seeing at the Armadillo World Headquarters includes Todd Rundgren with Utopia, Frank Zappa, and Head East. “We kind of went to everything,” he muses. Music played at home included hand-me-down records from his parents, one of which made a particularly big impression: *Magical Mystery Tour* by the Beatles. “That was the record I tried to learn to play guitar to. That was tough because there is not one guitar line that

[Split Rail] had burned down.’ So the night before my debut, the club burns down. It was kind of apropos the way my life has gone, as charmed as it seems from the outside. All it takes is a drop of Irish blood for that kind of luck.”

Charlie’s live debut finally arrived the day before his eleventh birthday on August 10, 1979, at the Continental Club. He both sang and played guitar with a band called the Bizarros, an adventurous conglomerate of veteran Austin musicians that at one time included Sterling Morrison, formerly of the Velvet Underground. Soon after, he finally got to perform with Kenny Acosta at the Armadillo as Little Charlie. “Kenny is the one who gave me that name. It was on the poster.” The Armadillo was a familiar setting. “I mean, I basically grew up in that club and the beer garden.” The night Charlie saw Rockpile, the seminal British pub rock band that featured Dave Edmunds and Nick Lowe, at the Armadillo is particularly

So the night before my debut, the club burns down. It was kind of apropos the way my life has gone, as charmed as it seems from the outside. All it takes is a drop of Irish blood for that kind of luck.

goes through a whole song. It was just moronic. That record has both scarred me and led to some of my aesthetic.” He also began to sing along with some of these records. “When I was about nine years old, maybe a little younger ... I remember trying to sing [to the record] and I opened my mouth ... and to my mind, I sounded just like Willie Nelson. And at that point, that’s just not what I was going for, the furthest thing from my mind. I barely knew a chord.”

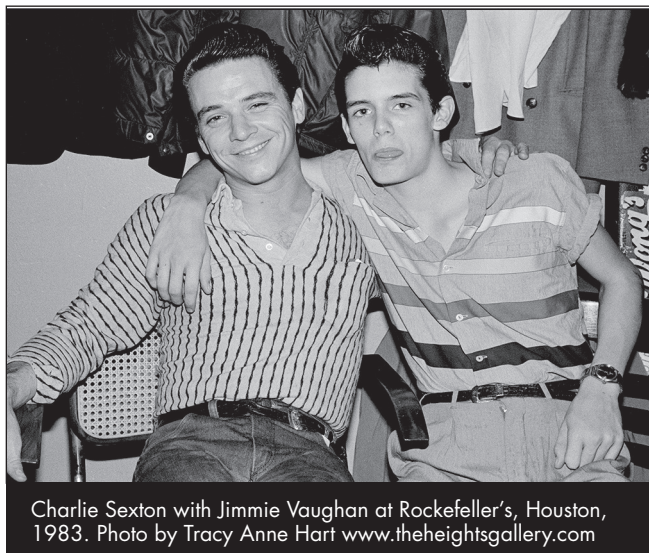
His first invitation to perform on stage came from a singer the family often went to see. “Kenny Acosta was from Louisiana but lived here in Austin. He had kind of a soul review kind of band. He was playing a place called the Split Rail, which was right across the street from where Schlotzsky’s is now [South Lamar Blvd. just south of Lady Bird Lake]. Kenny was a friend of the family and he said, ‘If you learn the words to “Jambalaya,” you can get up and sing it next week.’ So I was just so excited I went home and all week I just practiced. The day of the gig rolled around and my mother got home from work and it started getting kind of late and I told my mom we had to go because I was singing with Kenny tonight. She just said, ‘Oh honey, I forgot to tell you, when I was coming home from the Soap Creek Saloon last night, it

memorable. “That was the night I met Jimmie Vaughan, because I already knew Stevie [Ray Vaughan].” After a couple of shows playing acoustic guitar, Charlie was encouraged by family friend Speedy Sparks to invest in an electric guitar for an upcoming music fest. “We took a .22 pump rifle down to a pawnshop somewhere downtown and traded it in for a little cash for an electric guitar. I got on stage and played it that night. I didn’t know how to tune it, I didn’t know what keys were, I just played it by ear. That gave me a lot of drive to figure it all out.” Soon after Charlie met local blues legend W.C. Clark. “He became like my godfather. I played with him every Tuesday at the Continental for a year.” Subsequent appearances with area groups such as the Cobras featuring Denny Freeman continued to snowball. By the time Charlie was either twelve or thirteen (“It’s a little foggy”), his family moved to Wimberley, Texas, and Charlie stayed in Austin. First, he enrolled in school, staying with family friends, but that soon dissolved as well. He took up residence at a building on the lot of Red River Motors. Then he rented an attic apartment. “I think I had a bag of clothes, a record player, a few records, and my guitar. The school year started and then that didn’t work out and I had to transfer.” For the better part

of a year Charlie lived under the table at the home of Speedy Sparks, but then a lucky break came in the form of a call from Joe Ely's management.

Joe Ely had come out of the small but vibrant music scene in Lubbock, Texas. At the dawn of the 1980s, he was riding a streak of great press and strong albums. He was particularly popular in Austin. However, his guitarist, Jesse Taylor, had suffered a serious hand injury and needed time to heal. Charlie got the call. "I was thirteen at this point, and it didn't make sense. Of all the other guitarists in town, I didn't understand. It was a very sweet thing of Joe to do. In hindsight I can see how he just said, 'Well, Jesse is going to be out for six weeks, let's do something fun and cool.' I guess he had faith that I could pull it off. That's what we did."

When asked if he had started writing songs at this point, he said, "My brother and I played together constantly then. He'd play bass and I would play guitar. We'd play old rock and roll songs and this and that. But then we started writing standard type songs. You know, 'Baby's gone, baby's leaving, simmer down, baby,' what sounds good as a title? We would do carbon copies of these songs, kind of the way those fifties songs really were [similar]." When asked if he had an affinity for that era of music, he said exposure to Speedy's records was the catalyst for that interest. "Speedy started dating our mom. When he moved in with us, with him came his record collection. I mean he had every Elvis Sun 45. I would just play those records and just study it, study it, study it until I figured it out. All the modern records I had been given, like Boston or Kiss, got literally thrown out the window. They were replaced by Little Richard, Buddy Holly, Elvis, Gene Vincent, I mean all that stuff." Local rockabilly outfit the Leroi Brothers were a big inspiration as well. "They were the best, I mean they



Charlie Sexton with Jimmie Vaughan at Rockefeller's, Houston, 1983. Photo by Tracy Anne Hart www.theheightsgallery.com



Joe Ely and Charlie Sexton watching The Clash, Austin, 1982. Photo by Tracy Anne Hart www.theheightsgallery.com

were so great." When Charlie decided to put together his first band, he sought guidance from drummer Mike Buck, who had played with both the LeRoi Bros. and the Fabulous Thunderbirds. Buck was another record collector who offered Charlie some obscure songs to cover. One of the songs selected was "Eager Beaver Boy" by the Austin [via New York] rockabilly raver Ray Campi. The song also provided Charlie with the name of his first band, the Eager Beaver Boys. Little Charlie and the Eager Beaver Boys consistently performed around town. "Basically, back then I was singing the songs, writing some of the songs, fronting the band, and booking the band. I had some friends that worked for Jim Ramsey, the promoter. I'd call and see if I could get any gigs for the month and you know, 'Got anything coming up?' Well my friend says, 'The Clash are coming and they're doing these shows.' I was a huge Clash fan and I knew them through Joe [Ely] and we'd hung out. So I thought that would be great. My friend said, 'Alright, you can do the first show, and if they like you, then you can do the rest of the shows.' The dates stretched out to El Paso, Wichita Falls, and Tucson. So, basically, it was a loose sort of negotiation and we did the first show and they knew me and they thought this was a perfect band to open up." Charlie and the band did the tour in their broken-down Suburban only to find after a particularly long drive that they were not scheduled to play one of the dates. "I was horrified. We didn't have enough money to get back to Austin. The promoter came and got in my face saying I couldn't do this show and it was real ugly. Finally, the guys from the Clash came over and said, 'Hey, get out of that guy's face. You leave him alone and if he don't play, we don't play.' Well I played. Then we rode on the bus with them to Tucson

and they invited us to come to the US Festival in California, just to come. But I said we just had to get home because we were going to have a hard enough time getting home from Tucson, much less California. So that's how that happened." The Clash's appearance at the US Festival that May in 1983 would be their last ever with founding member Mick Jones and would signal the end of the band as a viable creative force.

Charlie says that "a huge part of that story from the time I was eleven to thirteen was Stevie Vaughan and I were real close. He was just Stevie Vaughan back then." Before Charlie had formed his band, he would make the rounds nightly, going from bar to bar, sitting in with the local outfits. "At the time Stevie was doing a weekly gig down at Cheatham Street Warehouse down in San Marcos, and there was never more than six people there. So my brother and I we'd go and play part of the set. And before that I'd go to the Steamboat and

house in South Austin. I got real sleepy one afternoon and it was so cold in the winter and I had this old funky heater. He came and woke me up; the whole house had this gas leaking [in it]. He had come by just to say 'Hi,' or whatever and I was [knocked] out on the couch. That would have been it!"

Even during the first year on his own Charlie kept up with school, waking himself up every morning to make it to class. However, the late-night schedule eventually began to take its toll. "I did one year living by myself in Austin going to school. At the end of that year I was fourteen and was burned out. I looked at what was available before me was not going to include tuition or a scholarship of any sort. So I decided, 'I'm gonna make records.' That part has worked out pretty decent." Not having graduated from high school failed to dampen his prospects or ambitions. At the age of sixteen, Charlie moved to Los Angeles to cut his first record.

A big part of my story is that all those years with Stevie. Stevie and I were so close and Stevie was so great, and Jimmie too. They both took care of me when I was living on my own, those guys would look after me.

Stevie would be playing like at 1:30 and I'd walk in and he'd see me and go, 'Come up! Come here!' He'd give me his guitar and it would be Little Charlie and Double Trouble." This was not an invitation that Stevie gave to many others, perhaps only his own brother Jimmie Vaughan. But it was a method of mentoring the younger guitarist. "I think he just got a kick out of me playing," says Charlie. "He'd just go to the bar and listen to me." At this time Double Trouble, Stevie's rhythm section, was made up of drummer Chris "Whipper" Layton and bassist Jackie Newhouse. It was one of these scenarios when Charlie sat in with Stevie that he first met new Double Trouble bassist Tommy Shannon. "Chris knew what was happening because we'd played together before," said Charlie. "But Tommy was just looking like, 'What is Stevie doing? He's giving a guitar to this kid?' I think we did an Elmore James [song] or something. A big part of my story is all those years with Stevie. Stevie and I were so close and Stevie was so great, and Jimmie too. They both took care of me when I was living on my own, those guys would look after me. Make sure I could eat or if I needed a ride, you know? In fact, Franny Christina, who was the drummer for the [Fabulous] Thunderbirds after Mike Buck left, saved my life one time when I was living in some crappy

The tremendous success of the debut album by Texan singer Christopher Cross resulted in a large contingent of Cross's team relocating to Southern California. Joe Priesnitz, who has worked with Cross, Eric Johnson, and the Gourds, arranged for Charlie to shoot some video footage back at Club Foot in Austin featuring original compositions by Charlie and filmed by local director Tim Hamblin. This prototypical electronic press kit was shipped to one label prior to Charlie being picked up by MCA Records in L.A. in 1985. After being signed, Charlie's first assignment was to cut a number for former Eagle [and Texan] Don Henley's second solo album, a track called "Man with a Mission." He also cut a track with avant-garde new wave duo Sparks. His first proper gig for MCA was to fly to New York to record a song for the soundtrack of the film *The Wild Life* starring Christopher Penn, brother of actor Sean Penn. The song was a cover of the Rolling Stones' "It's Not Easy" from the album *Aftermath*. "So I go out there to work with Woody (Rolling Stone Ron Wood) and Keith [Richards] shows up. So that week, I'm working with Keith and Woody. So Woody and I really hit it off, and I ended up staying for like a week or two in New York. So a week goes by in the studio ... and that's when I met Bob

[Dylan]. Woody said, 'Yeah Bob is gonna come by today.' Well, he didn't say Dylan, he just said Bob. You know, I thought some guy Bob would come by and that's it. Even with Keith I was all business back then. You know I was excited about music and the people that made it, but when it came down to it, I just wanted to work. But it was really cool to meet Keith and Woody for that matter. But really, the weird thing was the 'Bob thing.' I mean Woody said, 'This is the guy I was telling you about.' This kind of [response] was a recurring experience. So Bob shook his cane at me and said, 'Oh, I've heard about you.' I mean this had been going on for a while. Nick Lowe would come to one of our little shows at Liberty Lunch and there would be like fourteen people and he would come check us out with Jimmie Vaughan or something." Word was getting around. Charlie likens it to a tall tale from Texas.

Meetings commenced in New York to discuss potential producers for Charlie's debut record. Terry Manning had been a member of the West Texas band the Bobby Fuller Four and had a long slew of hits as producer and engineer. Manning's most recent success had been with ZZ Top's *Eliminator* album, and executives thought there would be a natural rapport with the young, bluesy artist. However, Charlie had other designs on his career. "Before that I spent a lot of time at Raul's, the punk club, because Speedy played with Joe 'King' Carrasco. I saw Carrasco a lot. [Then] my band had begun to morph from a rockabilly band into a kind of punk band. I'd been hanging out with [Austin punk rock band] the Big Boys. Basically, once I heard the Sex Pistols, I thought, 'Well this is rock and roll!' and that led me to other things. It also led me to a lot more English music, you know, and I was really soaking up all these other influences." The powers that be at MCA had planned on pitching Charlie as a blues artist. "I had been really fortunate. I got to open for John Lee Hooker at Antone's, and Clifford Antone had been really supportive of



Charlie Sexton, Doyle Bramhall II, Chris "Whipper" Layton, and Tommy Shannon, The Arc Angels backstage in Austin, 1999. Photo by Tracy Anne Hart www.theheightsgallery.com



Charlie Sexton, Clifford Antone, and Doyle Bramhall II at Antone's, Austin, 2005. Photo by Tracy Anne Hart www.theheightsgallery.com

my family and me. And blues was a big part of what was going on in this town. So that was the vehicle [that allowed me] to get up and play with people at Antone's. Of course, I learned tons from Stevie; I learned tons from Jimmie and among other people. But really when I thought about making my own record, I was influenced by all this great music; I was lucky to have that education with old rock and roll, rockabilly and blues and country stuff before all that. But as far as the blues guitar hero ... the person that was going to deliver all that to the world was Stevie. I knew that, and that was his job. And this was before Stevie really blew up. But that's where he was going. And also sometimes when I was singing [the blues] I didn't always feel as sincere, given my age and all. So I didn't identify with Terry Manning." MCA executives agreed to let Charlie do some investigating on his own. His next option proved to be very interesting, and this individual had a very storied pedigree as well.

Mick Ronson was David Bowie's right-hand man in the early 1970s. He had played guitar on every Bowie record from *The Man Who Sold the World* through *Aladdin Sane*. He went on to play with Bob Dylan, Van Morrison, Elton John, Ian Hunter, and many others. He arranged string parts on numerous records. With Bowie, he co-produced the classic Lou Reed album *Transformer*. He had a major hand in the success of John Cougar's *American Fool*. Charlie felt like Mick Ronson might provide the right guidance. "He was just lovely, a beautiful guy," says Charlie. "He came down and saw the band and he was into it! So we went up to his house in Bearsville, in Woodstock [New York], in the dead of winter for a week or five days. We would work in the day, kind of like a development thing, you know? We'd try this and that. Mick's wife Susie Ronson would make tea every morning and shepherd's pie for dinner; it was a very English existence.

One night he said, 'Oh we've got to quit kind of early.' 'Why's that?' I asked. 'Because Michael Caine's on the telly,' Ronson replied. While I was there we did a couple of things. He had me demo [the Yardbirds'] 'Heart Full of Soul' one day and then another day he had me sing this Billy Swan version of [Elvis's classic] 'Don't Be Cruel.' He had picked up on the influence Elvis had had on me vocally. It was a slow groove version, mostly piano. He said, 'We're running short of time. Why don't I just put the record down to tape and you just sing over it?' So that's basically what we did. So I go home and the A&R guy hears these few recordings we'd done and he said exasperatedly, "Heart Full of Soul?" That song's been so overdone. "Don't Be Cruel." What were you thinking?' So they basically fired Mick." To Ronson's credit both songs proved to be sizable hits in '87 and '88 for Chris Isaak and Cheap Trick, respectively. So the search for a producer continued.

Back in Los Angeles, Charlie approached producer Keith Forsey, who had in the previous year had enormous hits with Billy Idol (the *Rebel Yell* album) and Simple Minds ("Don't You (Forget About Me)"), which Forsey had also composed. Forsey swore he was much too busy and turned down the project. After some effort a meeting was arranged, and Forsey and Charlie hit it off. As fate would have it, the demo of Charlie doing the Billy Swan/Elvis tribute was what hooked Forsey. "He said, 'It's like you're the next Elvis or something!' Well, he agreed to do the record. He even thought we would do the southern kind of rockabilly thing. But I really had no intention [of doing that kind of record]. So, on that first record, Keith got a lot of the heat for what was done. But essentially, he and I did the record together and I really pushed the envelope to make it more contemporary. I mean I was really into the Pistols, Bowie, 999, the Stranglers, and all kinds of stuff. But it was really about writing the songs and that was a really long process. It was all new songs for this record. Oddly enough, the first day I went to work with Keith, we did a little preproduction day, I went up to his house and we wrote the single ["Beat So Lonely."] We made the record a couple of times. First with the band in the studio, drummer Ian Bailey and [bassist] Nigel Harrison from Blondie. The second single ["Impressed"] led to my long friendship with [songwriter] Tonio K. Keith brought in the ballad 'Hold Me,' made popular by [Texan] P.J. Proby, to sort of riff off the Elvis ballad-style number. It was about getting all the songs together. But once I learned what all you could do [in the studio], I really got the bug!"

Once the album was completed and band members selected, the promotional machine got underway. "I was shipped back and forth from Europe and England, probably four times before we even did a show. So by the time we actually started

the tour, I was like toast. It was: shoot videos, fly to Europe to do the press, do this, do that. Then the first gig was the MTV New Year's Ball with us, the Divinyls, the Hooters, and Starship. We all had to get up there and sing, 'We built this city ... [grumbles, laughs].' At least the Divinyls were awesome," he recalls.

When it came time for promoting the album *Pictures for Pleasure*, Charlie said the marketing was "Strong. Strong and wrong." "MCA was a real interesting company, but it wasn't called Musical Cemetery of America for nothing. But they really wanted to push the teen idol thing and I just said, 'Hey man, I just wanna play and make records.' The thing for me was I was always the weird-looking kid that fought my way through school every day of my life. I'm pretty self-effacing in a lot of ways. Anyway, 'Beat So Lonely' was only supposed to be the warm-up single. The second single, 'Impressed,' was meant to get the major attention. Anyhow, MTV picked up 'Beat So Lonely' and put it in heavy rotation. By the time the second video was done, there was some political something going on behind the scenes with MCA and accusations of payola and how they promoted things and all that. There were a couple of books about it and everything."

As was the popular format of the era, remix/12" singles were produced for both projected singles. In a stroke of good luck, Charlie met English singer Kirsty MacColl in a bar. She happened to be married to producer Steve Lillywhite. Lillywhite had produced dozens of hit albums, chief among them the first three U2 records as well as hits for Big Country, Simple Minds, the Smiths, and the Psychedelic Furs. After a rousing time on the town, Charlie asked Lillywhite if he had plans for the weekend. Lillywhite said, "No," and commenced to remix Charlie's second single, "Impressed." Charlie says, "So that was like part of the charmed part of my life. Just meeting Lillywhite in a bar and him being free that weekend. I mean some small part of it could be talent, raw, natural talent or whatever. And the rest of it is just being a decent guy, I hope."

The record did respectfully on the international market, particularly in Australia and Japan. However, the press in Austin was less receptive. "Here I got my weekly slogging from local writers." Jeff Whittington's review of *Pictures for Pleasure* from the *Austin Chronicle*, December 13, 1985, opens with, "Charlie Sexton is going to be bigger than Corey Hart and John Parr put together. This is not a compliment." Both of the aforementioned artists had had major hits in the previous year but have had little lasting resonance in the subsequent three decades. Whittington claimed "\$400,000 worth of overproduction by eight engineers" had provided Sexton "with an album virtually indistinguishable from the pack of interchangeable 'artists' cluttering up the airwaves and MTV.

Besides, maybe all the time he was playing those blazing blues riffs and gritty rockabilly runs he was really yearning to be Aldo Nova,” conjuring up another eighties relic. The review goes on to slag producer Forsey and bemoan the lack of guitar on the synth-dappled songs. “It made for good copy, I guess,” Sexton shrugs.

After the promotion of the record had run its course and a projected tour of Australia was scrapped, an executive decision was made to concentrate on writing new material for a new record. Shortly thereafter, Charlie was in a bad motorcycle accident and could not play guitar at all for six months. In the meantime, MCA was doing what it did best by assembling hit soundtracks for hit movies and placing their stable of artists squarely in the proceedings. Soundtrack sales were huge for eighties movies like *Beverly Hills Cop*, *Back to the Future*, *Ghostbusters*, *The Color of Money*, and *Streets of Fire*, among others. Soundtracks for popular television shows such as *Miami Vice* and *Moonlighting* also generated major sales. This approach was used with Charlie’s songs that generated a desired ambiance in a film. During these years Charlie would be heard in films such as *Beverly Hills Cop 2*, *True Romance*, *The Wild Life*, *Air America*, and *Roadracers*. In addition to two songs performed on the soundtrack, Charlie briefly appeared in the 1991 film *Thelma & Louise*. His interest in acting began to emerge.

Meanwhile, Charlie turned up in another major music release at the end of the 80s, albeit in an unexpected manner. The boxset *Biograph*, a career retrospective of the work of Bob Dylan, was unveiled to capitalize on the new format of compact disc and hopefully repeat the lucrative sales of Eric Clapton’s box *Crossroads* in 1988. Within the liner notes Dylan lamented the state of popular music with the following. “Rock and roll, I don’t know, rhythm and blues or whatever, I think it’s all gone. In its pure form. There are some guys true to it, but it’s so hard. You have to be so dedicated and committed and everything is against it. I’d like to see Charlie Sexton become a big star, but the whole machine would have to break down right now before that could happen.” This sentiment was as much a surprise to Charlie as anybody. But it would not be the last time Dylan would talk up Charlie.

1987 was a fallow year for Charlie artistically, but he spent some of that time gallivanting around the United States and Australia with David Bowie. “He called me and said, ‘Hey, I’m going to be in your town. Why don’t you come around?’ and I asked him ‘You’re gonna be in Austin?’ He said, ‘No, Houston.’ So I met David in Houston and played one song. Then David thought I should go to California with him. Then he suggested that I go down to Australia as well.” Peter Frampton was the guitarist on the Glass Spider tour and

seemed non-plussed by Bowie’s favoritism towards Charlie. “He [Frampton] wasn’t very nice.” Ultimately the concert was broadcast on network television in the States, and a home video was released as well. Before bringing Charlie out for a version of the Velvet Underground’s “White Light, White Heat,” Bowie introduced “My young friend from America, Charlie Sexton!”

In 1989 Charlie’s second album, *Charlie Sexton*, was released. Produced by Tony Berg, the label monitored the process more closely this time and considered more outside writers. The closing song “Cry Little Sister” had been featured in the soundtrack to the teen vampire film *The Lost Boys* just two years previously and seemed an odd choice for Charlie. “It was a label thing. But some of the other things I was proposed to do, I mean no way. Honestly, in hindsight that was one of the personal tragedies for myself, I didn’t put myself around the right writers. I mean I knew Steve Earle then, Gary Louris from the Jayhawks was around and we’d all see each other around. But I was so enamored with the studio aspect of things and production, what I gravitated to was [laying] tracks and sonics that I [missed opportunities] to write more. I mean, I’m not super prolific anyway. Most of the time I’ll work on a musical or melodic idea and figure out how to go from there. Sometimes I’ll get lucky and [whistles, simulates an explosion] and there it all is. Some of the better ones are the ones that happened like that.”

As it became apparent that the record was not taking off, Charlie occupied his time by motorcycling about California with his mates. Usual riding buddies included Steve Jones of the Sex Pistols, actors Mickey Rourke and Michael Bowen, and “whatever Soap Opera dude had just bought a bike. I mean after I recovered [from the accident] I went and bought a brand new bike. I didn’t own a car for years.” When asked about drinking, drugs, and partying, he responded, “Yeah I partied. You know, whatever was around. It was by proxy. After hanging out with people and doing this and doing that I remembered, ‘Hey, I do music, that’s what I do.’ I didn’t buy into the romance of drugs or addiction. Luckily, I never became a junkie, although I look like one.”

After so many years living in Los Angeles, Charlie found that it was “hollow,” and made a trip to his old hometown, Austin. “I was hanging out with some of my old friends and we’d ride around in old cars, sweating our asses off, we’d go to Barton Springs, let’s go get some tacos, let’s go to the club, eat hot sauce, all that stuff. I thought, ‘I’ll come back here!’ So I did. The ARC [Austin Rehearsal Complex] was just getting started and the people who owned the ARC, one was my road manager and the other was my drummer [Wayne Nagel and Don Harvey, respectively.] So I got my own [rehearsal]

room, and I had that for nine years. Once it was up and going I was there for twelve, thirteen hours a day, working on songs, working on tracks. That's where most of the Arc Angels stuff was created."

"In all those years as close as I was to Stevie, I only saw him a couple of times because everyone was always on tour. I think I saw him at Jimmie's house maybe. But, when I moved back, Stevie was taking a break from Double Trouble because he was gonna do the *Family Style* record and tour with Jimmie and use another band on the road. So I was always at the ARC working and Chris [Layton] had a locker and was practicing there and in the hall one time and he said, 'So Stevie's going out with Jimmie for this tour and we're not gonna be doing anything. You're in town and Doyle [Bramhall II] has been around. We should book something at the Continental Club on a Tuesday or something.' So we had booked a gig, you know we were gonna get together and work some stuff up, just for fun. And then Stevie got killed."

Vaughan for all the mentoring they had offered Charlie early in his career. "The best medicine for them after the initial grieving was to get out and play, and I owed it to them."

When asked how long he had known Doyle Bramhall II, he said, "That's the funny thing because I knew Doyle a long time. The first time I met Doyle was when I had the rockabilly band and we played at a place called the Hop, in Ft. Worth. His grandmother brought him to our show. He and his half-brother were there and he [Doyle] was kind of preppy then. He had on a little tennis shirt, and I was all greasy, looking like a road dog already. I had a step-grandmother that would dress me up like that too when she brought me to Ft. Worth. She didn't want me looking like the little Bohemian that I was. That's when I was fourteen, when that happened."

"So once I said yes completely to the Arc Angels I said, 'Okay, this couldn't be a straight up blues band.' What I wanted was like a Texas Led Zeppelin. Essentially there were two producers in the running. Little Steven [Van Zandt of the E Street Band]

So once I said yes completely to the Arc Angels I said, 'Okay, this couldn't be a straight up blues band.' What I wanted was like a Texas Led Zeppelin.

"After it had been a while, Tommy [Shannon, on whom Vaughan's death had been particularly rough] and Mark Proct who managed the Thunderbirds [and later the Arc Angels], heard there was some band with Double Trouble and Charlie and Doyle. Robert Cray was coming to play the Opry House and needed an opener. He asked if we wanted to do it. We said, 'Okay' and worked up some shit real quick, eight or nine songs and we did it!" Thus were born the Arc Angels, an Austin supergroup. "Even after that one show, like Warner Bros. came around saying 'Hey man!' sniffing around. Different label guys, I guess they smelled blood. For me, that was a kind of crossroads because I'd already started writing for what was gonna be my third record. There was all this heat about the Angels because I was on MCA, and we end up getting signed by Geffen. So basically, David Geffen and the president of MCA get into a plane and took a flight and worked it out. But for me, it was a step backwards, because I had already decided against the bluesy thing since my first record. I mean I love to play it, but what I was working on for [projected third album] *Under the Wishing Tree* was more of a grown-up record." Charlie did continue the Arc Angels for the most part out of dedication to Chris Layton and Tommy Shannon and even Stevie Ray

and I had been talking about working together for years. He always told me, 'I wanna see you in a band, man! It's always gotta be a band! You got the Beatles and the Stones, man!' So he was always trying to draw me into some project with this Scottish guy. Anyway, Little Steven and I hit it off and that's great. But then during SXSW, we had a meeting with [Led Zeppelin bassist] John Paul Jones. He came to our rehearsal space at the ARC to hear the band. He was into it too, and he is really amazing! And artistically with John Paul Jones, I thought, 'Well yeah!' The label really wanted Little Steven and I had to kind of pull back and take out what I thought was really cool out of the equation and look at it. I knew that one thing that really had to happen for the record was collaboration vocally between Doyle and me. I knew Little Steven could broker collaboration. There was a little bit of friction there too, because Doyle hadn't done too much by then. And Little Steven knew what a band did; I mean he was in the E Street Band. And so I pushed all the way for Steven, saying, 'He's the guy, he's the guy.'" The self-titled debut by the Arc Angels was released on Geffen Records in April 1992. The first single "Living in a Dream" featured lead vocal chores split by Charlie and Doyle. They made their network television debut on



Doyle Bramhall II with Charlie Sexton at the Arc Angels Reunion at Antone's, Austin, 2005.
Photo by Tracy Anne Hart www.theheightsgallery.com

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Late Night with David Letterman in June 1992 performing “Living in a Dream” and returned the following January to present Charlie’s cautionary tale of excess, “Too Many Ways to Fall.” That song, the album’s closer, would be sadly prophetic concerning the band’s future.

There was no second record. Even as the band toured extensively, it became apparent that Doyle was becoming addicted to heroin. “Doyle quit, then he kinda got fired and then he became a junkie. Everything that could be fucked up was. And the more fucked up he was, the crazier his outfits got, just like Stevie; big hats, feathers, purple clothes, a weird tail thing.” When asked about his willingness to record a second album, had Doyle not been sick, he said, “Well yeah, that band had legs! I mean there was no other rock and roll then, it was all R & B and beginning of the grunge thing and all that. And there could have been another record because that’s what the label wanted, just to replace Doyle. Boy, they had ideas. Bad ideas.” He refuses to name any of the label’s suggestions. “It just made no sense. Of course, that happens to bands all the time. Something goes wrong, and they bring in someone new and it’s up to the band to make that work.” So that chapter came to an end, and Charlie could return to *Under the Wishing Tree* with his full attention.

Charlie and his management hoped to shake off the contract at MCA. “We were gonna play our big card with MCA, because I wanted off of the label. I was crazy in debt at that label, and that is not the reason I wanted off. I was in the hole over there for easily seven figures and most of that money you have no control over how and when it is spent. I wanted off because the contract was for a lot of records, I mean a lot. Anyhow we went to them with several songs that I had demoed and felt very strongly about. Well we hoped when they heard these demos, they would cut me loose, saying, ‘Oh, this isn’t a pop record, get out of here!’ Instead they said, ‘Hey, you learned how to write! This is good stuff!’ So we made a brand new deal over there with some serious renegotiations. ‘We’ll get rid of the debt if you don’t deliver this amount of success if we promote you in some sort of decent way’ . . . blah, blah. Anyway, it all backfired. And then to stick it to me after all that, that’s the only record that is out-of-print. The other two have always been available. And they won’t give it up either. You can no longer buy *Wishing Tree*. It’s all public affairs and bean counters. They just decide they are not gonna pay you half of what they owe you. They say, ‘You wanna get paid? Ha, ha, ha. Go fuck yourself. Go ahead sue us. Good luck with that!’” Charlie is no longer on the MCA roster.

Attempts to record an album with his brother Will Sexton also fizzled out due to label challenges. After writing together, recording songs, and getting signed to A&M records, the whole thing was discarded when Universal Records bought out dozens of smaller labels in the largest such deal in recorded music history. Hundreds of artists were dropped from labels as varied as Island, Polygram, Mercury, MCA, and A&M as they were folded into a giant conglomerate that in actuality belonged to Seagram's, the liquor and refreshment empire. It should be mentioned that Charlie's old label, MCA, had done this very thing in the early seventies, purchasing smaller labels such as Duke/Peacock, ABC/Dunhill, Uni, etc., assuming control of the roster and catalogue associated with each label it acquired. It just had never occurred at this volume previously. A&M

During the nineties, Charlie got married and became a father. But once again, opportunity came knocking. Bob Dylan had approached him in the past about joining his touring band. Dylan tours ceaselessly, playing dozens of shows every year. Charlie declined the offer during the making of the aborted album with his brother. But with little on his docket, Charlie couldn't think of a good reason to say "no," and he accepted the job. He also assisted Dylan in the studio when Dylan recorded "Things Have Changed," which went on to win an Oscar for Best Original Song in 2001. Since that time Charlie has appeared on most of Dylan's records, including *Love and Theft*, *Tempest*, and *Fallen Angels*. Charlie also appeared in Dylan's own movie, *Masked and Anonymous*. Between tours with Dylan, Charlie had regular gigs producing

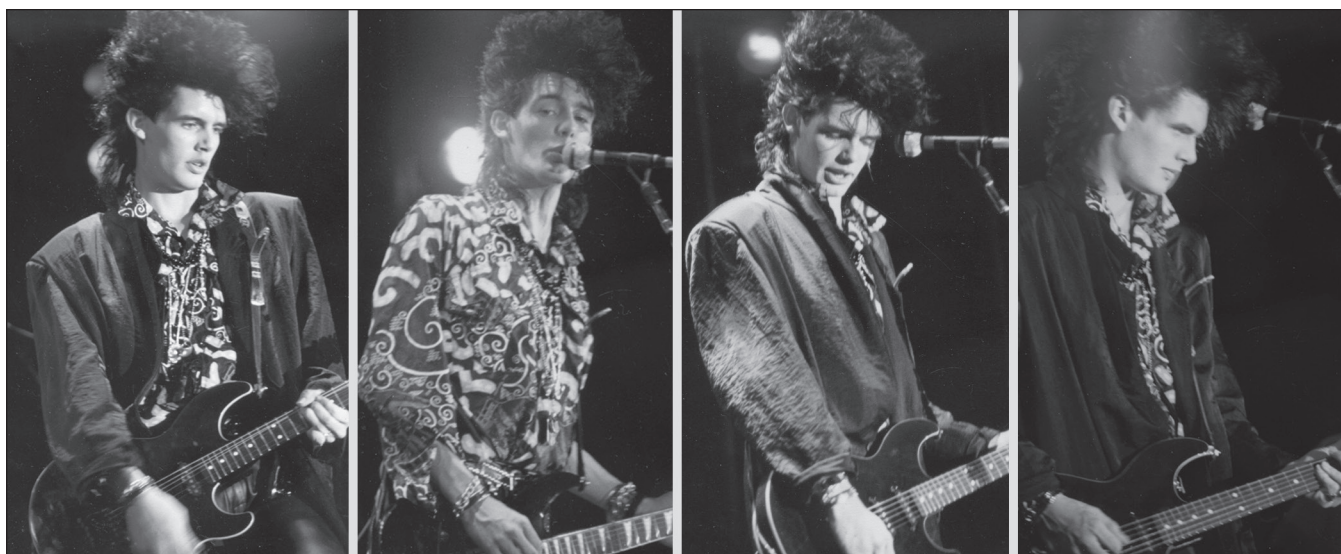
Then Ethan [Hawke] said, "'I want you to play Townes Van Zandt.' There was a long pause. A long silence. I said, 'Well that's terrifying.' He said, 'I know.'"

Records was maintained almost as a pet imprint for superstars Sting and Sheryl Crow. The Sexton Bros. album remains unreleased. "Four years for naught. Well, there are still plenty of songs we wrote during that time, but ..." his voice trailing off. "I'm telling you, it's that one drop of Irish blood. That is all it takes." In 2008, a massive fire on the Universal Studios lot in Los Angeles destroyed hundreds, if not thousands, of master recordings acquired and stored by the Universal Music Group. The true extent of the loss was not revealed until the summer of 2019 when investigations by *New York Times* reporters determined the true scale of loss. Charlie's name was listed with hundreds of other artists whose material was gone forever. The incident had to be brought to Charlie's attention as he had heard nothing from Universal. It just served to further illustrate his personal distaste for corporate meddling.

In an effort to release his fourth solo record, *Cruel and Gentle Things*, with minimal mishaps and no meddling label executives, Charlie went with a smaller company. "It was this tiny little label out of Minneapolis called Backporch. For years they were just a jazz label and then they were looking to broaden their roster. They pretty much left us alone; wait, what us? They left me alone. I only spent maybe seven actual days in a studio making it. Two or three of the songs I did in one night. I'd go in at 8:00 at night and work till 4:00 in the morning." The album was released in the autumn of 2005.

critically-acclaimed albums by Edie Brickell, Lucinda Williams, Los Super Seven, and a stand-alone record by old friends Double Trouble.

Charlie was invited by Austin filmmaker Richard Linklater to act in the Oscar-nominated motion picture *Boyhood*. The film was famously shot over a number of years in the first decade of the 21st century, and Charlie was cast as the roommate of Ethan Hawke's character. Off screen Hawke and Charlie became great friends, which lead to a collaboration that Charlie did not anticipate. In 2016, Hawke posited a series of questions to Charlie about a projected film project. "First Ethan asked me, 'What do you think if I write and do a film about Blaze Foley?' I told him, 'Yes, that's a movie. Good story.' Then he asked me, 'Will you help me and oversee the musical aspects, help with the musicians, etc.' I said 'Of course.' Then Ethan said, 'I want you to play Townes Van Zandt.' There was a long pause. A long silence. I said, 'Well that's terrifying.' He said, 'I know.' 'So that means we're supposed to do it?' 'Yes.'" The film was both written and directed by Hawke. It tells the story of star-crossed Southern singer-songwriter Blaze Foley. Charlie played the part of the more celebrated Texas singer-songwriter Townes Van Zandt, whom he knew personally. Charlie said, "I didn't know Townes as well as my brother did, or certainly as well as my mother did, but I was able to include little small details about



Charlie Sexton at Magic Landing, El Paso, 1986. Photo by Larry House. Courtesy of Aileen Law.

him that most people didn't know. It was something I had to do, respectfully. I only do things I believe in." As renowned as Van Zandt was as a songwriter, Charlie says, "He also had impeccable comic timing." The film was a success, with Charlie receiving praise for his sensitive rendering of the singer. The artistic partnership between Ethan Hawke and Charlie will undoubtedly furnish future works.

Charlie is frequently called upon to be the musical director at local events such as the annual Austin Music Awards and high-profile benefits such as the Hurricane Harvey Relief Show in September 2017. "I'm blessed with being this weird conduit between people," he laughs. Yes, famous people, artistic people, generous people. He spent the first months of 2019 as a guest on "A Bowie Celebration" tour spearheaded by long-time Bowie pianist Mike Garson. Charlie turned in emotional performances of "Space Oddity" and others amidst a cast of Bowie alumni. Today, Charlie tours regularly with Dylan, generally for about half of the year. Very few reviews of Dylan's performances fail to mention Charlie's substantial contribution to the show as bandleader. Charlie is divorced but has custody of his son, Marlon, and is particularly attentive to his duties as a father. "It is unfortunate that what I do for a living takes me away for months at a time," he ponders. As this article was being concluded, Charlie had just finished a four-month tour of Europe with Bob Dylan that took them to several countries, playing historic halls and theatres. With no further Dylan dates on the calendar for the remainder of 2019, Charlie will have more time to spend with his son and resume his perpetual tinkering in his studio. After all, a rock music veteran with a career of more than three decades ought to get to work on his fifth solo record. ★

Bibliography

This article is the culmination of a lengthy personal interview with Charlie Sexton on October 9, 2013, at his home in Oak Hill, Texas. Additional information was extracted from an evening telephone interview on August 4, 2019. I thank Charlie for the generous gift of his time and accessibility.

The quote from Bob Dylan appears in the liner notes authored by Cameron Crowe in the box set *Biograph*. Issued in 1985 by Columbia Records, New York, New York.

The review of Charlie's debut album by Jeff Whittington appeared in the *Austin Chronicle* on December 13, 1985. It can also be found on p. 55 in *The Austin Chronicle Music Anthology*, published in 2011 by University of Texas Press, Austin, Texas.

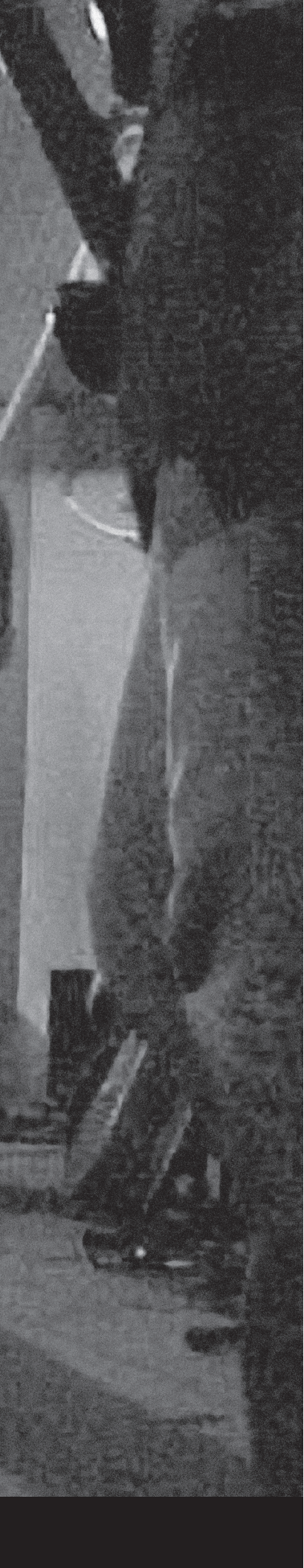
The collage photos of Charlie were taken at a performance in El Paso, Texas, May 24, 1986, at the now defunct amusement park Magic Landing. Those photos were taken by Larry House and tracked down by Aileen Law. Many thanks to both of them.

Tracy Anne Hart graciously provided the majority of images accompanying this article as a preview for her upcoming book *Seeing Stevie Ray* in the John and Robin Dickson Series in Texas Music History at Texas A & M University Press, available February 2020. From 1983 until just before Vaughan's untimely death in 1990, Hart crafted a vibrant photographic mosaic of Vaughan and other Texas blues artists.



Jack Ingram and the Roots of the Texas Country Scene

Rich Kelly



In May of 2016 Guy Clark, a songwriting giant in both his native Texas and his adopted Nashville, passed away. A week later, a bus of Clark's Tennessee friends delivered their mentor's cremated remains to fellow artist Terry Allen's Santa Fe home for a wake for the legend. The intimate picking party featured a who's who of alternative country luminaries including Steve Earle, Emmylou Harris, Vince Gill, Joe Ely, Rodney Crowell, Lyle Lovett, and Robert Earl Keen. Among the impressive gathering of singer-songwriters, only two were under sixty years old: Allen's son Bukka, an accomplished accordionist, and Jack Ingram.¹ The 45-year-old Ingram had come a long way from his musical beginnings in Dallas's Deep Ellum more than twenty-five years earlier. Along with the chance to honor one of his heroes and inspirations, the invitation signaled Ingram's ascension into the pantheon of Texas's elite singer-songwriters. Along the way Ingram pushed against the prevailing musical winds, played a key role in reviving fan interest in original Texas country music, and served as the key inspiration for the early artists of the emerging Texas Country scene.

In the 1990s in college cities and towns throughout Texas, a regional country music scene developed. The artists and fans in this musical movement consciously strove to revive the values and musical heritage of the earlier progressive country scene and its outlaw offshoot. This scene would come to be called “Texas Country.” For many this name is problematic. Texas Country in its literal sense includes a quantity and variety of artists so vast as to defy any attempts to address them as a cohesive group. But genres and subgenres are not named by academics, and their names are unrelated to attempts at accurate descriptions. Institutions such as record labels, trade groups, and radio stations create genre designations for the purpose of packaging and selling a group of artists to potential listeners. Diane Pecknold traces the process of a group of recordings being labeled “hillbilly” before that name was discarded by broadcasters and the recording industry in favor of the more marketable “country” in the 1950s.² In the 1970s

Kacey Musgraves. Despite the genre’s widespread popularity, there has been little academic examination of its beginnings or impact. In dozens of interviews with artists, fans, and others who worked in the early years of the Texas Country scene, it is clear that the genre stems largely from the work of two artists, Robert Earl Keen and Jack Ingram. Keen’s role is well understood, but Ingram’s position as the first of a new generation seems to be overlooked by most who were not there in those nascent days. For all the attention and respect Ingram has earned in his three decades as a performer, it is his role in forging a trail for a new generation of Texas singer-songwriters that will be examined here.

Keen, Ingram, and those who followed them took their primary inspiration from the progressive and outlaw country scenes of the 1970s and early 1980s. In the minds of Texas Country’s progenitors, Willie Nelson and Jerry Jeff Walker playing at the Armadillo World Headquarters was a paradise

34 In dozens of interviews with artists, fans, and others who worked in the early years of the Texas Country scene, it is clear that the genre stems largely from the work of two artists, Robert Earl Keen and Jack Ingram. Keen’s role is well understood, but Ingram’s position as the first of a new generation seems to be overlooked by most who were not there in those nascent days.

Austin country scene, it was radio program director Rusty Bell who branded the music “progressive country.”³ In this way, Lone Star 93.3 in Austin, seeking to distinguish local music from that of the station’s mostly Nashville playlist, labeled artists such as Pat Green and Cory Morrow Texas Country. This term is widely applied to regional artists who see themselves as progressive and outlaw revivalists. Texas Country as a term is used today to describe a top-ten chart and dozens of radio stations and shows, and periodicals such as the *Houston Chronicle* and *Dallas Observer* annually publish “best of” lists under that genre heading. Texas Country as a label may be unsatisfying in a semantic sense but, as with other contested genre titles such as country itself, it is the term popularly applied to the music that is the subject of this article.

Nomenclature aside, Texas Country remains a vibrant and popular regional music scene as it continues in its third decade. Some of the state’s biggest draws have emerged from the scene, including Pat Green, Cory Morrow, Roger Creager, Kevin Fowler, Randy Rogers, Wade Bowen, Hayes Carll, Aaron Watson, and

from which country music had been expelled. Nelson, Walker, and a host of their musical compatriots including Gary P. Nunn, Ray Wiley Hubbard, Rusty Weir, Guy Clark, and Townes Van Zandt would serve as both inspiration as well as wizened guides to the performers who rose to prominence in the 1990s and beyond. In order to understand the importance of Jack Ingram, and Keen for that matter, it is crucial to recognize the declining commercial success the outlaw artists suffered in the late 1980s and well into the 1990s. Between Nelson’s 1975 release *Red Headed Stranger* and 1986, Nelson and Jennings combined to place 31 albums in the top five of the country chart, 17 of which hit number one. In the decade that followed, the pair mustered a single top-five album.⁴ In the late 1980s, Texas blues and indie rock came to the fore in terms of chart success and scene vibrancy. It was into these strong headwinds that Keen released three albums in the 1980s and Jack Ingram would launch his own progressive country revival.

If Ingram’s position as the primary catalyst for this generation of country artists has been obscured, it may owe



Jack Ingram with Jerry Jeff Walker at Kerrville Folk Festival, ca. 1997. Photo by and courtesy of Jeremy Elliott.

something to another little-remarked-upon development of the 1990s, Dallas's rise to rival Austin as the epicenter of live music in the state. Dallas's preeminence in Texas music was not without precedent. In the roaring twenties and into the Great Depression no other scene was more important in the development of Texas blues guitar than Dallas's Deep Ellum. The legendary Blind Lemon Jefferson performed on the streets and in the venues of the black business district, serving as the fountainhead for seminal blues musicians such as Robert Johnson, Lead Belly, Blind Willie Johnson, T-Bone Walker, Lil' Son Jackson, and Lightnin' Hopkins. By the last decade of the twentieth century, gentrification and a khaki-clad college crowd from nearby Southern Methodist University, a prestigious private university, had reinvigorated Deep Ellum. The late eighties saw the emergence of Edie Brickell & New Bohemians. The alternative folk-rock group met at Booker T. Washington High School, a magnet high school in the area.⁵ The Bohemians' 1988 Geffen release *Shooting Rubber Bands at the Moon* produced the hit singles "What I Am" and "Circle" and lent credibility to the resurgence of a new Deep Ellum live music scene. By the early 1990s, Jackopierce dominated Dallas folk pop. Jack O'Neill and Carey Pierce met in 1988 while majoring in theater at SMU. The duo combined their names and musical talents to create the most sought after ticket on the Dallas college scene. By 1994, Jackopierce had sold enough albums at their shows and in local record stores to earn a deal with Geffen A&M Records.⁶

Jackopierce failed to find national success as a major label act, and the duo's popularity waned after signing with A&M. The Dallas scene's national image was bolstered in 1993 by Deep Blue Something and their widely heard adult contemporary smash "Breakfast at Tiffany's," a song, as club owner John Henry Clay explains, that made minimal impact on its intended college audience but found a dramatically better reception among fans old enough to get the song's title reference.⁷

Tripping Daisy formed in Dallas in 1990, bringing a crunchy, neo-psychedelic grunge presence to local clubs and radio. The band hit the national charts in 1995 with "I Got a Girl"

before morphing into the symphonic pop of the Polyphonic Spree. The Deep Ellum scene was rounded out with indie rockers from nearby locales such as Fort Worth's Toadies, Oklahoma City's Nixons, Austin's Soul Hat, and Baton Rouge's Better Than Ezra. In December 1991, a relatively unknown Pearl Jam played Trees in Deep Ellum.⁸ Two months earlier Trees narrowly avoided a riot when Nirvana performed as their "Smells Like Teen Spirit" was introducing the nation to grunge.⁹ This was the musical world Jack Ingram found when he arrived from Houston to begin his freshman year at SMU in 1989.

Jack Owen Ingram was born on November 15, 1970, in Houston. The Ingrams moved to the prosperous Houston suburb the Woodlands when Jack was eight. Ingram was an athlete at the Woodlands, excelling in golf. His first experience on stage was playing Starbuck in Woodlands High School's UIL one act play presentation of *The Rainmaker* as a senior.¹⁰ As a child Ingram took piano lessons but largely ignored the guitar he had been given. Ingram's early musical taste was shaped by his father's record collection. Like many Texans in the 1970s, the elder Ingram enjoyed the progressive country sounds of Willie Nelson, Jerry Jeff Walker, and Waylon Jennings. Fellow Texan Buddy Holly joined Don McLean, Merle Haggard, and Don Williams on his father's shelf. Jack's older brother turned him on to Bruce Springsteen and Little Feat while John Cougar Mellencamp inspired from the radio.¹¹

As a teenager Ingram became obsessed with music. "I listened to so much music I stopped enjoying it because I was so inside the song I wanted to know what the hell they were doing," Ingram explained. In a time when LP records still dominated sales, Ingram sought answers in the liner notes that accompanied albums. Seeing Jennings had played bass with Buddy Holly and was a frequent collaborator with Nelson, as well as the frequent presence of Larry Gatlin on other artists' projects, Ingram began to gain a sense of the interconnectedness of the music industry.¹²

By high school Ingram was sneaking into the Wunsche Brothers Café and Saloon in nearby Spring to hear Texas legends such as Jerry Jeff Walker and Ray Wylie Hubbard. He bought a copy of a Willie Nelson songbook and immersed himself in progressive and outlaw country. "When I was a junior or senior in high school, a buddy of mine came to live with me, and we used to sit up getting high listening to [Willie Nelson's] *Red Headed Stranger* while everybody else in school was getting high listening to [Pink Floyd's] *The Wall*. We tapped into this whole other element, and it just spoke to me."¹³

As an Anglo Texan from a white-collar suburb born in 1970, the music of Ingram's childhood was the progressive and outlaw country scenes associated with Austin and musical institutions such as the Armadillo World Headquarters and the *Austin City*



Pat Green, Cory Morrow, and David Henry in Henry and Paige Blanton's Lubbock apartment, ca. 1993.
Photo by and courtesy of David Henry.

Limits PBS television series. Ingram represents the beginning of a generation of likeminded Texans who would come to view the music and culture, or perhaps the myth constructed around the culture, of their childhoods as a pastoral state to be returned to. Of course, the artists of that 1970s movement themselves were yearning to reconnect to what they perceived as the utopian past of their own childhoods. Of the first wave of artists to become popular in the college country scene of the late nineties, four artists—Ingram, Roger Creager, Pat Green, and Cory Morrow—were born in the eighteen months between November of 1970 and May of 1972. These artists had their musical world defined by the sounds of Waylon and Willie, Jerry Jeff Walker, and the other artists of the progressive country scene.

This phenomenon is not unique to Ingram and his contemporaries. Nelson and Jennings covered and praised in song the greatest Texas star of their youths, Bob Wills. Nelson frequently covered Wills songs such as “Milk Cow Blues” and “Stay All Night,” the latter recorded by Wills when Nelson was twelve. Jennings released a B-side titled “Bob Wills is Still the King,” paying homage to the King of Western Swing who ruled the Texas airwaves for the first decade of Jennings’s life. When Ingram turned away from the pop and indie rock popular in the live music scene he found at SMU, he turned

to his own past. He turned to the music of his childhood, the music of his father.

It is important to understand the artists and fans who created the Texas Country scene were almost as united in their dislike for the country music played on top-40 radio during the 1990s as in their love of the progressive and outlaw country of the 1970s and early 1980s. Ingram considered top-40 country music “the enemy” in the early years of his career.¹⁴ He saw the music coming out of Nashville as a problem he was determined to fix. Brendon Anthony, a College Station native who spent over fifteen years playing fiddle for Pat Green and now serves as the head of the Texas Music Office in the Governor’s Office, explained, “Mainstream country at this time was skewing older. Songs about the rodeo circuit, losing a wife or husband to cheating (or the rodeo), struggling to make it by, and the money being tight were romanticized by college kids but they had a hard time identifying with it personally.”¹⁵

In Alamo Heights, a wealthy downtown enclave in San Antonio, four neighbors and lifelong friends were heading off to college as the eighties ended: David Henry, Robert Henry, Stephen Harris, and Brian Zintgraff. During the 1990s they would find themselves in the heart of the developing Texas Country scene. Two of the four, David and Robert Henry, were brothers. Two would go on to become Texas Country

performers, Robert Henry and Stephen Harris. Two would attend Texas Tech University in Lubbock, David Henry and Brian Zintgraff, while two would join Ingram at SMU, Robert Henry and Stephen Harris. Their musical experiences were typical of the first wave of Texas country fans. They shared Ingram and Anthony's frustration with country radio. "Everyone wanted to change that awful shit they were putting out," according to David Henry.¹⁶

Robert Henry explained, "I think of my football tape in high school. The one I listened to on the bus and in the locker room. It was Guns and Roses, it was the Cult, it was Kool Moe Dee. Anything that was kick ass. Run-DMC was on there. Van Halen. It was heavy shit."¹⁷ Harris, an honorable mention All-State center, was recruited to play football for the SMU Mustangs as they attempted to rebuild their program from an NCAA-levelled "death penalty." "I had a meathead side of me. Growing up in San Antonio, the Detroit Rock

role model for Ingram. "He was closer to where I was," Ingram recalled. "He made it a little more attainable."²³ Ingram was not the only young Texan to embrace Keen as an alternative to mainstream country music, but he was the first of his generation to gain a significant following performing his own original material. In doing so Ingram became the inspiration for those who followed. As Dub Miller, an early Texas Country star in College Station, explained, "Robert Earl Keen made you want to do it, Jack Ingram made you believe you could."²⁴

In that first year at SMU, Ingram discovered the venue that would become his musical home. Adair's Saloon was already a Deep Ellum institution, featuring live music, patrons' signatures and messages on every inch of every surface, and "definitely the best burgers in the South."²⁵ Ingram's older brother was a senior at SMU, captain of the golf team, and an Adair's regular. When the younger Ingram moved to campus he was surprised to get a call from his brother inviting him

As Dub Miller, an early Texas Country star in College Station, explained, "Robert Earl Keen made you want to do it. Jack Ingram made you believe you could."

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City of the South, I definitely had a hankering for good hairband rock and roll, too. But so did Kevin Fowler so we're even there."¹⁸ Fowler, who became one of the scene's biggest stars with anthems such as "Beer, Bait, and Ammo," began his music career playing lead guitar on a national tour with Austin metal band Dangerous Toys.¹⁹ Pat Green, when he began playing publicly in the mid-1990s, regularly included covers of bands such as the Violent Femmes and Stevie Ray Vaughan and Double Trouble while his band inserted Metallica fills into Green's own compositions.²⁰ Future Texas Country superstar Randy Rogers, who had been raised on country radio, chose to cover Stone Temple Pilots' "Creep" in his high school talent show.²¹ Over dozens of interviews of early participants in the Texas country scene, the vast majority of respondents made clear they were listening to grunge, hip-hop, or heavy metal when they discovered Keen and Ingram.

Early Texas Country fans and artists tended to see their genre as not an extension of but a protest of country music. As Robert Earl Keen likes to explain, "I make country music for people who hate country music."²² Ingram ended up with a copy of Keen's 1988 *The Live Album* around the time he left for SMU and Dallas. Seeing that Keen's album had been recorded at the Sons of Hermann Hall in Deep Ellum inspired Ingram. Keen, who lacked label support, seemed a more realistic

to the saloon. "Hey, why don't you come down?" It was the first time he ever asked me to do something. He was four years older than me. He also asked me to go see *The Last Picture Show* with him. It was the first time I knew he knew my name because he didn't say, 'Hey asshole.'²⁶

The Ingram brothers were regulars at Tony Lane's Thursday night shows at Adair's. Lane came to Dallas from Comanche, Texas, where John Wesley Hardin once killed a deputy. A veteran of the bar circuit, the thirtysomething Lane seemed ancient to Ingram, but the songwriting skill was hard to miss. Lane inspired Ingram to begin writing before moving on to Nashville where dozens of his songs have appeared on major label country albums. Lane owns writing credits on nine Top 40 country hits and Easton Corbin's 2010 #1 hit "Roll With It."²⁷ Ingram's first public performance was at an open mic night in the spring of 1990 at Deep Ellum's Rhythm Room. He teamed up with a friend and played "basic covers, like R.E.M. songs."²⁸ Originally Ingram performed with a partner under the name Jack and the Other Guy. Robert Henry recalls those early shows. "I was in this class with 'the other guy,' I think that's what his name was, and all these girls are talking to this kind of chunky guy and I was like, 'Who the hell is he?' 'They play at Adair's every Tuesday night. It's the greatest thing since sliced bread.'" Ingram played guitar and sang while

the other guy played “this weird fold-out briefcase thing.”²⁹ Soon after, Lois Adair gave in to Ingram’s pestering and gave the nineteen-year-old college freshman the Tuesday slot, a residency he held until the end of 1995.³⁰ Ingram was paid in cheeseburgers and beer despite being still a teenager. He used his brother’s ID even though his brother was in attendance. “I think Lois was in on it,” Ingram quipped.³¹ Harris recalled Ingram’s Adair’s Tuesday nights. “When you get to Adair’s it’s like twenty, thirty feet across and you’re like, ‘We’re not going here, this place is packed!’ Of course, right as you walk in the door the band is immediately to your left. You open the door and the bandstand is right there. All you can see is a sea of heads going down this narrow shotgun of a bar and you’re wondering how am I ever going to make it to the bar to actually go and get a beer.”³² Harris’s childhood friend and neighbor Robert Henry joined him on these Tuesdays. “A dirty dingy beer hall with surly bartenders and waitresses and good music in the corner and you could still hear yourself talk. We loved it.”³³

John Clay Wolfe met Ingram in SMU’s *Mirror of the Age* course during their freshman year. The enterprising Wolfe, who owned a handful of bars in nearby Fort Worth, was an early Ingram fan. He even tried to manage the fledgling Ingram but settled for giving him a weekly Thursday night gig at Wolfe’s Plaid Pig and promoting the aspiring performer as often as he could. By the time he could legally drink, Ingram had established himself as a favorite in both Dallas’s SMU and Fort Worth’s TCU music scenes.³⁴ According to Pete Coatney, a drummer in several Deep Ellum rock bands during the eighties and early nineties, despite Ingram’s youth and country inclinations, he found a degree of respect among other local artists.

“I’d be talking to people and guys I’d known for years that were venue managers or bookers—I never knew them to dig country or anything in the country realm. In fact, a lot of them looked like your typical rock and roller or punk rock dude—tattooed, shaved heads, multiple piercings—and they sit down and talk knowledgeably about Jack and what they liked about Jack and the band.”

The devoutly Christian Coatney filled in with Ingram at Adair’s one Tuesday in 1994 and remained the Beat Up Ford Band’s drummer and spiritual advisor for the next twenty-five years.³⁵

For Ingram, Keen, and later Texas Country artists, the growth of the scene was facilitated by tapping into college students who are more open to experiment with their identities and have access to disposable income and free time. Robert Henry observed, “A big thing for those guys was that they were in college when they did it, which was brilliant. Everyone had a

brother or sister that went to Baylor or Southwest Texas or UT or whatever, so we shared those CDs. Then we all graduated and little brothers and sisters all wanted to listen because that’s what their big brothers and sisters did.”³⁶ Will Dupuy, San Antonio native and bassist for the South Austin Jug Band, Harris and Ryden, and Bruce Robison, explained, “A lot of that music was what I call older brother music. What I mean by that is a lot of kids got into it because their older brothers were into it. Like Jerry Jeff, I remember seeing Jerry Jeff shirts when I was in junior high because older brother went and saw Jerry Jeff.”³⁷ Ingram, for his part, saw it a little differently:

I don’t think there was necessarily a certain appeal that I had that attracted college kids. It’s just that I asked whoever I knew to come, and who I knew were college kids. That’s how that got to be, and I’m glad for it. Not only did it create a way for me to stick to doing what I was doing after college, but I’m also positive it made me better. You’ve seen college crowds, they can be really hard to work with. It made me force myself to feel proud of what I was doing, become a true performer, and make them watch. If you don’t really feel good about what you’re doing in your heart and you play for people who are talking and not listening, you can feel like a big poser when you walk out. I did that a couple of times, and then I was like, ‘Let’s go practice and get good before we put ourselves through that again.’ At least then, we knew in our hearts we were good.³⁸

Another key element to the appeal of Keen, Ingram, and Texas Country generally is the ritual that historian Jason Mellard refers to as “performing the Texan.” Mellard discusses how the progressive country scene of the 1970s allowed young Texans to embrace and participate in their Texan identity through music.³⁹ Young Texan country music fans and musicians continue this same ritual. Harris recalled booking Ray Wylie Hubbard to play a fraternity party to hear him play “Up Against the Wall, Redneck Mother.”⁴⁰ Robert Henry reflected, “Here we were twenty-one, twenty years old. We listened to Willie Nelson. For a fraternity party if you could raise enough money to have Jerry Jeff, that was your huge party for the year. But all the sudden comes a kid who literally lives next door and he’s damn good and he was kind of like our generation’s guy. And you could catch him at places you could afford to go.”⁴¹ For these early fans, rejecting mainstream country music they associated with Nashville in favor of an idealized Texas country past served as a bridge connecting themselves to their native state. Harris saw this in the music. “I never got to really know my grandparents. My one grandfather

was a country sheriff in East Texas for twenty years and my other grandfather built highways in Colorado, drove a maintainer and bulldozer. I never got to really know them. They both died when I was really young. There's something about getting back to the past or your grandparents or where your family has been. Most of the time that comes from rural Texas. That music kind of comes from that."⁴²

In the summer of 1992, Ingram enrolled in summer classes at the University of Texas to have an excuse to play in the musical mecca of Texas: Austin. As the main progressive country revivalist among Generation Xers, Ingram relished the opportunity to perform in the city most associated with artists such as Willie Nelson and Jerry Jeff Walker. He landed weekly spots on Tuesdays at the Cloak Room, a basement bar across the street from the state capitol populated by legislative staffers and lobbyists, and a Thursday night slot at O. Henry's Back Forty.⁴³

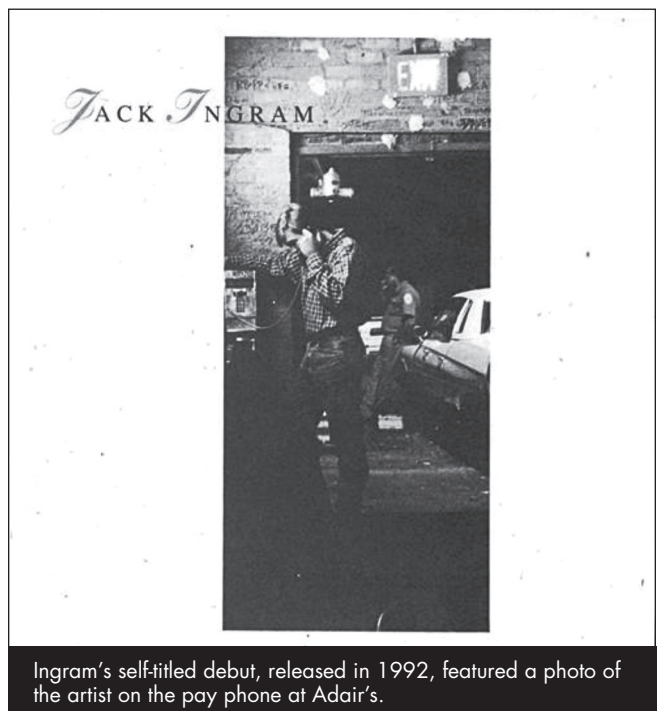
The Back Forty sat on the northeast corner of 5th and Neches, just a block from Austin's nationally famous Sixth Street party district. O. Henry did not refer to the owner of the bar but rather the renowned short story author of such standards as "The Gift of the Magi," "The Cop and the Anthem," and "The Ransom of Red Chief." In the 1880s William Sydney Porter rambled from South Carolina to Austin where he charmed his way into the local social scene through his singing and skill with the mandolin and guitar. Porter also published a short-lived periodical with the portentous title *The Rolling Stone*. In Austin, Porter eloped before moving to Houston, where he was arrested for embezzling from the bank where he worked. This development prompted Porter to flee to Honduras, a venue made attractive to Porter by that nation's lack of an extradition treaty. Porter returned to America to seek treatment for tuberculosis and spent four years in an Ohio federal penitentiary. In prison he first had a short story published and used the pen name O. Henry. Most of Porter's publishing output occurred in the final years of his life spent in New York before he died in 1910 at the age of 47. The bar took its name from the fact that it faced the back of Porter's house.⁴⁴

O. Henry's Back Forty catered to a fraternity crowd seeking cheap Natural Light and live music as they whiled away their college nights shooting pool. The *Austin Chronicle*, eternally unimpressed, concluded, "The writer for whom it is named wouldn't likely recognize the decor, which is straight out of Roy Rogers' rec room—formica tables, faux-tile linoleum bar, and red woven-vinyl chairs."⁴⁵ The Back Forty did not seek out talent to strum away on the stool masquerading as a stage, instead relying on eager Greeks looking to play for a few bucks plus tips in front of their friends. "The Forty" would serve as a vital proving ground for a string of future Texas Country stars

including Ingram, Cory Morrow, Owen Temple, and South Austin Jug Band founder James Hyland.⁴⁶

From the beginning of his performing career, Ingram was determined to play original material. "My first gig at Adair's I had 25 songs. One of them was mine, and I had 24 Jerry Jeff, Willie Nelson, I think I played 'Neon Moon,' I had a couple of things I thought were cool on the radio. ...The next week I had two of my own songs, 23 covers and two of my own songs. Next week I had 22 covers. I kind of built my own list by forcing myself to have a new song every week."⁴⁷ Ingram's guitar teacher, Reed Easterwood, of the Dallas band Powwow, was key in teaching Ingram the foundations of songwriting. He showed Ingram that a great song is still great stripped of all ornamentation down to just an acoustic guitar. Ingram explained, "All the ones I was learning were 1-4-5, so I knew it had to be all about melodies and words."⁴⁸

Ingram claims he was not trying to be country; it just came out that way.⁴⁹ Musically, Ingram thought of himself as similar to the other Deep Ellum regulars. Coatney opined, "He was raised listening to something, and like a sponge that soaks something up, you might soak up a little red here, a little blue, a little green, but when you squeeze that sponge it doesn't come out like anything it looked like when you soaked it up."⁵⁰ Having leveraged his original songs into a loyal and growing fan base on what he called the "Southwest Conference Circuit," a reference to the college towns and cities of the now defunct athletic conference, in 1992 the 22-year-old Ingram decided it was time to make a record.⁵¹



Despite the 1970s Austin music scene's purported rejection of the Nashville establishment, virtually all the artists associated with that scene were signed to major labels. Not only were Nelson, Jennings, and Walker under contract. Michael Martin Murphey, Rusty Weir, Steve Fromholz, B. W. Stevenson, Guy Clark, and even Shiva's Headband all worked in the label system. This was necessary due to the extraordinary expense of the equipment required to record sound with enough fidelity to market as commercial music. Typically, like Keen, these artists had no other option than to retreat to the well-equipped studios in Nashville or Los Angeles to record their albums.

Ingram decided he needed music to sell at shows but worried about pursuing a label deal. "I just figured I'd put it out myself, so I wouldn't have to face the rejection of somebody telling me that they didn't want to put [my] record out," Ingram recalled.⁵² Ingram befriended Carrie Pierce by playing at Pierce's open mic nights at the Rhythm Room and looked up to the more established act. "They were like three years older than me, and they had already sold a few thousand copies, which in the independent world was like going platinum."⁵³

Ingram did not have the \$8,000 to record the album, so he applied what he had learned about business in college and went looking for investors. Ingram solicited friends and family, promising to pay back the initial investment with proceeds from sales and performances and offering 15 percent of album sales after the initial investment was paid off. Ingram's grandfather was the primary investor in this "mini-label deal." Within three months Ingram had sold enough CDs to pay back his investors.⁵⁴ Pierce directed Ingram to Terry Slemmons, the producer of Jack Pierce's regional hit CD *Woman as Salvation*. Slemmons had capitalized on improvements in recording technology and falling prices of recording equipment to produce professional-quality recordings for local artists with the ability to pay out of pocket.⁵⁵ Slemmons's interest laid in pop and indie rock. "He didn't dig it, I could tell," Ingram recalls.⁵⁶ Consequently, Slemmons offered very little input into the sound of the finished product. This lack of producer input made *Jack Ingram* distinctly Ingram's own musical vision, a luxury rare even for independently produced debut albums. Ingram explains, "When you do the songs naturally your way without trying to do something you aren't capable of doing then the music changes because it goes through your own filter."⁵⁷

Jack Ingram was released the week before Thanksgiving, 1992, coinciding with Ingram's 22nd birthday. "Beat Up Ford," the album's opening track and one of the first Ingram wrote, served as an anthem to a new generation of Texans. Stephen Harris recalled the song's impact in those early days. "Every time he played 'Beat Up Ford' the girls would just go nuts and then all the guys started buying his album. I don't know if Jack would

have had the impact if it wasn't for that damn song. ... That song in and of itself opened my eyes to Jack Ingram."⁵⁸

The song, written in the third person, features two characters, "young man" and "old man." Using these generic, generationally-defined personas turns a personal song into something more archetypal and universally relatable. Ingram is tapping into country music's tradition of finding meaning by looking to the past and particularly parents and grandparents. This is different from rock and roll and hip-hop traditions, which are often presented as rejecting traditional values and being in opposition to older generations.

The setting is a "dusty road way down in Texas." The singer's call is specifically to those who have either a real or spiritual connection to rural Texas, presumably the kind of Texan who grew up listening to their parents' Willie Nelson and Jerry Jeff Walker records. Ingram's old man imparts words of wisdom to the young man. Before the two meet, the young man is aimless and spends his time "chasing butterflies and rainbows." The older figure, representing a link to a Texas rural past, urges his young protégé to live a more authentic existence.

"The old man said, 'You gotta have a good imagination / If you're gonna live a life of old / You've got to drive that Ford like it's a stallion / And you've got to wear your heart just like a gun'"⁵⁹ In "Beat Up Ford," "living a life of old" is presented as an aspiration for the young man. This is an update of the 1970s progressive notion of a "return to the land." This admiration for an older generation is also found in earlier progressive country works such as Guy Clark's "Desperados Waiting for a Train" and "Let Him Roll" and Jerry Jeff Walker's "My Old Man," which Ingram covered on his second album, *Lonesome Questions*.

The Ford of the title refers to Ingram's own mode of transportation. "I wrote this when I was 21. I thought that driving an old truck and listening to country music could save the world. It saved mine; I'm still working on the rest of it."⁶⁰ Ingram's old truck became a symbol that represented a harkening back to an earlier time in Texas musical and cultural history. "Beat Up Ford" was Ingram's musical expression of his own discovery of that time. For Ingram, the "young lost soul" of his song found a meaningful existence "dreaming of wild times where old cowboys broke down cattle lines."⁶¹

The notion of wearing "your heart just like a gun" resonates with a line from one of the most admired songs to come out of Texas in the 1970s, Townes Van Zandt's "Pancho and Lefty" (1972). In 1983 two of Jack's idols, Willie Nelson and Merle Haggard, teamed up to take the Van Zandt song to number one on the country charts and a place in the pantheon of Texas music. In "Pancho and Lefty" the outlaw Pancho "wore his gun outside his pants for all the honest world to feel."⁶²

This line establishes Pancho's honesty while at the same time casting him as an outlaw. For Ingram and Van Zandt, in the mythological Texas cowboy past, displaying your pistol in plain sight is a mark of openness and authenticity. This serves to link contemporary Texans' quest for a meaningful life to a romanticized rural Western past.

"Beat Up Ford" also foreshadows the scene that came to be called Texas Country as an expression of Ingram's reality as a suburban, affluent, college-educated Texan born in the 1970s. In "Beat Up Ford" and many of his other original compositions Ingram does not assume the narrative position of one from a rural background or a blue-collar worker as many mainstream country artists often do. Brendon Anthony appreciated Ingram's perspective. "He made a record on his own, came from a fraternity-based, college country background, and sang what he knew. It really resonated with people like me, Roger Creager, and a few others who I played with in College Station. It certainly seemed to with Cory [Morrow] and Pat [Green] as well."⁶³

In *Rednecks, Queers, and Country Music*, Nadine Hubbs argues that working class culture, specifically music, reflects working class values. Using cultural anthropologists Adrie Kusserow's study of working-, middle- and upper-class child-rearing in New York, Hubbs concludes working class culture promotes a class defensiveness that focuses on toughening children for a world they see as threatening to their class interests and identity. Hubbs offers Johnny Cash's Shel Silverstein-penned 1969 country number one single "A Boy Named Sue" as an example of these attitudes.⁶⁴ Middle- and upper-class parents, according to Kusserow, prepare their children to find self-actualization through discovering their individuality. Children are protected from psychological harm in order to foster "autonomy, uniqueness, individuality and self-confidence."⁶⁵ On the surface "Beat Up Ford" employs working class signifiers. The road is dusty and the Ford is beat up, after all. But thematically the song is the story of a dreamy youth fixated on "butterflies and rainbows" finding a path to self-realization in "words of a young man who turned old." The key, the young man learns, is to use your imagination and be honest and emotionally engaged, which is represented by "driving that Ford like it's a stallion." In doing these things the young man can "live a life of old" or return to the mythological, pastoral Texan past. Ingram and those who followed in the progressive country revival typically employed this middle-class perspective Hubbs describes as "seek[ing] to express their purportedly unique inner qualities and thereby change the world" as opposed to much of mainstream country, which promotes working class ideas of "striv[ing] to withstand the world's pressures without *themselves* changing to

compromise their integrity."⁶⁶

"Beat Up Ford" was but one of the signposts pointing to a new musical direction. The upbeat "Flutter," written by fellow Deep Ellum scenester Colin Boyd, gained some local radio play in Dallas and became Ingram's closer in his early live shows. But it was the three covers that helped limn the contours of the genre Ingram inspired. Merle Haggard's "Mama Tried" put Ingram firmly in outlaw country territory and, by itself, suggested a significant departure from the jangle pop of bands such as Jackopierce. "Pick Up the Tempo" was a Willie Nelson song that made it on to a Waylon Jennings album and become a staple for Jerry Jeff Walker. The last track of the album is a cover of Robert Earl Keen's not yet widely heard "The Road Goes on Forever." Ingram's recording of the track is the first cover of Keen's 1989 epic tale, predating Joe Ely's 1993 and country supergroup the Highwaymen's 1995 versions. In Ingram's hands the song is slower than Keen's and feels more reflective. Keen would later worry his younger fans missed the ironic implications of Sonny and Sherry's wayward lives juxtaposed with Keen's anthemic chorus. Ingram clearly does not. The song is bare in instrumentation and lacks any element of beer-swilling rowdiness that would come to be associated with Keen's live shows. For young Texas suburbanites newly rediscovering their parents' music, Ingram's inclusion of Haggard, Nelson, and, indirectly, Walker helped to define the parameters of the Texas country music revival of the 1990s. The inclusion of Keen, helped immensely by his outstanding writing, helped to introduce Keen to a younger crowd that would eventually make him the scene's biggest star.

Ingram's brooding love song "Drive On" forges one more link to Texans' continual struggle to reconcile their rural past, be it real or imagined, with their post-industrial present. "Drive On" offers a small-town vignette featuring a young man driving with his girl and dreaming of bigger things while a storm beats down on them. Despite himself being a young man in love, Ingram sees the young lovers as unprepared for what comes next, describing them as "two young believers, too young to know."⁶⁷ The knowing lyric is given even more emotional heft by a mournful fiddle countered by a light mandolin. The contrasting sounds serve to convey the optimism of the young lovers juxtaposed against the impending storm that represents life beyond the simplicity of youth and the safety of the small town.

Ingram was inspired to write the song after his older brother took him to see a revival of the film *The Last Picture Show*, the Oscar-winning 1971 film based on a novel by Texan Larry McMurtry.⁶⁸ The film and novel deal with the reality of growing up in small-town Texas as the state evolves from a rural agrarian economy to the increasingly urbanized, oil-

driven Texas of the second half of the twentieth century.⁶⁹ In “Drive On” and much of the rest of *Jack Ingram*, Ingram introduces a rising generation of Texan fans to a key theme of modern Texas literature and music: how to embrace and honor Texas’s rich cultural legacy in a rapidly changing and homogenizing world.

Within a month, Ingram sold 250 copies from the stage at his performances. The early fans often copied the CDs for friends, spreading Ingram’s message of a progressive country revival to university towns like Austin, College Station, and Lubbock. Ingram compares this rampant bootlegging to file sharing.⁷⁰ In this way, without record store distribution and by growing his fan base one burnt CD or cassette copy at a time, Ingram built the young, rowdy, passionate fan base that would soon embrace Robert Earl Keen and the artists, like Morrow and Green, that Ingram and Keen inspired.

this guy Pat with him, who we all thought was a big dork. They would come down and go see shows. They were road tripping fools. David started bringing Cory Morrow and Pat Green down back when they were just playing on barstools for tips.”⁷³ David’s little brother Robert was impressed with Green. “Pat came to visit with my brother because they were at Tech. We got drunk—so Pat came to visit and he pulled out Stephen Harris’s guitar and we were like, ‘Holy shit, this guy’s pretty good.’ Immediately we hired him to play the next day at the Phi Delt house for a hundred bucks. And he was like, ‘Holy shit, a hundred bucks.’”⁷⁴ The next week Robert and Harris talked Chris Wall into letting Green open for the veteran songwriter at Dallas’s Three Teardrops venue. Green assembled his first band for the gig.⁷⁵ Back in Lubbock, David Henry applied Ingram’s DIY approach to fund Green and Morrow’s first recording.⁷⁶ Soon after seeing Ingram’s Adair’s

Jack Ingram was not trying to create a new musical movement with his debut album. He also did not believe he was capable of inspiring a rebirth of his beloved 1970s Texas country scene. . . . Intentions aside, it is hard to imagine Ingram could have laid a clearer blueprint for the music scene to follow.

Jack Ingram was not trying to create a new musical movement with his debut album. He also did not believe he was capable of inspiring a rebirth of his beloved 1970s Texas country scene. “I really thought I sucked,” Ingram said almost a quarter century later.⁷¹ Intentions aside, it is hard to imagine Ingram could have laid a clearer blueprint for the music scene to follow if that had been the 21-year-old’s intention.

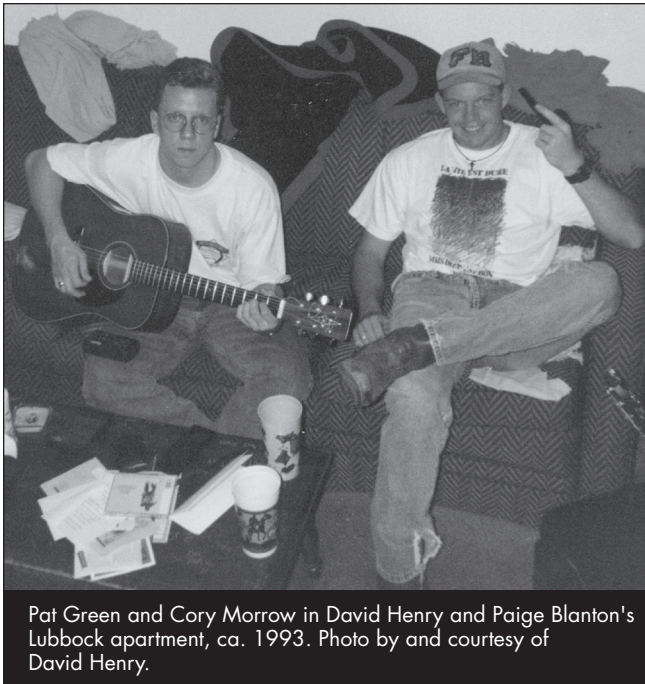
While Robert Henry and Stephen Harris were witnessing Ingram’s origins at Adair’s, David Henry and Brian Zintgraff were making their own discoveries at Texas Tech. David and his roommate Paige Blanton had a fraternity brother from Houston, Cory Morrow, who could play guitar and sing. About that same time David met another aspiring musician at Tech by way of Waco, Pat Green. Henry and Blanton introduced the two and invited them to guitar pulls at their apartment on Wednesday nights where they impressed partygoers.

After hearing Ingram’s album, seeing the performer in person was a revelation for Green. By 1993, Henry, Blanton, Green, and Morrow would occasionally drive the 350 miles to catch shows in Dallas, including Ingram at Adair’s.⁷² Harris remembers the beginning of his long friendship with Green. “David Henry would come down from Tech and bring

show, Green, Morrow, and their friends convinced a Lubbock bar to allow the pair to play for tips on the promise the Greek community would turn out. Green and Morrow’s first public performance at Bash Riprock’s was successful enough to convince Morrow to drop out of Texas Tech and move to Austin to advance his musical career.⁷⁷

After earning his degree from Texas Tech, David Henry moved to Austin and handled Green’s merchandise sales, overseeing an early online ordering model with same-day shipping. Robert Henry spent a year teaching in Japan, returning to find the Texas Country scene in full bloom. “When I got back everybody was famous!” he recalled.⁷⁸ Henry formed his own band with his friend Graham Somes. The two performed as the B-Team for several years, a reference to Henry only being allowed to play at his brother’s apartment after Pat and Cory had finished.

Stephen Harris was also inspired to begin performing in public by Ingram. “My fraternity hired Jack Ingram to play at a party . . . and I remember my girlfriend and date at the time wouldn’t give me the time of day and I remember all the girls, all they wanted to do was go watch Jack play at this fraternity party. I remember specifically making the comment



Pat Green and Cory Morrow in David Henry and Paige Blanton's Lubbock apartment, ca. 1993. Photo by and courtesy of David Henry.

... 'Man, I could do this.'"⁷⁹ Harris moved to Wyoming after graduation to work as a cowboy where he met fellow Texan Chris Ryden and began singing cowboy songs built on complicated harmonies inspired by Jackpierce. In 2000 the duo would move back to Texas, form a band, and join the Texas Country scene as Harris and Ryden.

In 1996 Harris stopped by on the way from Jackson Hole to San Antonio to see Green open for Ingram at Melody Ranch in Green's hometown of Waco. "Pat idolized Jack. That's what really got Pat going. He was always infatuated with Jack."⁸⁰ On Green's debut CD, *Dancehall Dreamer*, Green convinced Ingram and Chris Wall to appear as guests by telling each the other had agreed to appear before either had accepted the request.⁸¹ Greg Henry, a relentless entrepreneur who worked tirelessly to book and promote Green from the artist's earliest days, used Ingram and Keen's postcard mailers listing tour dates to map out shows for Green. At the end of each night Green's head count would be compared to Ingram's as a way to measure Pat's progress on the road to stardom.⁸²

In Austin, Morrow played regularly at the Back Forty, as Ingram had, before landing a weekly Tuesday night slot at Pete's Peanut Bar and Piano Emporium on Sixth Street playing acoustic guitar and accompanied on bass by Ryan Lynch. By 1996 John Dickson and Mark Schaberg were two established concert promoters looking for opportunities. Their experience booking Keen and Ingram had convinced them that the long-suffering market for local country music was on the rise. Dickson recalls being shocked at how inexpensive it

had become to book artists such as Willie Nelson and Merle Haggard. Gambling that college students were ready to return to the country music of the 1970s, the partners booked a series of shows at Hang Em High, a saloon-themed venue next to Pete's. They found a host and regular opening act for the event one bar over in Morrow. In 1996 Outlaw Thursdays paired shot specials and Cory Morrow with headliners including Merle Haggard, Ray Wylie Hubbard, Gary P. Nunn, Chris Wall, and Jack Ingram. These shows helped to solidify the burgeoning Texas Country scene in Austin and propel Morrow to its forefront.⁸³

In College Station, Brendon Anthony met Roger Creager at an Ingram show, which led to the formation of a band that put Anthony, Creager, and drummer Justin Pollard on the path to Texas Country stardom. The fourth member of that band, Jeremy Elliott, would impact the scene in a very different way. Elliott recalled first seeing Ingram at Wolf Penn Creek Ampitheater in 1993 where the stage is separated from the audience by a moat. An infuriated Ingram screamed, "Stand up! Get up! Fuck this moat." He actually got two girls to jump in the moat. Then he jumped in it. ... I thought I was seeing a superstar. That was it for me." Desperate to find guitar tabs, Elliott discovered an internet bulletin board at Nevada.edu posting classic country chords. In early 1995 Elliott saw an early internet browser and decided it was the future. After meeting Kurt Lockhart, who was running a website for Todd Snider, Elliott made a fan site for Ingram that got significant traffic. He printed out the data and showed Coatney after a show, who passed on the information to Ingram. Elliott was hired as a proto-webmaster by an artist who barely knew what the web was. He would quickly add pages for Green and Morrow to the Ingram site and serve as a pioneer in creating music websites. Elliott moved into the role of road manager and spent five years on tour with Ingram.⁸⁴



Jack Ingram (right), head shaved for military charity event, and Cory Morrow. Photo by and courtesy of David Henry.



Jack Ingram and Randy Rogers at the Center for Texas Music History's Roots of the Texas Country Scene event, April 2019.
Photo by William Philpott.

Two more independent releases, *Lonesome Questions* (1994) and *Live at Adair's* (1996) followed Ingram's debut album.⁸⁵ Listening to the audience chatter from the live recording made Ingram yearn to escape Texas to find a broader audience.⁸⁶ Elliott becomes philosophical when considering Ingram's relationship with his early fans.

Artists take heat often for being too aloof.... That's because when you really get to know the people who like your music some of them like it for reasons that don't make you happy. They misinterpret your work. They adhere to it for some of the baser levels of it. But then ... you realize good works target all levels of intellect. Cerebrally, they appeal to the Shakespearean groundlings as well as to the intellectual aristocracy. ... Being able to appeal to all those fans and still be able to sleep at night. I think that's what drove Jack out of a Texas-only career. The search for that.⁸⁷

Fan attitudes aside, selling 30,000 CDs without a label convinced Warner Music Group to sign Ingram to its Rising Tide label in 1996. Ingram spent much of that year paired with Todd Snider, a fellow singer-songwriter with Texas connections who had been inspired to perform by Jerry Jeff Walker. Snider helped Ingram grow as an artist, but the tour took him out of his Texas base. When the tour ended, Ingram went to Nashville to record his first label record, *Livin' or Dyin'* (1997), with Twang Trust, a partnership of legendary Texas songwriter Steve Earle and Ray Kennedy. Rising Tide folded soon after the release, crippling the album's label support but not before Ingram secured an *Austin City Limits* taping that he shared with Robert Earl Keen, who was enjoying his own first major label release. Ingram was then picked up by Sony's Lucky Dog imprint where he released *Hey You* (1999) and *Electric* (2002), two albums frequently cited as favorites by artists in my research.

While Ingram was touring and working outside of Texas for

much of 1996 and 1998, the Texas Country scene exploded, particularly Ingram's friends and early fans Pat Green and Cory Morrow. While much of the early audience was still around, the vast majority had only recently discovered Green, Morrow, and Keen, all of whom were touring Texas regularly. When Ingram reappeared, to many fans he seemed a newcomer to the scene or perhaps even a major label guy trying to break into their grassroots movement. Ingram appreciated the deference the current kings of Texas Country showed him but admits to feeling some jealousy. Green would, at times, insist Ingram be the headliner when they shared a bill despite Green being the bigger draw in Texas at the time. Green and Morrow would make clear Jack's role in inspiring their careers during banter between songs, but Ingram had set his sights on conquering Nashville and could not simply reclaim his place in the scene he helped create.⁸⁸

His willingness to give his time and energy to charitable causes is legendary, best exemplified by his work with Mack, Jack, and McConaughey, which has raised over \$14 million since 2013 for children's causes.⁹¹ He has become a mentor to many younger Texas Country artists, following the example of Guy Clark, one of Ingram's greatest heroes.

As for his role in the creation of Texas Country, Ingram has long reflected on the genre's reputation. "Some people may think, 'That's that frat guy' and mention my name with other bands they don't respect. I've always felt that. But there's a lot of bands that I don't really like or respect and I can't make everybody like me. And yet, most of the people that I wanted to gain their respect and wanted them to come see a show have given me that respect."⁹² *Dallas Observer* writer Robert Patterson notes, "[A]s one of the originators of the post-Robert Earl Keen syndrome, Ingram has definitely helped paved the

His willingness to give his time and energy to charitable causes is legendary, best exemplified by his work with Mack, Jack, and McConaughey, which has raised over \$14 million since 2013 for children's causes. He has become a mentor to many younger Texas Country artists, following the example of Guy Clark, one of Ingram's greatest heroes.

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Elliott, who served as Ingram's road manager during this period, understood the complexity of Ingram's situation. On the one hand, having a strong fan base in Texas is a significant advantage. "The fertile grounds here give Texas artists an advantage in making the case for a broader appeal. They can take risks, they can do different things because they know that they always have a base here in Texas." But at the same time, signing a label deal and being pushed on top-40 radio "burned off some of Ingram's Texas following."⁸⁹ As Jack has said for years, "I wasn't trying to be the fucking King of Texas." He was aiming to save country music nationally as Willie Nelson had, in his mind.⁹⁰

Between 1997 and 2006 Ingram released nine albums on four labels, reaching #4 with *This Is It* (2006). In 2008 the Academy of Country Music awarded him "Best New Artist." He has charted twelve singles, hitting #1 in 2005 with "Wherever You Are." In April 2019 Ingram followed up 2016's well received folk-rock *Midnight Motel* with *Riding High...Again*, an album of covers of progressive and Texas country recorded in the laid back, casual style of Walker's *Viva Terlingua*.

way for other good ol' young guys with guitars."⁹³

Among those he inspired, Ingram stands as a benchmark to strive for. Randy Rogers feared handing Ingram his first CD. Rogers had heard when artists gave their music to the Beat Up Ford Band the ritual was to put it on in the Suburban and critique it. If it didn't pass muster, the offending disc would be placed on the antenna to see how long it took the highway winds to pull it off into oblivion. Ingram confirmed the story and assured Rogers he still has his CD. Elliott added context to the story. "A lot of us in the van would let our latent envy or jealousy get the better of us. We'd go by and get handed the latest effort by those guys and just poop on it. Jack would put on his headphones or say, 'Shut up. This is their work, and they're aimed at a different target than we're aiming at.'"⁹⁴

Contemporary critics wrote Ingram off as a "college-frat-country-rocker" and denigrated him as a "solo hillbilly version of Jackpierce."⁹⁵ Most did not quite know what to do with Ingram because he was something new. Or, more accurately, a fresh take on something old. Jerry Jeff Walker, Ray Wylie Hubbard, Rusty Weir, and a host of older artists were all still

active and were treated with some reverence as originators of the regional Texas country scene. It was easy to understand where they fit into the Texas musical landscape. Keen, and others of his age such as Steve Earle, had all been active since before outlaw country faded from prominence in the mid-1980s. It would take many listeners time to understand Ingram's role as a revivalist of a more organic style of Texas country music and the attitude associated with it. Robert Wilonsky, a *Dallas Observer* music writer during the 1990s and 2000s, only slowly came to realize Ingram was "*No Depression* before the movement had a name or a tip sheet."⁹⁶

Ingram did not invent Texas country music—not even

close—but throughout most of the 1990s he was the most popular and influential artist of his generation, working to both revive and honor progressive and outlaw country. More importantly, the artists who followed him in the regional Texas country music scene were directly impacted by Ingram. Ingram's youth and precociousness would be a major inspiration for artists, such as Cory Morrow and Pat Green, who followed him in the progressive and outlaw revival of the late 1990s that is still going strong a quarter century after Ingram first took the stage. Elliott summed up Ingram's journey. "Jack was the pilot who showed everyone the way."⁹⁷ ★

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Radio Dreams: The Story of an Outlaw DJ and a Cosmic Cowgirl

By Joe Gracey and Kimmie Rhodes (Austin: Dancing Feet Publishing, 2018)

Writing a readable memoir is a daunting task, but creating a dual memoir of two people who are not exactly household names that is educational, entertaining, and emotional is near impossible. Despite the challenges, Kimmie Rhodes has completed a project Joe Gracey started long before they met in 1979, and it is the story of *Radio Dreams*.

Radio Dreams began as Joe Gracey's memoir. He was a Fort Worth native who landed in Austin in the early 1970s and established the world's first progressive country radio station, helping KOKE-FM earn *Billboard's* Trendsetter of the Year Honors in 1974. Gracey was also the talent coordinator for the first season of *Austin City Limits*, which would become the longest-running music series on American television. He and Bobby Earl Smith established Electric Graceyland Studios in Austin. Calling themselves the Jackalope Brothers, the friends had two record labels, Rude and Jackalope, and were eager to preserve the synchronicity of the singer-songwriter, blues, country, swing, and Tejano that was the Austin Sound. In 1979, Gracey lost his voice to cancer, but continued to engineer, produce, and perform as a bassist and rhythm guitarist. Crediting M.D. Anderson Cancer Research Hospital,

his cancer went into remission for nearly three decades, and Gracey engineered albums for Willie Nelson, Ray Price, and a host of others over the course of his career. A gourmet cook and wine connoisseur, Gracey was also a regular contributor to *Saveur* magazine. His head and neck cancer returned in 2009. After a long battle with the disease, Gracey died in 2011.

Kimmie Rhodes's songs have been recorded by Willie Nelson, Joe Ely, Waylon Jennings, Peter Frampton, Emmylou Harris, Townes Van Zandt and others. Her own albums have met high acclaim at home and in Europe. She was the driving force behind the current *Outlaws and Armadillos* exhibition at the Country Music Hall of Fame in Nashville. Rodney Crowell says Rhodes has "the soul of a poet and the voice of an angel." She has been named an ambassador for The Buddy Holly Educational Foundation and travels in the United States and abroad, performing and working with young talent in songwriter retreats and workshops. She has also played on stages from the Armadillo World Headquarters to Royal Albert Hall.

Rhodes met Joe Gracey in 1979, after he had lost his voice. She walked into the studio, passing a young Stevie Ray



Vaughan on his way out, having just finished tracking one of his first ever recording sessions with Gracey behind the board. She shook Gracey's hand, and as he wrote a greeting to her on his ever-present Magic Slate, she felt an immediate connection with this man with no voice but much to say.

Rhodes writes that the second she laid eyes on Gracey, "all the bells and whistles in my intuition went off." She recorded some songs that day, and about a week later Gracey sent her a letter saying that he liked her voice and her songs, and was interested in helping with her career. She shrugged off her "crush," and was happy that he had, at least, fallen in love with her voice.

With Gracey as her producer and Smith as her record promoter, Rhodes began to gain traction in that progressive country moment when all eyes were on Austin, Texas. In a letter to a friend, Joe Gracey called her "Jackalope's new fair-haired boy," and wrote, "We used the best musicians in town and bought a brand-new box of tape. ... I view it as my best production to date." He shared the session with his mentor, Cowboy Jack Clement, and Rhodes's first single, "You'll Take Care of You," was the beginning of a thirty-year fairytale romance, career, and life of adventure for Gracey and Rhodes. They married and added a daughter, Jole Goodnight Gracey, to the family that included her two sons from a previous marriage.

As the story continues, Rhodes and Gracey write of the pioneer efforts in the Austin music business, recording on a shoestring, and promoting the old school way. They even include some geeked out technical studio equipment and recording methodology that defines the rough and real elements that created the Austin Sound in the studio. Music historian Joe Nick Patoski describes Gracey as "a pillar of the burgeoning music community on the verge of being discovered nationally and internationally. ... [He] coolly and casually opened his microphone so Willie Nelson and his friend Kris Kristofferson could perform an impromptu concert

for listeners at home. Gracey not only played Ernest Tubb on his radio show, he took the time to explain ET's significance and line out Tubb's hip bona fides for a generation that had previously ignored their parents' and grandparents' music. Gracey spent time on KOKE-FM educating his audiences about how Gram Parsons and the Rolling Stones were related to George Jones, Bob Wills, and others." And Patoski adds, "In that respect, he was as influential as Willie Nelson, Austin's musical godfather, in bringing the hippies and the rednecks together through the common love of music."

The rise and fall of that moment in Austin music history is chronicled conversationally, and with wit and humor as well as daily adventure as Rhodes and Gracey moved out to Briarcliff Country Club and became an integral part of the Willie Nelson family. Rhodes writes and performs plays with her neighbor, Joe Sears, and she and Gracey hit the road with son Gabe Rhodes playing guitar in the now-family band, as they take Europe by storm.

Along the way, the book moves, as did their lives, from the *laissez faire* world of music and creative flow, to the end of his thirty-year remission, and their final battle with his cancer. M.D. Anderson Hospital in Houston plays a major part in this book, and is just as evenly-documented as the other aspects of their lives.

Radio Dreams is much more than a memoir. It is a firsthand chronicle of much of what made Austin the live music capital of the world. It is a once-in-a-lifetime adventure of two people who were meant for each other, and their free-spirited cavalcade of friends. It is a boots-on-the-ground battle with cancer, one in which the patient and his caregiver never lose hope, even in the end.

Months after Gracey's death, back in her home in Briarcliff, Rhodes says a man came to help her friend with some repairs. This stranger said, "This house is heavy with the spirit of Joe Gracey. He's here right now and says that your life is your own now, and he's not ever going to leave you, but he wants you to go on with your life and be happy."

And so Kimmie Rhodes has begun the next chapter of her life with a reminder of the life she began with Gracey. Perhaps the title for the new chapter should be that long-ago Jackalope single, "You'll Take Care of You."

- Diana Finlay Hendricks

Our Contributors

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