

From: Kathleen Hudson

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ON THE ROAD

I first heard Stephanie Urbina Jones at a venue in Comfort called Armadillo on the River, a renovated old bowling alley. The lanes stretched out behind her as we sat at table in front. The life in her eyes first caught my attention, and her enduring energy. She was obviously passionate about her music and about each performance. Since that first time, I've seen her play at the opening of the Hill Country Opry in Kerrville, at the Comfort Texas Music Festival, at the Kerrville Folk Festival, at the 2003 Willie Nelson Picnic and at a Cinco de Mayo festivity in San Antonio in 2005. At the picnic, her t-shirt said "Espiritu," and she meant it. Her spirit reigns on the stage as she reaches out and touches our spirits. Singing "Crazy" while looking into the face of Willie Nelson was a highlight for her.. Her dark beauty blends in with the passion she portrays. On July 10, 2004, I attended a baby shower for her in San Antonio. Her business is family run, with Uncle Rudy taking care of many loose ends. She spends her time traveling between Nashville, her home with her husband, and Texas, her spiritual home and home to her largest fan base. When I saw her at the Cinco de Mayo Festival this year, she was traveling with Zeta, her new baby.

Stephanie has never been one to sit back and let things happen. Proactive in all areas of life, she got herself to San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, just when she needed the time to reflect and heal. She has toured behind her CD's, visiting radio stations and playing in

small towns as well as the big cities. She has been a queen on a float during San Antonio fiesta, and she works hard in the studio. Not many aspects of the music business that Stephanie has not experienced. I appreciate the fact that she noticed I secretly wanted to be a percussion player. She invited me on stage several times, with my castanets or bones. I enjoyed her music one more way by actually playing along. The following conversation from 2003 is an excerpt from a longer piece that will appear in my book on women and Texas music, estimated publishing year 2006. Stephanie returns on June 4, 2005, to play the Hill Country Opry in the new location on the Junction Highway. Don't miss her rare Kerrville appearance.

Hudson (2003): I want you to tell me what you are most excited about right now.

Jones: I'm most excited about two things: How I'm being received in Texas with "God Loves It When You Dance." That message is getting out there. It's been a long two years getting prepared for this point. The second thing is how I've been led spiritually these last two weeks to make this Christmas album. Within three days I wrote five new Christmas songs.

Hudson: You have an amazing voice, as well as delivery and songwriting. Of course, your path is right in line with everything I love about music. I'd love to hear you do an all blues show. You used the phrase "led spiritually," and I see that thread in your promo pack as well. Some of your songs move me to tears. Yeah, "Mariachi music always makes me cry" too. I have spent a lot of time in San Miguel de Allende.

Jones: I have spent time there. I don't talk to a lot of people about this, but I've worked with a lot of healers down in San Miguel. I've had some very powerful experiences.

Something happened in me and I realized that when the voice of the Great Spirit beyond talked to me, I would follow that voice. It was a connection, something like a train getting on a track. The evolution from that moment of commitment has been amazing. One miracle after another. I kind of call my tour The Spirit of Texas Tour. I just got married about two years ago. I thought I was going to start having babies and write songs on the side. I got a call from San Antonio to play for Henry B. Gonzales. I came to San Antonio, and my father had heard a Mariachi Band, and we got them to play with us. I played two songs I had written. That acceptance in San Antonio inspired me, and I decided I wanted to do this. We started playing in some hotels in San Antonio, and the performance aspect just took off. For me, the synchronicity leads the way. When I speak of something and then it shows up, I know I'm on the right path.

Hudson: That's how it works in my life.

Jones: I have an instinct. I follow that instinct. I ask for guidance, and I know I'm going in the right direction when things show up that keep me moving in that direction. When I have a set back, I know that I need to get some distance and perhaps, change my thinking. It's been an incredible learning experience because I'm a very willful, strong woman, and I have a sense where I think I should be going. It would not have been my choice to come play little honky-tonks in Texas for two years. And yet I am so grateful because of the experience that I've had. I've earned something. Now I can come to any experience and just let go. If there's one person in the audience or 500, I choose to connect.

Hudson: I want to talk more about the Mexico connection. I resonate with the rocks when I go there.

Jones: It is so powerful. There are so many things that are beyond what I can understand.

Hudson: Your faith, whatever it is that allows you to listen, really shows up on stage. My dream would be to have you sharing your story with classes at Schreiner. I know you would have a huge impact on students. The way you are speaking who you are.

Jones: Let's make that happen. It is my dream to have a publishing company, to publish books and to mentor young writers. I don't always want to be on the road. (A year later when I saw Stephanie, she had a set of cards illustrating the Spirit of Texas theme, designed by her.) I've been through a big publishing system; it's hard to pull me away from my soul just to get a song published. I do have a home and a husband in Nashville now. I do tour Texas about three months each month. He knew when we married that I was following this calling. I would hate to be sitting on a back porch rocking a baby right now. It's not the time (and it became the time in 2004). I married him because I believe it will work, and it will be for a lifetime.

Now that's just a taste of an interesting conversation with a powerful woman. I am in San Miguel de Allende right now, May 20, 2005, writing this story. I teach here for Schreiner University each May and bring writing groups here at other times. My base at #18 Hidalgo with Marisela at PMC Travel is the springboard for travel to Guanajuato, Morelia, Patzcuaro and Yuriria. Philip is a great guide, and this small group of 7, including two women in the community, is experiencing the same magic that Stephanie describes.

Besides enjoying the brilliant colors, the soft air and the cobblestone streets, I am also finding time to consider my own love for teaching, writing, traveling and following the music around Texas. When I return, May 25, I'll be heading to the Kerrville Folk

Festival, an event that lasts nightly until June 12. Do not miss an evening there, if possible. Check out the website for details. Arlo Guthrie is making his first appearance on June 10th.

Then I'll head out on my annual trip to the Young Rhetorician's Conference in Monterey, California, where I'll visit with other writing teachers and take in the Monterey Bay Blues Festival. Yes, that is the same stage where Janis and Jimi once performed. And this year the stage will showcase some Texas talent and some other women in my upcoming book with University of Texas Press: Shemekia Copeland, Karen Tyler, Trudy Lynn. We, the Monterey Blues Festival and I, must have something in common in our taste of good blues. All three of these very different women will grace an event that is part of our country's musical history. I'm just waiting for Marcia Ball to make an appearance some year. It's also her kind of show.

The show is one of the most well-run in the country, with three stages showcasing many eclectic kinds of music. The food is excellent, and I always buy more clothing and jewelry! Nothing I need less, but nothing I enjoy more than roaming the booths in Monterey as great music keeps my feet dancing along. I have interviewed many a Texas performer in California at this event. Many musicians and writers have traveled between these two states. Last year I tracked down Doug Sahn's California home in this area. Check out www.montereyblues.com for details.

Also ahead is the July 4th Annual Willie Nelson Picnic, to be held in my hometown of Ft. Worth, Texas, the second year. Joining him in a stellar lineup will be another of my all time favorites, Bob Dylan. I saw them perform together last summer in Kansas and Oklahoma. These two giants in America music bring new life to the concept of a festival.

Joining them this year will be Pauline Reese (another women in my book project), Billy Joe Shaver (a favorite of all of us!), The Greencards (pulled out of their scheduled Kerrville Folk Festival slot) and many more. See Dylan's site for details on this concert. Or Willie's site. Hey, what did we do before the world-side web?

I am reading Billy Joe's autobiography, published by UT Press. What an amazing story. And I thought I knew him well. His last appearance locally at Luckenbach to help out at a Kinky Friedman fundraiser, revealed a thinner, trimmer, smiling Billy Joe. He said, "Folk, all these songs I'm singing are ones I wrote," and he started in on the hits. LeRoy and I took to the dance floor, along with sister Carolyn and Rod. We shared a magical evening thanks to an invitation from Robert Brandes in Fredericksburg. No, I'm not name dropping. Just sharing the good time I had with all of you, dear readers. We live in the middle of a hotbed of talent and opportunity.

As I end my trip in Mexico, I play my Greencards CD in my room at night. The haunting music takes me traveling in my mind. "Weather and Water," their second album, will be released June 28th on Dual Tone Records. See www.greencards.com for details. This band is comprised of two Australians—mandolin player Kym Warner and bass player Carol Young—and a fiddle playing Brit named Eamon McLoughlin. The trio met in Austin, Texas, and discovered they shared a love for acoustic and bluegrass music. They released their debut album, "Movin' On," independently and garnered much critical acclaim. The band sold nearly 10,000 albums out of the back of their van and climbed all the way to No. 5 on the American Chart. Dualtone is bringing us some great music. I know they also have Charlie Robison, another of my favorites. See www.dualtone.com for their story.

Another new album, “Guitars and Castanets,” comes out June 28. Patricia Vonne, another women in my book project, is also part of “Sin City,” a new noir tour de force directed by her brother, Richard Rodriguez. She crosses musical boundaries and creates the perfect blend of Texas roots rock and south-of-the border flavor. I remember the day she visited my English class at Schreiner University. She later sent me my own Castanets from her trip to Spain. And now I sit here, south of the border, writing about this Renaissance women who rocks!

Not enough space or time to do any of these people justice. Thinking of Stephanie and Patricia as I sit here in San Miguel under the tolling bells of La Parrochia, my heart is full! My students, Clint, John, Katie and Doug, my friends Mary and Judy, all enrich my own experience of life as we create our own community here in Mexico. Often on the road, I’ll be returning to the Hill Country by the time your read this. Send me your stories at www.texasheritagemusic.com. Join the music foundation and support local musicians. If you are a local musician, get on board in time for your own showcase on our website and at the August chamber mixer.

And now for a few more words from the Stephanie Urbina Jones chapter:

Hudson: Now for a chat with dad. You were telling me something very interesting about the history of women in Nashville.

CJones: I'm Charlie Urbina Jones, Stephanie's dad. I call myself the minority person here. What I have to say parallels in both the country and the Hispanic community. In the 50's and 60's you had a brand of music coming together, country and Conjunto. Both went through some changes and fell on hard times. You saw Willie leave Nashville because they did not recognize his genius. I think the Conjunto music here in San Antonio began to die off for a while. Willie came back to Texas to play his own music. You saw the rise of the Tammy Wynette types in Nashville. They were the people who served as the bridge and savior for that music. They played straight into people's hearts, both men and women. Nobody talked about the maladies women had gone through. I remember driving through Alpine, Texas, in my pickup truck, in 1967, hearing Tammy sing "Stand By Your Man," and "D-I-V-O-R-C-E." That resonated with me as a young man. This woman was a heroine of sorts. She made a lot of sense...." And that's just the beginning. Ils sont partis. KH