

November 30, 2005

December edition: On the Road

I get a break from teaching at Schreiner University from December 13-January 11. T.S. Eliot leads me forth when he says, "At the end of all our exploration we will arrive at where we started and know the place for the first time." That's my relationship to endings and beginnings. Full circle becomes a spiral, unfolding on another plane. I have had some great musical moments this semester (teachers often speak in terms of semesters), and I am looking forward to more.

Charlie Robison is performing New Year's Eve in Kerrville at the YO Ranch Hotel. Now that's something to anticipate. I talked with Charlie at the Cabaret Dance Hall in his hometown of Bandera years ago. I heard him perform at the Inn Pub in Kerrville last year, his son, Gus, playing at his feet on stage. His songs are exactly the brand of writing I like: raw, full of energy, on the edge and brave. My interview with his wife, Emily, will come out in a book on voices of Texas women.....someday. A manuscript rolling around a publisher's office can take a while to become a book on a shelf!

I've recently enjoyed evenings with Will Owen Gage, an 18-year-old guitar whiz and great guy. Yes, so many of the artists that I interview and get to know contribute to my life with their stand for music and people. Jay Boy Adams, mentor for Will and performing artist himself, is another beautiful spirit in Texas music. They play together, even as Will keeps honing his own talent. First, a bit about Will. After hearing him as a young teenager, I decided pay attention to his progress. I heard him on the outdoor stage at Chili's on the River in Kerrville, at the Watering Hole, Nautilus Bar (where he rocked out with Greg Forest and Ronnie Leatherman), at the now defunct Hill Country Opry (who will revive this venue?), and most recently at a new venue, Pampell's.

The place was packed on a Saturday night for the official opening of this architectural beauty on the corner of Sidney Baker and Water Street. Ken Wilson has done the job right, keeping the old soda-fountain bar as a focus in a room tastefully decorated with tables, chairs and couches in a way that encourages people to gather. The upstairs smoking bar is part of the sports bar, but this is far more than a sports bar.

Harry and the Hightones brought jazz for dancing on a Tuesday night series. This group of local musicians have a distinct sound, favorites of dancers. Local musicians (Louis Real, String Dancer, Jay Sims) have regular happy hour gigs here, and each weekend is an opportunity to hear a special artist. Female talent abounds, even behind the bar, with Emily (songwriter and performer) and Kristen (bar manager and singer). In fact, a friend thought he had discovered a new duo when he heard Kristen and Catherine (another local voice) singing at Luckenbach. I informed him that this duo had been performing locally for a while.

And on Saturday night, Will, young and passionate, traded leads with Jay Boy, watching his mentor closely even as he took off exploring his own musical prowess. Can you tell I love a Texas shuffle? A Texas blues riff, sometimes reminiscent of Stevie Ray, another obvious influence? Yes, I can through the door of blues to my great love for Texas music. Or was it the door of the songwriter? I never can decide. I do know that listening to Will makes me want to dance. And I do at the Blues Jam on Sunday's from 4-8 p.m. Hosted by Warwick and Smith, this new jam could become just the place for music lovers to hear

both the up and coming and the well-seasoned. Sunday, November 27, I stopped by on my way back from at afternoon at Maria's Taco Express in Austin....a noon gospel and blues show called me there!

Terry Penney, my hairdresser and longtime friend, held forth on guitar, blues and rock riffs now supporting songs that have spiritual content. His wife, Sarah, was singing when I arrived. If I had not listened to the words closely, I might have thought I was in one of those dark bars that Terry has quit playing! Blues makes me want to move around, for sure. Graham Warwick and Emmett Smith were hosting. I met Hennig, a German film producer who also likes to dance. I was busy taking lots of photos. I don't seem to be able to just listen to the music and talk with the performers now; I also want to document how it looks to me. Glad Jack Parker, photographer for the Kerrville Daily Times, turned me on to a new camera and a little new information on capturing the image. The THMF has invited Jack to submit "Jack's Page" to our website. Coming soon!

Tuesday, November 29, Jay Boy Adams visited my writing class at Schreiner, telling his story and singing some songs for us. Each student had researched him on the web and had prepared four questions. I do love teaching this way! Looking for funding to set up a speaker's series in the classroom. Meanwhile, generous musicians like Goat Carson from New Orleans, Billy Joe Shaver, Shake Russesll, James McMurtry, Patricia Vonne, Kinky Friedman (our next governor?), Terri Hendrix, Ruthie Foster and more are willing to talk with students. I teach writing and literature so having Texas songwriters and performers in my classroom works out well!

Jay Boy shared some of his experiences growing up, his influences, his creative process and his thoughts on life. He encouraged students to find something to do in life that made them happy each and every day. I heard a little Joseph Campbell, "Follow your bliss." He shared his favorite song, one about memories kept in a shoebox, one written about a longtime friend who was dying of cancer. At the end of class Carissa Martinez commented, "You know we all have a shoebox of memories. This song speaks to everyone." I loved that. Will Owen Gage will be playing the Schreiner Recall coffeehouse on Friday, March 31. Jay Boy Adams will join him. Jay Boy, who now supplies tour buses to many of the musicians going down the road, is also finishing up work on a new CD, a return to the recording business that he left years ago out of a commitment to being a good husband and father. He's still that AND creating music.

I missed the Big Band Bash in Fredericksburg this year, but my musical pal, Charlie Gray, invited me to attend the Pre-part at the Hilltop Café on the Mason Highway out of Fredericksburg. A special and intimate evening of great food and hot music. Johnny Nicholas gathered a few of the musicians and entertained us, again blues and jazz led the way. Nothing like watching and hearing Greg Piccolo on sax. The man is a monster. We even heard "Somewhere Over The Rainbow."

Floyd Domino shared keyboard time with Riley Osbourne. Huddled in a small corner, surrounded by memorabilia from New Orleans, Texas and music, the group expanded to include Joel Guzman on hot accordion and Terry Hale on bass. I had just heard that Teddy Slatius, former manager of Johnny Winter, died. I experienced this music as a tribute to his life, since my memories of Teddy are intertwined with time spent with Johnny Winter, a chapter in my first book on Texas songwriter. Teddy loved the music, as many of us do. With passion. Joe King added "party" to the evening, as he sang, "my name is cabron....."

On November 11 I headed to Phil's Firehouse, my first visit after hearing of this place for a year. Comfort is now home to a class Texas music venue, an old bowling alley renovated into a café and outdoor stage, complete with metal circles holding up campfires. Shelley King was playing when I arrived. Her son, Clark Drake, a very young man of about 18 months, took up drumsticks, sat in his dad's lap, and played a few strokes. He was captivated with the stage where his mom and dad (drummer) were making music. Shelley, a chapter in THE manuscript, has a long list of saying for women laced throughout her songs: "I was soul searching when I found you," "The highway is my lover," "I'm afraid of running out of time," and her classic anthem, "I'm drivin' by myself." She says things like, "By the time you come around, I'll be gone," and "I don't need no man givin' me shit." And all this from a family woman! She rocks. Buy her music now.

I also heard Shelley one Sunday at the weekly gospel/blues jam at Maria's Taco Express on South Lamar in Austin. I was showing off the venue to a new friend when I realized that the usual crowd that includes Papa Mali and Gurf Morlix were missing. Instead, three amazing women took chairs and prepared to play. Nick Connley was on keyboard and Paul Mills had his usual spot on drums. Carolyn Wonderland, my hero, started out, singing in a way that makes me feel the thought: "I want to BE her." Sarah Brown, an Austin tradition in the blues scene and bass player, took the next song. And Shelley King rounded out the trio of female power. Nick appropriately sang Dylan's tune, "You've got to serve somebody." How true. And Charlie Pritchard played lead/slide guitar. This IS the place to be early Sunday afternoon, before you drive to Kerrville for the blues jam at Pampell's.

Yes, I do find time to grade papers, play with my animals, spend time with friends and meditate on this good Hill Country living from my front porch, facing west. And I run up and down roads chasing this music wherever it leads me. Sometimes I even have a road warrior accompanying me.

The Meltdown Monday at the Inn of the Hills just keeps on melting, bringing in stunning songwriters for an evening of listening (and talking...after all, this is a bar). Walt Wilkins and Johnny Gringo were recently hosts, and this is a pair to draw to (thanks, Guy, for that phrase). I had to miss it, but the reports I heard were good ones. I attend a course with Landmark Education each Monday in San Antonio. Great training to have your words match up with your world. Often I show up at the Meltdown late. Since my next seminar begins in February, I will enjoy the Inn during December and January.

I am putting together a trip to San Miguel de Allende from January 4-8, a course of exploration that includes some creative writing as we explore the global issues inherent in this culture of art and beauty. Limited to ten, we will stay in a classic Mexican hotel, walk the cobblestone streets and interact with the people there. Interested? I might even make this a woman's retreat! Contact me immediately at kat@maverickbbs.com

That's a little of the future with me.

And now for some CD talk. I have the new one by Warwick and Smith, a collection of blues song to play while driving down the road, "driving by myself." These two local musicians are part of the backbone of the Hill Country music scene. I love the Blues News that Graham Warwick sends out. Call 830-456-6372 for information and booking. "Hire us for your shotgun weddin'..." is an appropriate title for this collection of originals.

Mike Blakely, writer and cowboy scholar and performer, has a new CD, "Any Sky." Mike never disappoints with his sense of place, history, nostalgia and story. I happen to love his take on love songs! He was the songwriter we showcased at the Schreiner Coffeehouse in 2001 when my first book came out. One of his books, COMMANCHE DAWN, includes information on horses that sings to my soul. After all, I live with Brownie an Spirit, the yin/yang horse due, a brown Mexican mix and a white appaloosa/arab mix. Both outside my front door as I face west, watching that sun go down on I-10. See www.mikeblakely.com for information.

THMF is an organization that I started in 1987. www.texasheritagemusic.org We are having a membership drive. Join us. Support Texas music this way. We have added a new category for local musicians. And they are listed on the site...hire them! We also have a new FREE student membership. Our coffeehouse series resumes the first Wednesday in February and runs through April. If you are looking for a good non-profit to support with some year-end donations, choose us! We are small and making a difference. Down the road, ils sont partis and happy holidays. KH

www.texasheritagemusic.org

kat@maverickbbs.com

830-792-1945

PO Box 291945, Kerrville, Texas 78029-1945

Send CD's, stories and songs.