

## ON THE ROAD

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Already July! After a great time in Mexico in May, after a heartwarming Kerrville Folk Festival in June, I have spent the rest of my time healing. Well, it's all healing in one way. That is what music can do for us. Highlights of the festival include an evening with the great love of Peter Yarrow and Paul Stookey, an evening of honest words with Butch Hancock, an evening of stories with Guy Clark and Verlon Thompson, and evening with Carolyn Hester. The thread that ran through each performance was a thread of love. Butch said things like ""Along came a man with love in his heart, and he cast the devils out," and "There's ways to be real, there's ways to heal." Carolyn performed with her two daughters, grieving the loss of her husband, David, and bringing great love and compassion to the stage in her performance.

I attended the tribute to Allen Damron hosted by Walter Lee. We heard many a poignant story as a host of friends took the stage at the newly reconstructed Threadgill Theatre. Ramblin' Jack sang "San Francisco Bay Blues" and "Don't Think Twice It's Alright." Guy and Verlon gave us "Old Friends," and Fromholz sang a Tom Paxton tune, "Ramblin' Boy." An afternoon of nostalgia and memory. Allen was there at the beginning for me and for many others.

On June 12<sup>th</sup> I went under the knife (saw and hammer?) to have my right knee replaced. Years ago my horse fell on me, on concrete, breaking my elbow. Since my right side was under the horse, I prefer to say the knee was also affected, rather than say "osteoarthritis" and aging. So, a horse accident did me in. And Dr. Mitchell in Kerrville helped bring balance back into my life. And music is an integral part of my healing process. The animals I live with also help by giving their unconditional love: Max, the black lab, a gift from Sandra Cisneros, and Tux, the black cat that was a gift from granddaughter Jessica. The two horses have gone to summer camp. Jessica is here for a two-week visit.

And now for some music stories. Most recently, June 29, I attended an open mike at Armadillo Exchange, a new venue (since May 22) on the Guadalupe River in Kerrville. Just head west from the courthouse on Highway 27 (Junction Highway) and look left after you pass the construction for the new bridge over the river. This may be the best location in town. I arrived early, at the invitation of local musician Melissa Weatherby. Her band, Sol Patch, was hosting the open mike. A cool breeze came off the river, and a stand of huge trees provided some early shade. The Exchange is a great collection of stores full of antiques, books, and clothing. After wandering through the stores, I entered the back patio, a multi-level wooden structure that overlooks a fire pit, volleyball pit, picnic tables and walking trails. You can buy the food to grill outdoors. A novel idea.

I made it up the stairs, sans cane. My granddaughter was providing her arm for support. We sat on a higher level, looking down on the band, and we were not disappointed. I have always said Melissa had the best voice in town. Well, her band this evening included her own soulmate, Brian Maldonado, on guitar. Johnny Way, a veteran fiddle player from the area, and Wilson Fisher on bass. No drums tonight. What a great

collection of songs we heard, including “Ain’t No Sunshine When He’s Gone.” Her first song included the words, “Love comes out of nowhere, just like a hurricane. Feels like Rain.” I agree.

“Eclectic” best describes the rest of the evening. We heard a young rock group called “Violent Breed of Nature.” Saul and Tito (guitar, bass and vocalist) told me that “death metal” was the genre. I heard some of my favorite minor chords played in a trance-like manner. Interesting music for me. A younger group took the stage, Coreview, and gave us some funky up rock and blues. Two brothers, JT and Bear Aspra, along with drummer Chad Hayes, graduated from Ingram High School this year. A proud mom and dad were in the audience. I always love it when the bass player starts slapping his instrument, giving that funk rhythm that makes me want to dance. Well, I was at the end of a long day on this new knee, but I did wiggle around a bit.

The THMF scholarship winner, Casey Hubble, is an Ingram graduate and friend of this group. Casey has a gig in Kerrville at Riverstone Inn on the river on Saturday, July 8. He sings country and his own originals.

The schedule at the Armadillo Exchange includes music on Fri. and Sat., and the open mike on Thursday. Ahead are Guy Forsythe on July 4, Will Own Gage on July 14, Sol Patch on the 15<sup>th</sup>, Greg Forest on the 21<sup>st</sup>, Graham Warwick on the 22<sup>nd</sup>. Others TBA. I love the timing of these shows: 6-9 p.m.

Pampell’s, another local venue downtown, also has an open mike on Thursdays. I understand both places were packed. Glad to hear that more people are getting out to enjoy this experience where musicians, young and old, can share the music.

And now for my CD pick of the litter. Sustain Records, based in Kerrville and owned by Jimmy Perkins, is releasing excellent music. Jimmy told me once, “I listen carefully for the songs that capture my imagination.” KRVL, a local radio station, has become an excellent outlet for Texas music and for local performers. I applaud them for this new direction. KFAN in Fredericksburg has always sent Texas music out into the world, via web and station. When in the Hill Country, check out these two stations. 94.3 and 107.9.

And now for my CD pick: “Snake Farm” by Ray Wylie Hubbard on Sustain Records. “Snake Farm, it just sounds nasty,” he sings in the chorus. The CD is a work of art itself, with a special place inside the cover for the lyrics, indicating that words do matter! As an English teacher I love having the words so accessible. My research into mythology and world religions has revealed many interpretations for the snake, some being “transformation, the goddess, wisdom, and feminine power.” Now I have known Ray Wylie since his days in folk clubs in Dallas, Texas. I first heard him at the Rubaiyat folk club on Maple. I invited him once to visit my high school English class at Aledo High School. He surprised me by accepting. What a guest speaker he was that day, arriving after an all night musical adventure. He noticed the collection of Flannery O’Connor short stories on my desk, saying, “I was an English major at North Texas University, and I do love Flannery.” I gave him that book, immediately.

After his own personal transformation away from drugs and alcohol, he visited my class at Schreiner University several times, giving his own personal testimony and sharing his music with my students. “Heartaches and Grease” is a song on this album that captures many of the personal stories I’ve heard Ray tell. And I do love this song. In fact, I have ways of using Ray’s songs in my writing classes. For example: After he sang “The Messenger” for my class, I asked them all to write their own personal message, using his

beginning sentence. Hubbard quotes Rilke in that song; I ask my students to use a favorite quote in their own message. Yes, Ray and many other Texas songwriters are also GREAT in the classroom.

In one of his stories, Ray credits the late Stevie Ray Vaughan with influencing his decision to stop drinking on his birthday in 1987. “Stevie told me what I needed to do for recovery,” relates Hubbard. “A lot of people remember Stevie for his guitar playing, but I remember him because he saved my life.” Ray’s story was an important chapter in my first book on Texas songwriters, *TELLING STORIES, WRITING SONGS: AN ALBUM OF TEXAS SONGWRITERS*, University of Texas Press, 2001. The book contains over 30 interviews with Texas songwriters, an oral history. Ray’s chapter is inspiring and uplifting.

“Snake Farm” is produced by Ray and Gurf Morlix, another of my favorites. I started hearing Gurf at Maria’s Taco Express in Austin on Sundays. After loving his music, I discovered that he had produced many of the artists I love. He says, “The lyrics (on “Snake Farm”) are the hooks. Nobody else is writing songs like him—deep in the blues but with very spiritual lyrics. He’s out there all by himself.”

The album includes guest spots by Ruthie Foster, Peter Rowan and harmonica groovemesiter Ray Bonneville. A work of art, a spiritual treatise, a collection of literary stories, this CD is another phase in the ongoing transformation of Ray Wylie Hubbard.

Keep tuned to CMT for the video, filmed at a log cabin near Wimberley. Ray’s son, Lucas, a promising guitarist himself, contributes a guest solo on “Old Guitar.” The director, Tiller Russell, says, “Ray Wylie is rock ‘n’ roll’s last samurai. He writes like he has a devil at his tail, the Good Lord in his heart, a saddlebag of poetry and a pistol in his boot. His songs evoke images of Sam Peckinpah, Fellini and the best of Robert Altman.” Now that’s a compelling list of images!

Cameron Randall is now working with Sustain Records. I first met Cameron at a music conference in Austin and quickly realized he was one person in the business with a creative heart. And the heart is important. He wrote a beautiful biography of Hubbard for the press kit, weaving in the literary influences. Of course, my first interview with Jimmy Perkins revealed another English major who loves the writing. We share a love for many of the same writers, including Jack Kerouac, the man who changed the course of American fiction with *ON THE ROAD*.

Townes Van Zandt, James McMurtry, Guy Clark, Kinky Friedman, and Michelle Shocked are also swimming in the sea of great writing that can be found in Texas, along with Terri Hendrix, Ruthie Foster, Patrice Vonne and more. Just ask Larry McMurtry! And don’t forget (although Ray wants to at times) that “Up Against the Wall Redneck Mother” was an anthem for the cosmic cowboy revolution in 1973 penned by Hubbard and recorded by Jerry Jeff Walker.

Speaking of James McMurtry, I just received the final nominations from the Americana Music Association. James (finally) is nominated for album of the year, artist of the year, and song of the year (“We Can’t Make It Here on Compadre Records). The Dixie Chicks are also nominated for the controversial song “Not Ready To Make Nice” from their latest album, “Taking The Long Way.” I first interviewed James McMurtry in San Antonio years ago when he had completed about five songs. Now he has albums with Sony Records, Sugar Hill and Compadre Records. His writing gets stronger with each one, his guitar playing is excellent, and his performances have moved into a dark, edgy

rock sound. I remember when he once suggested that people get up and dance to his music. At the time he was playing a folk club, a listening club. He always did want to rock and roll.

The 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Americana Music Awards are September 20-22 at the annual conference in Nashville. I joined the association the founding year and love the music in this organization. Using "I Walk The Line" as a byline, honoring Johnny Cash and other classic American writers and performer, the association has grown to rival Top-40 Hit lists (in my estimation). For information write [info@americanamusic.org](mailto:info@americanamusic.org) [www.americanamusic.org](http://www.americanamusic.org) contains all the nominees for the last five years. Time to get caught up with this great association!

Upcoming in Bandera is the Bandera Music Hall of Fame Awards and Jam on August 13. After a jam on the back patio of the Kronkosky Library by the Almost Patsy Cline Band and the McKay brothers, winners will be announced and Rockabilly Hall of Famer Larry Nolen will accept the Bandera Music Hall of Fame 2006 Living Legend Award. Texas Monthly rates Bandera fifth among the state's best music destinations.

Last year Arkey Blue was inducted and 400 music lovers streamed through the Library to pay tribute and visit The Jukebox, a computer archive of 700 tunes by Bandera County musicians. Admission is free. Call 830-796-4213 for information.

The Auslander in Fredericksburg is hosting another summer music festival. Billy Joe Shaver played Saturday, July 1. Joe Ely is scheduled for Monday, July 3! Now that's a rare treat in the Hill Country. Ian Moore plays July 2. See [www.theauslander.com](http://www.theauslander.com) for a complete schedule. See you there Monday!

Other venues to check out include John T. Floore Country Store (with Robert Earl Keen on Sunday, July 2), Hondo's in Fredericksburg, Luckenbach, Armadillo Exchange in Kerrville, Waring Steak Night on Wednesdays and much more. The Hill Country is alive with the sound of music. Down the road and happy trails. Ils sont partis. KH