

January On The Road 2006
For Hill Country Visitor
From Kathleen Hudson, Ph.D.

Welcome to a new year, a new perspective, and a new collection of possibilities. The Hill Country is rich in opportunity for stories and songs. And I am the possibility that stories and songs make a difference in the world! Thus, this column, the Texas Heritage Music Foundation, a career teaching literature and writing at Schreiner University, a book in progress on women and Texas music, a published book of interviews with Texas songwriters. All these projects flow from the possibility that I created...stories and songs make a difference in the world.

And what is the possibility you have invented for yourself? The songwriters I interview all say one thing, "I am doing what I love. I am writing because I have to. I am performing to express something important to me. I love sharing and entertaining." Yep, all those sentences are ONE thing. According to Joseph Campbell, "Follow your bliss." A good New Year's resolution. Or "To thine own self be true," as Shakespeare wrote for Polonius to say to his son, Laertes.

I am writing this on December 31, 2005, getting ready to head to the YO Ranch in Mountain Home to hear a favorite son of Texas, Charlie Robison. I am anticipating a great evening of Texas music, heritage and tradition. Both Charlie and the Ranch resonate with Texas! I have attended cattle drives on this ranch, riding one of my rowdy horses. I have listened to great music under that stars in September at the annual YO Social Club Party. I interviewed Charlie III when I first moved to Kerrville twenty years ago. I feel a family connection to this place, located just down the highway from my little piece of land at Midway on I-10. I just head up 41 and in about twenty minutes, enter the gate of the YO Ranch.

Charlie's music is raw, rowdy, and reminds me other great Texas songwriters. I once told him that as I listen to him, I also hear Townes, Guy and Billy Joe. We share a love of words, stories and rhythm. All four of us share that! (Even though sharing with Townes is now in my memory.)

Jimmy Perkins, a great manager of Texas music, has an office for his company, 823 Management, in Kerrville and will be launching a new record label, Sustain Records in February, 2006. The first three releases are Wade Bowen, Bruce Robison (Charlie's brother), and Ray Wylie Hubbard (need I say more?). Drew Kennedy is under management by Jimmy now, and he will be hosting Melt Down Mondays at the Inn Pub during January. His guests include many of my favorites....Nathan Hamilton, Bonnie Bishop and more. I interviewed Drew before his gig at the Yacht Club in Kerrville in December. His wife, Holly, accompanied him and we had a beautiful conversation on our love of the music. His voice, edgy and interesting, is the kind of voice that captures my attention. His songs capture a part of Texas music that draws in an audience of all ages.

M.Y.T.H. Magazine (Music of Your Texas Heritage), owned by Bob Gray, writer and publisher, is collecting the stories of Texas music. The next edition will be out in the Kerrville Paper in February. Hill Country Happenings, edited by Greg Forest and Natalie

Steele, will hit the streets in February, giving us the upcoming schedules along with features on Texas music. Texas Rising Star, edited and owned by Jim Haile, is also out on the streets monthly, covering the Texas music scene. Gary Hartman at the Center for Texas Music History at Texas State University puts out a brilliant academic publication on Texas music. Important for all music lovers! KFAN covers Texas music in a thorough and unique way at 107.9 and 103.1FM. KRVL has a Texas music show, as does Ranch Radio (KRNH) in Kerrville. Yes, the Hill Country is full of outlets for good stories and songs!

Some of my December gem-like moments in music include at evening honoring Cindy Terry at Pampell's in Kerrville, "A lady with a big heart, big talent and loved by all her knew her." Cindy hosted a weekly local music jam at The Downtowner, and she created an eclectic night of sharing songs, honoring all the local musicians by giving them a space to play and gathering an audience. My sister, Carolyn, and I enjoyed many a Thursday night dancing in the aisles there. The tribute consisted of many performers, including her sister, performing Cindy's originals. Go to musicoffice.com for more information on her music.

Another moment for me was a Thursday evening at The Auslander in Fredericksburg listening to the blues/rock of The Ben Beckendorf Band. His blue guitar matched the color of the night sky, and the blues he played matched the mood of my heart...at times. Ben is a local treasure, along with Jeff on drums. I always appreciate their version of the Jimmie Rodgers hit, "T for Texas."

I had some beautiful Christmas moments in the lobbies of local banks. Bank of the Hills featured two of my favorites, Ridge Floyd and Doug Ballentine. Both men have voices that fill the chapel-like lobby with the sound of angels. Doug gave us a sampling of show tunes as well as some originals. Ridge shared his stories of the Hill Country from the Hunt perspective, and he sang "Come Emmanuel" acapello, bringing in a host of angels! Now my Christmas tradition is going to include afternoons in the Bank of the Hills. I also heard my young friend, Jackson, sing at the Hill Country State Bank with his class from Notre Dame Elementary School. Jackson is eight going on about twenty in wisdom.

Rod Kennedy's production, "6th Annual Michael Martin Murphey Cowboy Christmas Concert," played to a packed house at the Inn of the Hills Conference Center. I loved the scaled down version (more songs and stories, less set and costume) of this intimate evening. We heard traditional Christmas songs and stories, as well as original Michael Martin Murphey music. The next and last production by the Kerrville Special Events Association is the Chinese Golden Dragon Acrobats, performing at the Cailloux Performing Arts Center in Kerrville on February 9. Call 830-896-9393 ext. 2 for tickets. Rod Kennedy will produce a special evening and dinner on February 14 with Tom Prasado-Rao in Fredericksburg. Reserve your tickets through Rod Kennedy soon. 830-792-9830.

I ran up the road to Austin several times during December. First to attend a Sunday afternoon at Maria's Taco Express, listening to Carolyn Wonderland, Shelley King, Sarah Brown, Paul Mills, and Nick Connerly as the Imperial Harmonizers giving us gospel and blues. Best show in town!

On December 21 I attended a musical gathering at the home of Freddy and Catherine Powers. When you join a group at the home of a great songwriter, you know to expect great music. The jam circle, containing as many as twelve musicians at one time, not only

showcased the life and songs of Freddy Powers, but also showcased his young protégé, Lauren Beller, age 8. She sang some Bob Wills, some Freddy Powers and a song about Freddy, written by her dad. She just may have stolen the show, except for the appearance of another young beauty, Kimarie. Still a teenager, Kimarie has been performing at Randy Willis's club in North Austin, as well as playing festival and rodeos. Her version of Janis Joplin was compelling to me in my research on women and Texas music. BB Morse kept rhythm for the circle, except when Meaux Jeux and Slim Ritchie showed up. Meaux Jeux took her turn at the stand-up bass, reminding me of the great time we had with the Slim Ritchie Dream Band at the September Living History Weekend in Kerrville. I invited them back in 2007! Others in attendance and performing were Pauline Reese (and some real honky tonk), Karen Mall, Lee Duffy, Steve Carter, and many more. Hearing Freddy sing flavored the night with such sweetness. And watching his loving wife, Catherine, laughing and smiling at the gathering of love in her home, provided a real moment of Christmas love and joy for us all. I think my guest, a real curmudgeon at heart, even enjoyed the evening.

On December 23, on my way to Ft. Worth for a family Christmas, I attended the CD release for Monte Montgomery, a Texas favorite. I'm not sure how his performance keeps getting better. I mean, he's been playing a tough guitar since he was a teenager! This show was tight, rhythmic, soulful and original! Can't compare Monte to anyone these days. Ray Rodriguez, his manager for the last five years, says, "He's an American original." I agree. His new CD, "Monte Montgomery at Workplay," was recorded live at Workplay Theater in Alabama. After a rich live experience with Monte, I was not disappointed when I played the CD on the rest of my trip. I try to find a favorite and can't. I love singing along to "Shock," and I love the line, "The book that I'm writing...." along with "I laugh when I cry." Of course, an English teacher would love a song called, "The Book." Go to www.montemontgomery.com for more information. The label is Harmonic Records. And Monte made the cover of Acoustic Guitar Magazine in November 2005. I must own a copy of that one. Monte does give credit to his mom, another local favorite, Maggie Montgomery, for teaching him his first guitar chord. He was a mere child at the time.

January 11, at Schreiner University, Andy Wilkinson will preview his show "Women of the West," a one-woman show featuring Trudy Fair. Andy and Trudy have performed at Western music gatherings, Cowboy gatherings and festivals. Andy is a true Texas Renaissance man, writing plays, performing his own original music, producing cd's, teaching songwriting at Texas Tech, being artist-in-residence at the Southwest Archives at Tech, writing short stories and painting! This performance will be free and held at the Theatre at Schreiner University. Hope to see some of you readers there.

The Texas Music Coffeehouse series starts back up at Schreiner on Feb. 1 with a tribute to Black History Month. Clifton Fifer will open, and the featured guest will be published on the THMF website soon. Mark the first Wednesday in March and April for the next two shows, along with an extra show on Friday, March 31, for Schreiner homecoming weekend. Will Owen Gage (18 now) and Jay Boy Adams will be performing some music with strong guitar leads! The Josh Murley Trio will also perform.

I want to end this beginning column for the year 2006 with a hats off to Stephen Bruton and his new album "from the five." The first song, "Bigger Wheel," contains a new mantra for me. "I want to surrender to the bigger wheel." "Walk by Faith" points the way

to the future, for me. And “In The Wind” speaks to my heart. This album, played over and over in my car, is evidence that this songwriter (touring with Little Feat) is transforming and growing in all ways...body, mind and spirit. I like talking to him about books and ideas. His music reveals his own growth. And it’s rhythmic just the way I like it!

And now I will end this column with a quotation I found on the bathroom wall in Ruta Maya, a club for poetry and music on South Congress in Austin. My wish for us all:

“So don’t be so hard on YOU.

You’re the one who’s gonna get you otta this

That’s why there’s time

That’s why there’s seasons

That’s how we roll on down the road.

down the road, Free Leonard, ils sont partis and surrender to the bigger wheel! KH

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Send me your songs and stories! Happy New Year.