

On The Road

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South by Southwest 2007 is evidence that a conference organized for growth, continues to grow. Over 1400 bands showcased in Austin, with music industry professionals enjoying a trade show, panels, interviews along with the music. Hard for this Libra woman to choose so, of course, I have some regrets about what I missed. I wanted to hear more of James McMurtry than his acceptance speech for BMI songwriter of the year. I've been listening to James since he first completed five songs, and I watched him stroll in and out of small venues in San Antonio, waiting for someone to say, "Yes, sit down and play." He's come a long way and continues a regular gig at the Continental Club on South Congress way too late for me each Wednesday night. I also missed Steve Earle. Both men were significant chapters in my first book on Texas songwriters. And they have that edge in the writing that I love!

I did hear two phenomenal women being interviewed. Both played music and sang songs. Emmylou Harris was stunning, of course, and told us about her influences, her relationship with Graham Parsons and the effect of his death, about her love for the music. I did miss hearing her do the classic Townes song, "If I Needed You."

Ricky Lee Jones was the conference interview on Thursday. She also had her guitar and often gave us an answer dressed in music and song. Such fun. She showed a lot of displeasure around the subject of being categorized by her fans as they keep expecting her to do and be "Chuck e's in Love." "We were reminded that artists change and expecting them to deliver the same thing night after night is unrealistic and even painful. I could hear Dylan and others who reinvent themselves giving us a chorus of "amens."

The Austin Music Awards on Wednesday night thrilled me with the tribute to Doug Sahm, music led by his outrageous son, Shawn. I danced to the energy when I wasn't trying to capture the faces of Flaco, Speedy, Ernie Durwawa on drums, Augie Meyers and Shawn. Such energy. The tribute to Clifford Antone was led by Jimmie Vaughan and Gary Clark Jr. Derek O'Brien was also on stage, and the house was a rockin'. We all love this godfather to the blues. I know my first experiences in Austin listening to music took place at Antone's, a place I could go alone and really get involved with the music. Everyone was there for the music.

Another special for me at SxSW was the Texamericana showcase led by Barbara Kooyman (K), formerly of Timbuk 3. Her spirit at the awards show as she helped showcase Michelle Shocked and Carrie Rodriguez brought tears to my eyes. What a fine person she is, having started a non-profit to sell cd's and let a percentage benefit public radio stations. Threadgills was home to wonderful afternoon jams featuring Michelle, Greasy Wheels, and more.

Each venue had a lineup and a flavor. Easier for me to pick a location and park myself than to wander around trying to find a different band each hour. The secret is to conduct some pre-investigation in order to fill your dance card early, always leaving room for surprises.

This conference has become an event easy to cover, easy to enjoy. Everyone seems to do his or her job, and the thousands of volunteer man-hours must be staggering. As a woman who produces a much smaller event in Kerrville each month (/September 28,

2007), I could see the amount of hard and intelligent work that created this seamless experience for me.

I missed the Americana showcase and the Texas Music Magazine Party. Hated to miss these parts of Texas music that I love, but time was limited. Sign up now for next year. Get the early-bird rate. Get that motel room and plan on having a great time. The show this year was part of my spring break.

Ahead in April is the spoken word coffeehouse on April 4, 7-9 p.m. in the Cailloux Corner Pocket, featuring Thom "The World" Poet, a slam contest (prizes!), and an open mike beginning at 7:00 p.m. Sponsors include Chi Phi Fraternity, Sigma Tau Delta, Center for Innovative Learning, RevFM Radio (94.3), and the Texas Heritage Music Foundation.

April 3 Sigma Tau Delta is sponsoring an open mike reading at the Texas Star Coffeehouse on Earl Garrett, also sponsored by Sigma Tau Delta, an English Honors Society.

Tim Hazell, writer and interdisciplinary artist, will be in residence on campus from April 16-20. Check the Schreiner web for his schedule. I know that the annual Texas Writers Conference is the evening of April 19 in the Cailloux Center ballroom. Hope to see you throughout this special week at Schreiner.

The Bluebonnet Blues Festival kicks off March 30 and ends April 1. Might be a bit late for you to read about it here again, but know that I'm loving the blues gig, and I'm taking Jessica, my 14 year old granddaughter, with me. I do want to be in Dallas for a family event around my mother's 83rd birthday. Lots of driving that weekend. I wish I could give you the lineup now, creating envy and awe, but since I'm writing before the event, let me tell you a little I know. The Texana Dames played Saturday afternoon. The Pianarama is a great event Saturday night and most unusual. I'll be staying at the sponsoring hotel, The Marriott.

I'll be off to San Miguel de Allende May 8-20 teaching a creative writing course. Want to sneak down and join me?? Let me know. I am wondering how the Texas music concert with Gary P. Nunn and Patricia Voone went? That would have been worth the flight on March 25 if I could have stayed a week! I am starting to listen to Spanish radio stations and yearn for the culture. Always happens before I hit the road. A bit early for my Mexico yearning this year.

Remember, 2007 is the twentieth anniversary of the Texas Heritage Music Foundation, founded my me out of my commitment that stories and songs make a difference in the world. We now have a new grant to pay our member musicians to go into schools and to also work with kids at risk. This is another invitation for you local musicians to get on the membership roster asap. See www.texasheritagemusic.org for details. We also need a membership chairman, a volunteer coordinator, a producer for the Living History Day on September 28, and people to show up and help out that day! Lots of great volunteer opportunities at this non-profit based now on the Schreiner campus. Come see us in the rock house near the Robbins Lewis Pavilion.

You are all invited to join the THMF and help us celebrate 20 years of sharing stories and songs with this community and the world! Happy Trails and down the road. KH