

On The Road

For August 2008

From Kathleen Hudson - San Miguel de Allende

I spent 3 days in the Big Apple in June to receive a **Peabody Award** for the Texas Heritage Music Foundation. Several years ago Lex Gillespie from Washington D.C. called me about being the sponsor of this rockabilly radio series. He raised the money for the series, conducted the interviews and produced this heartfelt series called “**Whole Lotta Shakin,;**” with Rosie Flores (a recommendation I made after including my interview with her in my book on the women of Texas music) as the voice of the series. I am honored and thrilled to be part of a series with this much soul. And I called Lex after hearing the Johnny Cash show to tell him this! Yes, I served as a research assistant but Lex created the series. Ironically, I created a radio series myself on Texas music before even starting this foundation in 1987. I learned the hard way about sponsorship, ad agencies, syndication and studio work. A good learning it was though, leading me to understand this project with Lex. My board agreed, and we said an immediate yes to this sponsorship. The show is running on 90.1 FM each Saturday night during June and July on Texas Public Radio in the Hill Country.

What a time I had at the **Chelsea Hotel** (thanks to Leonard Cohen and his life!). Room 619 had a balcony that looked out over 23rd Street, right next to the sign for the hotel. And all the descriptions do not convey the sense of literary awe that permeated me as I stood in the lobby for the first time. Knowing the history and the stories only whet my appetite; meeting the man who has written a book on the hotel and now writes a daily blog on the hotel, Ed Hamilton, added new interest. But my slow approach to my room, painted dark forest green with black furniture, gave me time to soak in the art that adorns every space of the wall. Of course, a dark blue/green painting of a spiral was closest to my doorway! Yep, that spiral keeps showing up in my life as well as on my arm!

“I remember that night at the Chelsea Hotel!” kept Leonard’s voice in my head even as I thought about Janis, Dylan, Patti Smith, Mark Twain, Thomas Wolfe, Arthur C. Clarke (He wrote **2001 Space Odyssey** there!), and, of course, the death of Dyan Thomas in that hotel! Whew...the ghosts that roam these halls. And I loved meeting the three women (moira?) who sat in the lobby talking each day. Merle has lived in the hotel for 27 years. Storm also has a room there as well as one in London. And Irene comes over from an apartment across the street to complete these trio...the three fates in my imagination.

Great service, wonderful people, good memories. I shall return for weekends at the Chelsea Hotel. I also spent a day walking in **Greenwich Village**, taking photos of Café Wha and more. Avi Colon, in a pink linen shirt, was playing guitar in Washington Square. We talked, I was given two beautiful songs for the day, and we walked. Avi had all the stories of a man well-traveled. We also saw **David Amram** walking down the street! I had just read Kerouac on stage with Amram at the Kerrville Folk Festival. And now this chance meeting. I also took a list up to Jeff Rosen’s office, Bob Dylan’s publisher. The list was clear, saying, “These are some ways I see possible collaboration with Bob Dylan and the Texas Heritage Music Foundation.” He did not have time to meet with me. The list includes a film on Mance Lipscomb, a tribute to Jimmie Rodgers, an introduction to my next book on the poetry of Texas music, and a request that he visit Kerrville! Well, can’t hurt to ask.

I also had the chance to attend a concert by **Dr. John**. I had been spending time with **Rev. Goat Carson** when he stayed with Kinky in Medina, listening to the poetry of Rev. Goat!

Well, four of his songs are on the new Dr. John album, along with a duet with Willie Nelson. What a night of connections as I stood at the Highline Ballroom a few blocks from my hotel. What icing on the cake of my great trip. Yes, I danced all night with CC, a poet from Seattle who also loved the music. And I heard the very political songs generated by a post-Katrina atmosphere in New Orleans. “Promises, Promises,” may say it all! Of course, “Dream Warrior,” by Rev. Goat, may be my favorite! Goat has been a guest in my Schreiner English classes for several years, and he participates in the annual Living History Day produced by the **Texas Heritage Music Foundation** the last Friday in September, Sept. 26, 2008! Goat is working on a new book of poetry (I do like the title “Medicine Poem,” but think he is working with Kinky on a new title.). And he has out a new work of fiction. **Shallow Graves**. Eeries and mysterious! Find all this on the web, of course!

I am writing this version of my column from San Miguel de Allende on a day that started out warm, had a cool shower during the afternoon, and ended up sunny and cool! My brother, Charlie, and his wife, Paula, a painter, spent a week visiting me here. I took Spanish lessons and played tour guide, a job I dearly love. One night, high on a rooftop, we watched the lights of San Miguel as Paul Guerin, a former guide in San Miguel and all-around brilliant person, played Townes Van Zandt for us. Then Robert Earl Keen, Joe Ely, Butch Hancock and more. Yes, even though he is now living in San Francisco with the wonderful and hospital Jean Bush, he knows his Texas music. I am invited out to a festival in San Francisco that also features many Texas artists, The Hardly Strictly Bluegrass Festival the first weekend in October. I just might go.

I have run into many Texas here in San Miguel who also love the music. Bob Melton, former state legislator, gave me a CD of his greatest “non-hits,” and I danced around my apartment for hours, thinking I was at the Broken Spoke in Austin! Yes, he can write dance music as well as wonderful ballads and musica muy romantica! As I attended a Spanish conversation group on Monday morning, I was invited to a monthly meeting of Texas meeting in San Miguel. I’ll be sure and go to that. Bet music comes up in the conversation.

I had the opportunity to be the featured writer at the July 11 Author’s Sala, thus connecting with people who know the power of stories. What fun. I am returning to San Miguel Aug. 19-23 for a visit by Tom Robbins, my favorite fiction writer in the world. He articulates all my secret yearnings, questions and desires! Yes, I have paragraphs marked with the words, “Me! Me!” Who has read a Tom Robbins book? Let me hear your stories.....kathleenhudson123 at hotmail.com. (AT sign would not work on this Mexican keyboard).

Projects ahead that call to me include an anthology of essays on Townes Van Zandt, co editor with Harold Eggers, business manager and road warrior with Townes. Now he encourages me! Susie Nelson and I are working on a children’s book that also features photos of horses that her dad, Willie, has rescued. My new class on Texas music at Schreiner University is taking up the spaces in my mind between these Spanish classes I am taking, thanks to a faculty development from this wonderful small university. Public invited to sign up for the course and audit it. And I am working on a book, CONVERSATIONS ACROSS BORDERS: WORD WEAVING, with the talented and inspiring Tim Hazell, a renaissance artist, scholar, musician and writer who is living in San Miguel de Allende. Check him out online.

I invite all you readers to visit Schreiner this year, enjoying all the free events, the lectures and workshops. Our first THMF coffeehouse will be the first Wednesday in September.

Booked for the Fall are Rosie Flores, Carolyn Wonderland and Walt Wilkins. What a lineup of talent.

And the Tribute to Jimmie Rodgers and the Living History Day are Friday, September 26. Remember, ALL local musicians are invited to participate in this special day by performing, telling stories, or giving demonstrations. Call Tim at the THMF office, 830-792-1945 for details. I want to give another public thank-you to Tim Wilton and our Schreiner intern, Adolpho, for a summer of good work!

Nietzsche said, "Life without music would be a mistake." Great words from a guy who also wrote about the super hero as well as the death of tragedy, focusing on an analogy using Apollo and Dionysus. A random tangential comment in a column on Texas music. Probably.

As the month of July comes to an end, I am also finishing up a month studying Spanish in San Miguel de Allende. The city has NOT been ruined by the many Americans building big houses on the outskirts of town. The beauty of the culture, the people, the food and the music flows through me each time I walk down Ancha de San Antonio to my class with Warren Hardy School of Spanish, each time I sit in El Jardin in front of the Paroquia soaking in the color and image of pink granite spires reaching up to the clear blue sky, each time I share comida con mucha gente muy amable!

Yes, I love my special time here, and connection abound. I have met a Texas legislator who also writes songs! Bob Melton. Of course, July is the month Texans invade San Miguel, not afraid of the cool rainy season, so everyone expects the Texans in July. Not snow birds, rather sun birds. Fleeing the hot Texas sun.

One Friday I saw and listened to an old friend, Javier Estrada, play his gypsy music and talk (a little) about the true gypsy spirit. "You are all gypsies," he explained, "because you are travelling and wandering." I agree with that! His music is straight from the heart, and the audience gathered in the Sala Quetzal room at the biblioteca nodded in agreement. We were surrounded and held closely by the warm red walls, covered with images of all the tribal cultures in Mexico as well as a history of Mexico. Painted by the renown David Leonardo. I know several people in Kerrville who have carried his work back. This huge mural was a donation to the library, a library that works with children, has educational programs and deserves all the friends it can have.

July was the time for the International Film Festival of "cortas" and music played a role in many of these films, including a stunning display called "El Corazon de Mexico." Yes, while I was here, San Miguel de Allende and a neighboring community, Atotonilco, were declared Patrimonio Cultral de Humanidad de la UNESCO. This designation will make a huge difference in how these jewels are perceived in the world. One woman wrote a story for the local paper on the relationship as mirroring Bethlehem and Jerusalem! Muy interesante.

Another highlight for me was the annual Toltequidad in Pozos. Hearing the number one Pre-Hispanic band, El Tribu, in all of Mexico out under an almost full moon was an astounding moment, full of the sangre of este cultura. And nothing beats a room at Posada de Las Minas restored and created by David and Julie from Austin. A work of art in Pozos.

My longtime friend, Don Patterson, has a new book out (2007) with University of New Mexico Press on his own journey as an archaeologist. And much more. The seed for the book was planted with his daughter, Jessica, asked him about a direction I life. She survived working in New York on 9-11, returning to Mexico for new directions. I saw her at an art show featuring her sister, Bianca. She is pregnant now...new directions! Meanwhile, dad started his book with a letter to Jessica and continued to tell his story in the metaphor of the

title: JOURNEY TO XIBALBA. Each chapter documents a project with the accompanying story. And a letter to Jessica runs throughout. Beautiful piece of work, even if I did not know the family so well. 20 years ago when I first brought Schreiner University students to San Miguel, we stayed at #18 Hidalgo, in the house of Maruca y Alfredo. When they both died, Marisela, the daughter, took care of us. Don was always a guest speaker in my class. Ask Rufus Hayes in Kerrville about those talks!

In his book he talks of the importance of reading the Popul Vuh and uses a quotation by Camus, "You cannot create experience. You must undergo it." That sums up my month in San Miguel de Allende. I was undergoing a transformative experience with each moment. Don also began his introduction by thanking his wife, Marisela Garcia de la Sota, for her help, patience and love. Pick up this book and join Don as he journeys through Xibalba, the Maya underground, facing obstacles along the way. Don is now battling cancer, in a strong way, and thinking of Sareda Miloz, who also edited his book for him as she battled cancer. She motivated him to write even during her last stages of melanoma.

On another note, Doc Severinson lives here and plays weekly at Bella Italia on Canal Street. Yes, this is a music column "on the road" in Mexico. I brought a guitar to play in my apartment, and I carry a rattle and bones to join in when I can. Music plays each night in the square, creating a new community of people singing together each night.

I have the highest regard for Warren Hardy and Tuli, the couple who started a brilliant school, a place to study Spanish and learn the distinctions in this culture. How much I have learned even after my twenty years of visiting here. One detail: saying "Buenas Dias" to all we pass is not just something to do. It is an important acknowledgment of the other person as a human being! Important in this culture. People gather to BE together, not for any other purpose at times. Honoring and respecting each other is first in this culture. I say "Buenas Dias" to many more people now, and the warm smile I get back is acknowledgement that we both exist. Love that form of communication.

Another highlight for me was discovering the actor Jeff Garrett as he performed in the one-man show called SHIMMER, an autobiographical piece written by John O'Keefe. His stories of growing up in an orphanage, filled with terror and pain, also contained moments that do shimmer! Shed some more light on my experience of life in San Miguel de Allende. Atencion, the local paper, is online now. Check it out. Tom Robbins will be here August 19-21, and I will return to join a workshop with him. "Language is not the icing on the cake; language IS the cake." You know I will love that one!

And to end with music, the annual chamber music series runs throughout August, including performance by a quartet from China.

As I bade you hasta luego, vaya con dios, abraozos y besos, I want to report that all is well in my world. What about yours? What story do you tell about your life? I keep creating mine in a context of learning, fun, growth, and inspiration. KH aka Belle Starr in Mexico.