

## **On The Road**

*By Dr. Kathleen Hudson*

*November 2008*

My September road ended at the annual Texas Heritage Living History Day on the Schreiner campus. An event that features stories and songs as another way of learning, we (THMF) showcased over 60 performers for a crowd of about 2,000! And the noon tribute to Jimmie Rodgers was enhanced by the introduction of Cody Court, son of the grandson of Jimmie Rodgers, and by a tribute to our Hispanic heritage by Joel Guzman and Sarah Fox. Get their new album, *Latinology*, to experience the depth of their talent and beauty. Barbara Kooyman, Karen Abrahams, Eddie Z, Trenton Chandler, and Lawrence Clark held court at the songwriters tent this year. Put the last Friday in September on your calendar now and attend this free event on the Schreiner University

Have you read the lineup for the Auslander in Fredericksburg in November and December? Yes, women are missing, but the lineup of men is spectacular! Each one has a great story, a wonderful song, and is part of my own musician history. Gary P. Nunn, "That's What I Like About Texas," was a founding director of the Texas Heritage Music Foundation and an important interview in my first book of interviews with Texas songwriters. A dance with Gary P. Nunn playing can't be beat, but my favorite scene is Gary at the keyboard, singing out the words of a truly Texas song. Guy Forsythe is eclectic and unique, defying all classification even with a history with the Asylum Street Spankers of Austin. Yes, he can play a saw. Jimmy LaFave has visited my classroom before, holding court as a writer and performer. Nothing rocks like Jimmy doing Dylan and Jimmy doing Jimmy! He called me a "goddess" once, after I told him I teach mythology. And my sister, Carolyn, booked him for my 60<sup>th</sup> birthday party which she planned at Commanche Trace. What a surprise that was.....

WC Clark IS, indeed, the godfather of blues in Texas. I have heard him at festivals around the country, but my favorite gig was JJ's Blues Bar in my hometown of Ft. Worth, Texas. WE met and chatted in the parking lot as I was just beginning my oral history project. He has honored many a performer and graced many a venue in Texas, bringing his soulful expression of Texas music to many new ears.

Walt Wilkins, who is playing the November 5 THMF coffeehouse at Schreiner University, is also performing December 27 at the Auslander with his complete band, Los Mystiqueros. My favorite Walt line is still, "Here's to the trains I've missed," and his performance at the coffeehouse several years ago caused many to say, "Ah, a Texas Eagles group." Guess it was the harmony and great songs. He blew away huge crowds at the Kerrville Folk Festival (thanks, Dalis), and now each band member also has a solo project working. Join us from 7-9 at Schreiner University for an intimate evening with Walt Wilkins and friends.

The American Music Festival and Conference in Nashville was held September 17-20. I was invited to be on a panel to talk about the Rockabilly radio series that won a Peabody for THMF and Lex Gillespie, producer. Rosie Flores and I joined Mary Bufwack and her husband, Robert Oermann to discuss the series. I was awed to be on a panel with these two experts in the history of country music! Their seminal book on the women of country music, *FINDING HER VOICE: THE SAGA OF THE WOMEN OF COUNTRY*

MUSIC, was influential in my choice to create an oral history with the women of Texas music. They even discovered that Belle Starr wrote an early song while hanging out in Dallas. I gave a talk on my research at the first Texas Nonfiction Writers Conference in Boerne on Oct. 24-25. I gave the talk as Belle Starr since she had the authority necessary in her own voice. They say that one of the most famous Western songs was written by Belle in about 1878... "Bucking Bronco/My Love is a Rider." And they described her as "the theatrical Belle." Suits my alter ego just fine.

A Texas presence was strong at this year's Americana, including an in-depth interview with the Houston kid, Rodney Crowell, an in-depth interview with T-Bone Burnett, a Ft. Worth man who produced the award-winning album by Robert Plant and Allison Krause, "Raising Sand," on Rounder Records. By the way, Rounder, a great folk label, reissued all the Jimmie Rodgers recordings for the 1997 celebration of this 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. They also had a nomination for song of the year, with "Gone, Gone, Gone," written by Don and Phil Everly and performed by Plant and Krause. Celebration was in the air after the awards ceremony on Wednesday at the Ryman auditorium. Plant was in the audience as Garth Fundis (who also produced some Townes Van Zandt albums in the 70's) interviewed T-Bone.

I just sat there with my mouth open as I heard the story of this amazing man. We were even enjoying the Skyliner Ballroom on the Jacksboro Highway in Ft. Worth close to the same time. I was listening to Ray Sharpe, he heard others a few years earlier. I did not know the dance floor was on springs!

It might take a short book to share all my highlights from this festival. I say put a trip to Nashville on your calendar for 2009 in September! I was lucky, reuniting with musician Susie Monick (who once played mandolin with Richard Dobson in my Kerrville backyard), and I got to sit in on a family jam and was invited to share a room in her landlord's house. Needless to say, the generosity was appreciated, and I heard Susie play accordion, mandolin, sing with Townes (on an old video) and share some good stories. Wish she lived in Texas! Check out her Myspace for details.

Tim Myers came up to me, spilling forth with stories after he met Rodney Crowell, telling him of his songwriting miracle. He woke up one morning, past the age of fifty, and just started spilling out songs. He had several cd's with him, and a truckload of passion for his new life calling! I brought home the music, and I appreciate his story of his own discovery of Jimmie Rodgers. "A friend heard my songs and suggested I listen to Jimmie. I had no idea why, but when I listened I could see some overwhelming influences there. Not deliberate ones since I had not heard of him!" Yes, Tim was overflowing, and that kind of emotion is refreshing in the "business" of music.

His cd contains songs and stories for the common man, the working man, the everyday hero. Look him up on the web!

Rodney Crowell's new album, "Sex and Gasoline," has some intense honesty as he explores the commodity that sex has become...to be sold like gasoline. His last words during the intense and honest interview (where he talked of family, his daughter and the culture, his own urge for relevance) were, "I'm making another record...more pastoral. Maybe I'm ready to do some landscapes now." Yes, the record is honest, brutal at times, and the stuff that often gets withheld. Rodney does not withhold. He reminded us that at one time he was aware of himself as others looked at him entering a room. He began to live as if that persona were real. Now he's back in touch with who he declares himself to

be, and that persona has disappeared. I was privileged to be part of such an honest conversation. And the man doing the interviewing, David Fricke, showed us why he is one of the top music writers and editors in the county. I found myself learning as much or more from him as he carefully, without notes, entered and created this intriguing conversation. I told him so later even though his role as senior editor of Rolling Stone Magazine speaks for itself. He now has a column of Fricke's hits. Yes, I also took careful notes on the man doing the interview. My new hero!

Other panels included "Lone Star Legacy," with Radney Foster, Rosie Flores, Bruce Robison and Cody Canada with Gary Hartman and Casey Monahan moderating. What an enlightening conversation. Then in October I took a friend to the Broken Spoke for some boot-scootin' and we danced to Bruce as he released his new album, "A New World." The dance was better because I had heard the panel! Heard the songs and stories in an intimate setting.

My Texas music class wrote reviews of Hartman's new book on the History of Texas Music. One loved the chapter on African Roots of Texas music (and this young poet loves rap); another commented, saying, "I find it refreshing to know that today, in an effort to remember the past and incorporate it into the present. Organizations such as the San Antonio Vocal Arts Ensemble research and perform native Texas music created in ancient times through the Spanish colonial period" (Kimball)." Deloras Kimball, said student, president of Sigma Tau Delta English honors society at Schreiner, also read a paper at the Texas Folklore Panel on September 26 on Willie Nelson's use of "Blue" in his songs. The many variations on the word blue. Jacob Michelson presented a paper on a song, "Pick up Truck, Texas," performed by Jerry Jeff Walker. And Don Parker read his paper on "Texas Trilogy" by Steve Fromholz. What fun to have students on the panel this year. Look out 2009 as we continue to grow. I am moving the panel up earlier in the day, hoping to catch some new audience as they leave the Living History Day. And we are going to schedule the panel in the Union Church. Put that on your calendar for 2009!

ONE student commented on the book as relevant without alienating the reader with "a showy book." Nikki Hollinger said, "Most of this book made the history of music seem like it built upon itself." Janean Hartmann said, "History of Texas Music reads less like a textbook and more like an informative love poem." Amanda White explored the context created in the book, saying, "Hartman paints a picture of the women web that is Texas music, recognizing ties between genres and artists that illuminate that fact which has been so special and so inexplicable to those who recognize the unique power and insight Texas musicians have to offer—that the significance of these ties is more than just historical." I heard the same conversations about Americana music in Nashville.

And in Nashville I attended a concert by Los Lonely Boys (a family trio from San Angelo) in the Wildhorse Saloon." Now that was heaven to me, hearing those guitars, watching the lights and dance steps, moving to the great music. I would love for Los Lonely Boy to adopt the THMF as we head into our next twenty years of history, and I will be asking them! This Nashville night was the finale of a tour behind their new cd "Forgiven." When they sang that song, the audience joined in, seeming to ask their own forgiveness. "We love Nashville. Our dad used to live here," said one of the brothers, and the crowd roared. This family trio always pays tribute to dad and his influence. I remember a Willie Picnic at the Ft. Worth Stockyards, and Los Lonely boys brought out dad and Willie to play some country music as the fireworks exploded. Now, it has

always been obvious that lead guitarist, Henry, is a Stevie Ray Vaughan fan, but watching the over these years, I have seen them take hold of this music, integrate the influences, and create a sound all their own. I love the dance steps, the duo on one guitar, the rhythm of brother Ringo on drums. A total package of the visual and aural. Their cover of "I'm a man and I can't help but love you babe" rocked the house as Henry, JoJo and Ringo became lost in the music. A fourth "brother" in spirit joined them on percussion, helping create this undulating wall of sound. Yep, I am a major fan of Los Lonely Boys!

Some quick recommendations: Joe Ely and Joel Guzman on an album with Rack 'Em Records called "Live Cactus. Go to Ely's website at [www.ely.com](http://www.ely.com) to get this album, which not only features Ely and Guzman doing some magical work together, but also contains a stunning cover of the Townes Van Zandt "White Freightliner Blues." Maybe we can get them both at the 2009 Living History Day. And don't miss Joe's poetic autobiography, *Bonfire of Road Maps*, with University of Texas Press. In the spirit of the Beat poets, Joe documents his road with compelling rhythm and words.

Denice Franke, a true Texas woman, has a new album, "Denice Franke: gulf coast blue," and the stories she tells are perfect for her voice. A 2008 release with Certain Records in Houston. [www.denicefranke.com](http://www.denicefranke.com) I ran into her in Nashville, and she joined Peter Cooper on stage at the Station Inn for a duet or two. I remember her standing on stage at the Kerrville Folk Festival with Nanci Griffith. Denice has many songs I can use as I teach Texas music and even women's literature! Yes, she can write and deliver. And her website is informative and compelling.

Guy Clark will be in Austin as an honoree for the Texas Heritage Songwriters Association on March 1, along with Willie Nelson. We have invited Guy to be our honored guest at the Texas Writers Conference at Schreiner University on March 2. Keep your ear to the ground or pick up this magazine for details.

And a bit more on my Texas Nonfiction Writers Retreat Oct. 24-25 in Boerne, Texas. While attending the great and successful first Texas Nonfiction Writers Retreat in Boerne last weekend, I ran off to Bandera, The 11<sup>th</sup> Street Bar on Friday night (instead of resting up for the appearance of Belle Starr at 9:45 a.m.) to hear one of my favorite writers and rockers, Charlie Robison.

First, a huge hurrah for this nonfiction conference. Not only was I privileged to tell my story on Saturday morning, but I heard the passionate stories of many others, including Elmer Kelton and Joe Nick Patoski (*An Epic Life... biography of Willie Nelson*). Belle did appear during my presentation. I was playing "Wide Open Spaces," written by Susan Gibson and performed by The Dixie Chicks, when Belle appeared, strapping on her colt 45 over her black velvet dress. Belle told the packed room at the gorgeous Cibelo Nature Center more about that Hudson woman...the one who often thinks of herself as some kind of outlaw woman! Jeff Morgenthaler hosted, presented and produced this stunning retreat; and I am ready to sign up for next year. Yes, Jeff, keep it small. Limit the attendance.

We had great food and a table of snacks at all times. Each person has a THFW pen and pad to use and carry away. This man knows what he is doing and where he is going. A nonfiction writer himself, he seems to intuit just what we all needed: participants and audience alike. See [www.texasnonfiction.org](http://www.texasnonfiction.org) for more information. And join the

organization. He also has Mockingbird Publishing Company and The Texana Foundation, a 501c3 non-profit.

Back to Charlie: I first heard him in Bandera at the Cabaret Club several years ago. Our short interview in the front dining area convinced me that I was going to follow him around. After a stunning performance at John T. Floore Country Store and one at Billy Bob's in Ft. Worth, he became my "favorite." I spent one New Year's Eve standing out on concrete at the YO Ranch in Mountain Home, singing along on some of my favorite songs. And I always get a photo with him whenever I get the chance. Jimmy Perkins, owner of Sustain Records in Kerrville and manager for Charlie, made sure I had that opportunity Friday night in Bandera. I got on the bus!

Now as many music stories as I have, you might be thinking that bus time is old hat with me. Nope. I have been on Willie's bus to interview him. Everyone kept their noses clean seeing a "journalist" in the house. I just wanted to be a fan and hang out on a bus! Well, I had this chance Friday night.

Charlie has a new band, and I enjoyed being with them as well. I watched them watch old reruns of class football games, as they "got ready" for the show. Charlie showed up about 10 p.m. We all talked a while, and, yes, I asked for a photo with Charlie. As a fan, not a journalist. I had to make that distinction. After all, I believe I was gushing over him and his music.

What makes me like it so? Well, it is wonderful and edgy, raw and written well, sexy and sensuous. It rolls over me, through me, and circles around me in a strong embrace. Hm..this might be gushing again!

My current attempt at a memoir begins by describing the night I looked around at Billy Bob's, realizing I was the oldest person up in the aisles dancing away. Alone. Yes, Charlie made me do it. Kim Deschamps was with him then and playing rock and roll steel with him in Bandera. I last saw Kim at Maria's Taco Express in Austin one Sunday, playing on stage with rocker, Carolyn Wonderland (the women I want to BE when I grow up). He writes and has his own album, and he adds the steel and mandolin to the Charlie show.

I thought I would miss his last rock lead guitarist, but his new guitarist, Mark Tokach, once playing the circuit with the Cosmic Dust Devils, did not disappoint. Both bass player, Jason Bryl, and drummer, Abe Comvest, completed the rock band, and Charlie delivered (along with some vocal harmony from other players) his songs. I was reminded of the time I saw him at the YO Ranch the day after 9-11 in September. The YO Social Club Party. He performed with a small American flag in the microphone, and I loved that evening as well..

Thanks to him, I got an interview with Emily Robison, a Dixie Chick and mother to his son, Gus and his twins. She is an important voice in my book on the women of Texas music. He suggested to her that she talk with me. I appreciate his recommendation.

And his songs about women! Well, that is another column, another story. One day we'll go through those lyrics. Charlie Robison is not afraid to tell any story that comes to his mind. We can see, smell, and hear New Year's Eve in Laredo after hearing his descriptive song of Pussy Willow Rose. Ils sont partis....KH

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