

On The Road

For September 2011

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Imagine a month where **Bob Dylan, Andy Clausen in Woodstock, Greenwich Village, Merle Haggard, Freddy Powers, Jason Eady, Adam Carroll, Owen Temple, Sol Patch and Plowboy** all joined up for a party....in my head. How to begin? First, a report from **Christie Hayden** on **Plowboy**:

*“Hear that? It’s the sound of buzz. The source is Dallas-based foursome, Plowboy. Disregard their ages and pencil in their next appearance. The oldest member of the group isn’t even fourteen yet, but Plowboy has already musically transcended anything Disney would be comfortable cranking out of its’ bubblegum machine.*

*Plowboy came to Kerrville July 22-23, played three gigs and managed to squeeze in an appearance on KVHC-TV. I didn’t know who they were on arrival. Now I am enthralled.*

*I heard about Plowboy when Tony Galluci pulled my road sister, Kathleen Hudson aside during the Kerrville Folk Festival. He said he’d found something she might want to meet, said it the way someone does when they’ve just discovered a jewel so rare it appears supernatural. I didn’t know about his documentary on lead singer Jonah Smith, entitled “Jonah’s Wail” and because I hadn’t heard Jonah’s actual wail, the information appeared useless.*

*Until I saw them.*

*They played vastly different venues. The 808, geared towards underagers, is all city slickness, lazars and loud sounds. Given their ages, their teenage good looks and the sheer amount of loud that they generate, the gig was a breezy slam-dunk. The next day, playing to audiences at Pampell's with its dark, more formal atmosphere and later the laidback outdoor Roddy Tree, they didn't shrink. Or compromise.*

*I can't discuss frontman Jonah Smith without mentioning Jim Morrison. Smith maybe all limbs, full lips and nighttime energy right now, but he visually feels every sound that he makes. Next time they hit Kerrville, make sure you are part of the crowd because this group is primed to explode off Facebook and away from small venues. The visual spectacle of mini-musicians with multi-layered talent is definitely something worth your night."*

**And now on the road with Kathleen:** Two trips to see/hear/experience **Bob Dylan** in July. First to an intimate setting at The Palms in Las Vegas. He was animated and engaging as he tore another veil from my eyes and heart. Dramatic response? Well, I have those! I saw next to veteran Dylan fans and a man from Australia who timed his U.S. tour to catch this concert. One woman had her first experience, as the row in front of me stood to sing along. The words of "Ballad of a Thin Man," just kept penetrating my skin...if I have any skin left. "Something is happening here, and you don't know what it is. Do you, Mr. Jones?" How political and timely is that? Or is it psychological? Some say you hear in Dylan what you bring to the performance. I believe that! And I just keep hearing poetry that open up doors, inviting me to new places in my own mind and soul.

I followed him back to Texas at Whitewater in New Braunfels. There, with road warrior pal **Christie Hayden**, I moved into the place of standing room only, near the stage, and

stood. On rocks. For a long time. It was worth the wait and the pebbles in my sandals, as Dylan danced out to joyfully perform with **Charlie Sexton**, an Austin guitarist who seems to inspire Dylan, and **Tony Garnier**, another musician with Austin roots, a stint with Asleep At the Wheel, and years with Dylan. I heard them play together at the Montreux Jazz Festival in Switzerland many years ago. And Dylan invited Flaco Jimenez up on the stage to play on “Borderlands.” I was on the front row in heaven. And, as Catherine of Sienna says, “All the way to heaven is heaven.” I agree.

Add **Merle Haggard** to the party. I knew that **Freddy Powers** was diagnosed with a short time to live as Parkinson’s took its toll. Catherine, his life partner, told me, “Freddy wants to die on the road, and I am going to make sure it happens that way for him. We are going to load up the van and head off to see Merle at the Majestic.”

Paul Hinson, photographer and pal, had just invited me to go as well. We showed up at the stage door in the blazing August heat at 4 p.m. on Wednesday, August 10. A line had already formed for autographs, mostly young Hispanic men holding either guitars or photos.

At about 4:10 Merle walked out that door, noticed the small group, and headed over to begin signing. Like magic. I had the chance to thank him for his 1996 Kerrville performance (YO Social Club and fundraiser for Kennemer Scholarship Fund the next day), and invite him back for the Silver Jubilee of the THMF in 2012! Yep, I can just see **Merle and The Strangers** playing the Kathleen Cailloux Theatre on Main Street in Kerrville, breathing that Jimmie Rodgers air. Paul reminded him that Jimmie opened the Majestic on June 14, 1929, and had 18 curtain calls! **Frank Mull**, his manager, walked

over and handed Paul and me backstage passes, and the rest is musical magic! I had a chance to talk with the band, gathering stories of those early years with Merle.

Freddy was in his hospital bed in the van for the afternoon, but as the show started, Catherine wheeled him to the edge of the stage so he could be part of the concert. Merle calls Freddy his best friend, Dana, Merle's daughter, calls him dad or uncle. ALL came by to pay respects, telling me over and over that Freddy was always part of their life. The Merle/Freddy history goes back to Lake Shasta, to houseboats, to touring, to writing, to sharing life. That is another book!

**Scott Joss**, fiddler who has know Freddy forever, took the stage at the beginning of the show, playing about 15 minutes of Freddy songs. Scott played "Catherine's Song," saying he was with Freddy when he wrote that one."You even changed the color of my sky," what a great line that is!

Catherine made sure Freddy was comfortable. I was moved at being present to this amount of love expressed as Merle left the stage, taking time to bend over to talk gently with Freddy.

Freddy is an important chapter in my book on the songwriters of Texas, but he also invited me into his house and helped give the invitation to **Willie Nelson** to play Kerrville in 1997 for the THMF scholarship fund. Freddy and Catherine, Bill McDavid and a few others all rode their Harley's down that Sunday for the afternoon show. What fun!

The evening of Merle hits, including twin fiddles with Merle and Scott on "San Antonio Rose," became another historical event in the Majestic Theater. Paul and I drove home, touched, moved and inspired by our evening. Paul had a huge collections of photos, I had

some video footage for my Texas Music class, and we were both excited to be road warriors at a Merle Concert.

In between Bob and Merle, I traveled to Woodstock, New York, for a coffeehouse performance by **Andy Clausen**, a “neo-beat” poet who, during his life of hard work and poetry, lived with Janine Pommy Vega at the end of her life and toured with Allen Ginsberg after being anointed by him.

Small world story: Kirpal Gordon, much loved New York jazz poet who called Kerrville home for a few years, also worked with Janine on a program of poetry in the prisons.

I met Andy when I studied at Naropa in Boulder, Colorado, at the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics.” Ah, the web we weave as we travel the roads of our lives! “I always knew one day I would take this road. I did not know yesterday it would be today.” 11<sup>th</sup> century Japanese poet said that.

My New York journey was held together by the Dylan thread, Andy and I walked Bleeker Street and McDougal one day, and Andy introduced me to many creative people in Woodstock, giving me the opportunity to create a film for my new creativity class at Schreiner. I met **Allen Midgette**, an actor/artist who shared his story of touring as Andy Warhol for four months until discovered by George Plimpton. I ran into **Tom Pacheko**, a songwriter who had performed at the THMF coffeehouse at Schreiner years ago! He sang some new songs for me one evening, and we shared stories of his life on the road, in Greenwich Village, and touring Europe. His CD, “Best of Tom Pacheko,” will be in another column.

Shiv worked at the Dharma House, and he also started **Shivastan Press**, gorgeous handmade books from Nepal. As we sat around his backyard talking one evening before the coffeehouse, he piled rocks up to balance at five feet tall, a creative structure called a “cairn.”

After Andy performed, he signed me up at the open mike, and I had my five minutes of fame in Woodstock, feeling the vibes of the Dylan trail, surrounded by photos of Dylan taken by Elliott Lancy. I began with the first stanza of “Pancho and Lefty” by **Townes Van Zandt**, moved into “Loose Woman” by Sandra Cisneros, and ended with a rant I wrote in my mythology class. Love performance art! And “Living on the road my road, is gonna make you free and clean.”

Andy’s performance accompanied by a jazz duo on guitar and keyboard, was a passionate plea for justice, a genuine observation on the state of the world, and a compelling poetic performance of the heart.

Did I mention that first night in Woodstock? I arrived on Long Island, rode a train for an hour into Penn Station, walked 8 blocks up to Port Authority bus station, found the bus to Woodstock at 6 p.m. and arrived about 8:30. **Ray Wylie Hubbard** was playing at the Bearsville Theater that night! Andy and I arrived for his last three songs: “Redneck Mother,” “The Messenger,” and “Drivin’ Wheels.” How is that for a Texas music moment? Ray has a literary bent, telling his story of Letters to a Young Poet by Rilke so meeting someone crowned by Ginsberg thrilled him.

I also talked with **Hayes Carll** in the airport on the way, and he told me he had played at Levon Helm’s Ramble in Woodstock. Hayes is on the skyrocket part of his musical life

right now. I remember the first time I heard him at Floore's Country Store. He made me think of Townes back then!

Townes? Dylan? What is the thread that ties this story together? I do know that Texas music connection show up in almost every conversation I have. Woodstock included! In Shiv's backyard, I met an artist, **Francesco Clementi**, and an art dealer, **Raymond Foy**, who also has a room in the Chelsea Hotel (Dylan? Patti Smith? Leonard Cohen?). He knew them all, and he started asking me about **Steve Earle**, who is living near Woodstock and plays in the town square from time to time. Dylan was returning August 12, the night I am writing this story in Kerrville! I could have stayed.

Instead I came home and heard Merle and attended **The Western Trail House Concert** on August 13, featuring **Jason Eady**. Joyce, a fan from Fredericksburg, said, "I have attended every show I can after first hearing him. And I can't pick a favorite on an album. I love them all!" **Bob and Sally Himmer**, our hosts for the evening, echoed the same sentiment. I had prepared for the concert by listening to "Wild Eyed Serenade," a CD filled with songs I love. I first heard Jason at Concan when I went to the Songwriters Festival hosted by Adam Carroll and Owen Temple in August 2010. Missed it this year!

The room moved in rhythm to Jason's rhythm, whether a two-step, waltz, or gospel/blues shout out. I saw many men there mouthing the words as Jason sang. A special night for me to just absorb the poetry of this man who also recently spoke at a TCU English class (my alma mater twice!). A line from my notes:

"Finders keepers, I'll take all the keepers I can find. Words are like diamonds....Best ones are the hardest to find. Buried in the bottom of a hole, just waitin' to shine." He also wrote "Promises and Pieces," a strong song about a man who committed a robbery with a

gun taken from a friend and then read the friend was convicted and hung for the crime. And he saw Jesus and his friend talking in the corner of a room. They did not turn to him. “Back to Jackson” seems to be a favorite of everyone, including me. And then we heard the songs he has written for a new country album, “old school” country, written with **Kevin Welch** and due out in January. Bob’s last request was George Jones, “He Stopped Loving Her Today,” after “You Sure Cry Pretty,” an original, and Jason added one more by his favorite, Merle Haggard, “Misery and Gin.”

I ended up Sunday August 14 at Hondo’s rocking out with **Sol Patch** and friends (Bill Lewis, Donnie Price, Paul Tennison) then headed to Luckenbach for a Sunday afternoon with **Adam Carroll, Owen Temple** (who sang “Mountain Home,” the title cut from his new album), and... **Jason Eady**. As T.S. Eliot says, “We will arrive at the end of all our exploration where we started and KNOW the place for the first time.” I am digesting now what I know from all this! And that is another story.

**Ahead:** September 7 THMF Coffeehouse at Schreiner featuring Max Baca and David Ferias of Los Texmaniacs, September 8 Jimmie Rodgers birthday program for Lion’s Club at Buzzie’s Barbecue, September 8 opening of Jimmie Rodgers THMF memoriabilia at the new “**Schreiner House**,” downtown. September 30 is the annual **Texas Heritage Music Day** from 9-3 on the Schreiner campus, featuring over 50 performers and a panel from 4-6 on the songs of Texas and two songwriting workshops in the morning with Barbara K (Timbuk 3) and Jameson. . RSVP to attend those. Space limited. See [www.texasheritagemusic.org](http://www.texasheritagemusic.org) for more information. Contact me at [kat@texasheritagemusic.org](mailto:kat@texasheritagemusic.org). We have a grant to fund schools and educational groups to

attend the event. Volunteers always needed! Ils sont partis and down the road (for the late CJ Berkman).