

Kathleen Hudson
April column, 2005
On the Road (a syndicated column)

ON THE ROAD

The Hill Country is rich in music venues, opportunities for any songwriter or performer to be heard. And audience is part of the process in songwriting. I know Texans sometimes sneer at the deliberate focus on audience, via a “hook line” that comes out of the Nashville writing mill. But even as Texas songwriters pour out their hearts and stories, without regard to a line that will hook the audience, the songs from Texas do hook audiences around the world. So, audience stays in the mix. If no one hears you, have you sung a song? If no one responds, have you written a moving song?

The Hill Country Opry and Grill, a smoke free venue on the Junction Highway west of Kerrville, is an opportunity for audiences to enjoy great food along with great music. See www.hillcountryopryandgrill.com for schedules. I happen to know April brings Ray Benson and Asleep at the Wheel...or at least a portion of that great swing band. Ian Moore, Malford Milligan, Albert and Gage, Mike Blakely and Jane Bond are other April shows. I’ve heard my favorites here, including the local performers who play during lunch, early in the evenings, and opening for touring acts. Some of the people involved here have been involved with Texas music and the Kerrville scene for a long time. James Harvey, a maniac for music, can be seen here introducing each act, raving on about the love we have in the Hill Country for musicians. He’s right.

Paul Tennison, songwriter, producer and performer, is a co-owner, while Tony Young, a veteran sound man and bass player, can be seen back at the sound board. Kristen, a woman who started singing outloud a year ago, also manages the waitstaff, and a host of other music lovers either work here or attend regularly. We’ve seen Guy Clark, Guy Forsythe, Billy Joe Shaver, Kinky Friedman, Sue Foley, Flaco Jiminez, Stephanie Urbina Jones (who opened the venue before it even had a permanent home), Jay Boy Adams (who also has a regular gig on Wednesdays at the Waring Steak House), Greg Forest (local performer who also as the Texas Music Office in Kerrville), Shelley King and more. Always more!

Another growing venue in the Monday Night Meltdown held at the Inn Pub at the Inn of the Hills on the Junction Highway. During March Brian Rung, a true Texas songwriter and performer, was host, featuring a different guest each night. I had to miss one of my favorites, Hayes Carll, on March 14th! Brian used to live in a house with Hayes and Adam Carroll (his guest on March 28th). Now that’s a writing moment to think about. Those three. A small group of people gather their chairs close to the stage to “listen” to the music. Others gather at the bar, listening to each other. Once in a while, people even get up and dance. Monday’s are a special opportunity at the Inn Pub to hear what the songwriters of Texas are saying.

Hard for me to maintain a balance between hearing all this great music and enjoying my little house on the high plain west of Kerrville. I do have horses, a wolf dog and 3 cats who await my arrival. Sometimes I arrive very late in the evening!

And now for my own road story. I attended a conference for writing teachers in San Francisco March 16-20. Wednesday, March 16, at 5:00 p.m. I was reading the music

schedule in the paper. I read that Bob Dylan and Merle Haggard were playing their third and final evening at the Paramount Theatre in Oakland, a short BART ride away. How could I resist seeing my own musical hero(s)? I arrived to a sold-out show, bought a scalped second row seat, and entered this theatre reminiscent of the Majestic in San Antonio. I didn't realize I was going to be looking in the eyes of a songwriter who changed the world even as he changed my life. Yes, second row is a good thing! Elana Fremerman (Hot Club of Cowtown) is now on tour with Bob Dylan, and Denny Freeman (Austin, Antone's) is playing one of the lead guitar spot. Tony Garnier, Bob's permanent bass player, brought his rhythm to the forefront as he stood next to Elana, trading licks. Bob is now playing keyboard, reinventing his songs, and laughing. That's right. We say Bob Dylan, playful in ways I've never seen. And I've been following the man since I first hear him live in the late 60's. He seemed to be energized by the wild ecstatic fiddle lead this beautiful women executed, all the while watching Bob for subtle clues. The musical jams (or were they rehearsed?) at the end of most songs rolled over us, the audience, like a runaway train. Tight, rhythmic, ecstatic! Tender, touching and tough! Guess you can tell I had a musical highlight that evening.

Elana is a chapter in my upcoming book on women in Texas music. Manuscript goes to the press by April 1! As she left the show, she hugged me, saying, "Hey, I have something to add to that chapter!" Merle was Merle in all his essence. No disappointments there. We heard his classics, and we experienced "the oldest honky tonk band on the road." Merle said, smiling, "We don't have roadies, we have nurses." Nothing old about the show except that part of old that just gets better.

Upcoming columns will feature venues in the Hill Country, musicians and a story of my own life "on the road." Other venues include Tuesday's at Southway Pub (and weekends), Wednesday Steak Night at Waring General Store, Thursdays local jam at the Downtowner (a real favorite of mine), and Roadie's (a place to dance), and more. And I also teach English at Schreiner University! Ils sont partis, Kathleen

MUSICANS, VENUES, AND MUSIC LOVERS ARE INVITED TO JOIN THE TEXAS HERITAGE MUSIC FOUNDATION, a local organization supporting local musicians. \$20 YEARLY MEMBERSHIP SUPPORTS THE PROJECTS OF THIS NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION. April 8 is the Texas Music Coffeehouse at Schreiner University, featuring local performer Josh Murley and a surprise guest! Open Mike starts at 7:00 p.m. April 7, 5-7 p.m, is the open house at the new THMF office on campus. Join us and hear some local musicians perform.

This column also appears in The Texas Rising Star, a free publication in the Hill Country and on www.hill-country-visitor.com

by Kathleen Hudson, Ph.D.

www.texasheritagemusic.org

kat@maverickbbs.com

Schreiner University

www.schreiner.edu