

CHAMBERS MUSIC by Bob Gray

The Texas music community continues to awe and amaze me. In no other industry that I know of do the professionals in the field congregate to perform for each other so often – and with such obvious delight. They collected on the 20th of October to honor George Chambers for bequeathing Texas over half a century of gentlemanly music and friendship. His 66th birthday was the 7th, and he isn't finished yet.

Over a hundred performers, producers, and their wives gathered at Floores Country Store in Helotes, Texas, on Wednesday night to say “Thanks”. Bobby Flores kicked things off with a surprise party for George, then collected up a half dozen people from the audience and started the jam. He played and sang (he plays anything with strings masterfully), beginning with a Blaze Foley song.

The guy on the fiddle was very impressive, John Schattenberg. They told me he was in Johnny Bush's band. And sure enough, a few minutes later Bush arrived and sang for a while. Then he stunned everyone by taking over the drums while Katherine Dawn belted out some Blues. Of course the smile on everybody's face made these Happy Blues.

As the audience of performers and producers awaited their turns, Jerry King, Geronimo Trevino, Ruben V, Marius Perron III, Johnny Bush, Allen Colby, and etc., during and between these sets, other musicians would join up or take someone's place. And they were all so obviously happy to be there, honoring George, and singing and playing.

Katherine intruded me into the circle surrounding George and introduced us. After a few words of congratulations and giving him a magnet that said Texas on it (I told him that, being close to his age myself, I knew how memory could betray a guy – leaving him wondering where he was) I asked him if he was going to sing. He gave me a pitying look, smiled - and turned to talk to someone more intelligent in the circle.

Because if George has brought his guitar he is going to sing. And that was how they got him to his surprise party – setting up a fake gig at Floores so George would show up. The perfect plan, since George is known for being more dependable than the south Texas sun – and appropriate since Floores was his very first gig over fifty years ago.

So, in the spirit of “Let George Do It,” he performed at his own surprise party. Well, why not? He has a unique combination of voice and song choice that calms the heart while bringing about that introspection necessary to create the most exciting - and lasting - bond to the music. And he got the only standing ovation of the evening.

Bill and Debbie Green of BGM Studios stood by and grinned like both were secretly pregnant. They'd had a heavy hand in the surprise party, and Debbie was the ever-attentive hostess, introducing herself to me the moment I walked in, offering to introduce me to others. Later she helped me obtain the names of performers I didn't know.

For instance, Glenda Rae, one of the last I could stay for. A lovely soothing voice, with perfect timing and pitch. The first thing she said was, “George, I just want you to know that you are the nicest man I ever met.” Can you say things like that in public anymore? If not, don’t tell Texas musicians. They say – and mean - stuff like that all the time.

One oddity was Ben Dorsey, 3rd. He was John Wayne’s valet, and now serves that function for Willie Nelson. He was in lots of the old western movies, and looks to be in his eighties or better. He spoke when we were introduced, but between the chatter around me and the ever-present cob pipe in his mouth (the only person allowed to smoke in the building) - I’m sure that’s why I couldn’t understand him.

Later I was able to talk at length to Joe Scaes, owner of Axbar Music, and long time Chambers friend. He said that George is very happy with his life as it is and has been. Following considerable national success, he loves the “local” life. He’s surrounded by friends – real friends who care *about* and *for* him. Of course, he’s pulled a historical compendium of highly talented players from obscurity to major success through his band, The Country Gentlemen.

Joe gave me a couple of George’s CDs, **Dance Time In Texas** is most recent, instrumentals only of Western Swing, beautiful renditions of old favorites that will have you dancing with your shadow if there are no live bodies available. But my own favorites are on his 2002 release, **Privileged Audience**. Here we get to hear George’s smooth and expressive voice give meaning to the D.A. Brown song, *Sunny Side of My Life*, and fire childhood humor and memories with Ron Knuth’s *Irving Leather’s Truck* (I’ve been in lots of places that required a lot of luck, but nothing like the time I rode in Irving Leather’s truck...if you got any doubts you better not go...). And remarkably, his voice has nothing of the seventy year old timbre you might expect – he could easily be thirty-five.

It is truly impossible to list all of George’s accomplishments and musical gifts in anything less than an autobiography. Will it suffice to say that roughly ALL of Texas music – performers, fans, and yes, Willie Nelson, owe George a debt? And he’s a sweet man, to boot.

The place and his party was full of characters, and I felt privileged to be in the midst of a bunch of truly happy people. Plus, there were tamales and cake. If you’re not a Texas music fan, you should go back to your asylum – because if you can’t find something to love in that room, you aren’t going to find it anywhere outside of Ecstasy or electro-shock therapy.

I appreciate the invitation from Bobby Flores through Katherine Dawn, Joe Scates unselfish sharing of stories and events in George’s life, and I’m very happy that George got the celebration his lifetime of music and “being the nicest man I ever met” means to all of us mere mortals.

Happy Birthday, George!

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