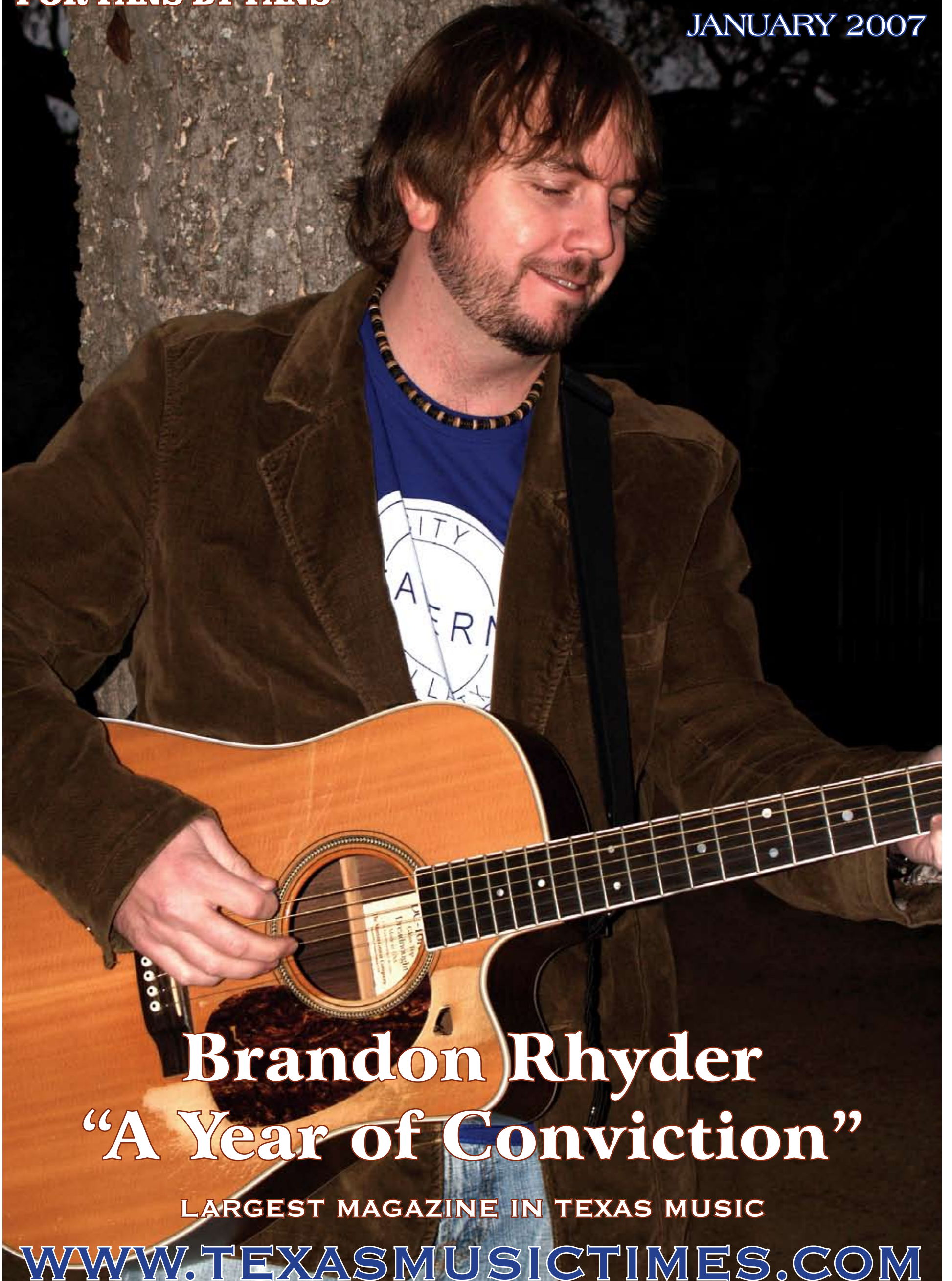


# Texas Music Times

**FOR FANS BY FANS**

**"THE RED DIRT IS HERE"**

**JANUARY 2007**



## **Brandon Rhyder** **"A Year of Conviction"**

**LARGEST MAGAZINE IN TEXAS MUSIC**

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# ABOUT THE COVER

The selection of Brandon Rhyder as the January 2007 cover of Texas Music Times was a natural one. Brandon is a consummate song writer and performer and the past year was a great one for him. His record "Conviction" sold thousands of copies from his merchandise table alone, his show and tour dates were bountiful, and the fans that came to see him perform grew in a steady manner throughout the year. I first saw Brandon in late 2005 shortly after the release of "Conviction" and no one in the crowd knew who Brandon was. In a short year later, thousands of Texas Music Fans not only know who Brandon Rhyder is, but have also become great fans of the "Man of Conviction" as well. He has become one of the mainstays and draws in Texas and Red Dirt music. However, as good as 2006 was for Brandon Rhyder it seems 2007 will be even better as he continues to tour on the conviction CD

and look to the future with plans for a new record.

Brandon has made many trips to Nashville in the past few weeks to write songs and have office calls. It is obvious that music city is courting the East Texas native. Brandon is likely one of the best songwriters

Brandon is likely one of the best songwriters in the nation and mainstream country music needs Brandon Rhyder and others like him to save all of us from the bogus talent shows and "Swing Batter. Donkey Dink."

in the nation and mainstream country music needs Brandon Rhyder and others like him to save all of us from the bogus talent shows and "Swing Batter...

Donkey Dink." Brandon Rhyder is what mainstream country should and needs to be. Brandon often says that the age of the songwriter is coming back and people again want soulful songs. There are signs that he might be right about that as the musical sands change with the market and record labels. However, it is almost certain that the record labels will lag behind the demands of the consumer.

Never-the-less, Brandon is on some kind of wave and 2007 will be another year of importance for him as he continues to deliver his brand of soulful country to a wider audience. He has and is making his mark on the regional music scene and the next level is bound to be just around the corner. He is Brandon Rhyder, he is a soulful songwriter, superb performer, and dedicated family man, he is our friend and Texas Music Times is proud to be having him as our January 2007 cover story.

## Brandon Rhyder: A Man of Conviction

By: Tee Dubya

I can ramble on about J2EE/XML/BPEL/SOA architectures. I can offer some tips on the finer points of nymph fishing and where the good honey-holes are on the White River; can even share a kick-ass family recipe for strawberry pancakes; but I'd never done this before.

In anticipation of this phone call, I realized quite abruptly that had no idea what I was doing. There I was, sitting in my car outside Starbucks, waiting for the phone to ring. I was supposed to do a phone interview with Brandon Rhyder, but hell, I've never done an interview before in my life. I mean, until two months ago, I'd never written a word about any artist. What was I supposed to say to this guy? What was I expected to I ask him?

At any moment, I was going to get a phone call from my favorite artist in all of Texas and Red-Dirt music and I desperately didn't want to sound like a dork.

Should I have asked about *Conviction*—Brandon Rhyder's third album that is so good that one writer commanded the following in *Country Weekly*: "Do yourself a favor...get *Conviction* in your CD player."

Should I have asked about working with Walt Wilkins? The uber-writer who produced *Conviction* and who, along with his fellow Red-Dirt elder-statesman Radney Foster, acts as co-Godfather to younger artists and helps keep our scene thriving?

Should I have asked about how it is that Brandon Rhyder is the *Dr. Phil* of country music? When trying to understand a woman for the umpteenth time, simply listening to the song will educate: "Go back inside and just hold her for a while/She's one of a kind/She's worth the fight."

As I pondered, the phone rang.

"Hi, this is Brandon, really appreciate you taking the time to talk with me today."

All I could think was, "Dude, you're the star and the next best thing in the scene, and I'm doing you a favor?"

And so it started.

Brandon Rhyder is a good guy. From my hour with him, it started right there. As we talked about the making of *Conviction*, working with Walt Wilkins, and his uncanny ability for writing songs that keep marriages together, I was struck by his sincerity and utter lack of pretension.



Photos By: Steve Circeo

Having never met or talked to him before, I guess I was prepared to talk to someone who knows he's head and shoulders above most writers in country music...Nashville, Texas, or anywhere. I guess I was prepared to talk to someone who knows that his style represents hope for those of us wishing we'd get something other than the latest reality show re-tread.

What I mean is someone who knows he's a star and talks about it.

Didn't happen.

On his vision: "Just going to keep doing what I do and being who I am."

On his family: "Been married since I was 20. My wife and kid are the most important things in my life."

On Nashville: "Been cool to get a good reception."

On the Texas and Red-Dirt scene: "There's nothing like it in the rest of the country."

On his band: "I'm blessed to have a great team working with me."

On his highest compliment: "Uh, I guess that I'm a

good songwriter."

On *Conviction*: "That album really represented a stake in the ground for me."

So, as evidenced by the above, Brandon is a down-to-earth country boy with a vision based in principle, with a family that keeps him grounded. He's a guy who still can't quite believe the momentum he's able to see, and will never take for granted the hopes we have for him.

Brandon Rhyder has big buzz...the kind of buzz that sometimes translates into a major-label deal. We should stand up and applaud when folks like Brandon Rhyder get a place at the big table. Not just because his songwriting deserves it--but because the signing of Brandon Rhyder means one less soulless-manufactured-drivel-act was signed. And dammit, that's a good thing for country music; kind of a two-for-one.

So, I'll end with a story.

I've got a friend who moved to Nashville in the mid-90s with big dreams. He was signed to a deal but was dropped and decided to go to medical school. His friends in Nashville kept working his songs and eventually got them picked up. He is now a top writer. Friends made it happen for him because they recognized his talent and heart. They knew him best, and that was something outside of "doctor."

I was talking with Brandon about the music business and the road ahead of him and what he thought it would take to get to the next level. I told him that story.

By this time in the interview, I really shouldn't have been surprised. He said without hesitation, "Yeah, you really need friends in this business."

Not connections. Not politics. Not angles. Friends.

From my time with Brandon, I found a guy who operates on some basic principles that have nothing to do with the country music business. He's a friend of ours. And friends do for friends. Let's help to get him where he belongs.

For upcoming tour dates and additional information on this artist, check him out at [www.brandonrhyder.com](http://www.brandonrhyder.com).

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GOD BLESS

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VIA OUR WEBSITE.

## From the Editor in Chief

Texas Music Times wishes you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. The holiday season always brings a time of reflection as well as a time to look forward. The past year was one of great change in our music scene. The Randy Rogers Band signed a major record deal and is focused on supporting the record with a label supported tour. We lost Freddy Fender. Cooder Graw decided to end the bands performing and touring schedule after 7 years of being together. The Josh Grider Band is changing with band mates leaving and Josh focusing on his writing and acoustic shows. Different players left some bands and moved on to others and new bands were formed. Venues closed and some new ones opened. Texas Music Times started publishing, and the failing mega-company Clear Channel Communications sold to a private group of investors who will break it up and sell it off one piece at a time. The only consistent theme in the scene was that change is constant and unavoidable. In all 2006 was an OK year for Texas music, not great, but not that bad. It is hard to predict what will happen in 2007. I hope it is a good year for genuine music, but there are a few things I am concerned about. There seems to be a commercial quality beginning to creep into the Texas music scene with acts that are well financed who come out and spend their way right on to the Texas Music Chart with well financed promotion, while other better bands struggle to get noticed at all. Even with genuine music there has to be a business side. The economics has to be there, but when the “music business” becomes the “business of music”, genuine music will be the loser. Texas and Red Dirt music has always had a genuine quality to it as driven by the fans that enjoy it and it will always endure in some form. The hope for 2007 is that genuine music continues to prosper over the commercial and contrived.

Happy Holidays

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# SIDEMAN BLUES Seth Allen - A "Master" Sideman

By: Keith Howerton

Seth Allen is the bass player for the extremely musically talented Josh Grider Band and is likely one of the most technically talented and proficient musicians in the state. A Josh Grider Band show is something to hear. Seeing the imposing Josh move and gig in front of the stage is also fun, but hearing them is like tasting a 200 dollar bottle of Merlot via the ears. A Josh Grider Band show is a journey through musical proficiency and innovation.

The band's myspace describes Seth in these terms, "not only does Seth's bass lines groove, stroll, and bounce; they lay the foundation for what has become a very unique sound. No matter what the time signature, Seth's look is a calm gaze of his bass and, at times his cello as his fingers dart, dash, and meander." It is an apt description of the master of his craft. His performances and sound provide a foundation for the band that is undeniable.

One of the unique facets of Seth Allen's sound on the bass is that his bass is tuned like a cello. He is foremost, and started his musical life as, a classical cello player. When he picked up the bass some strange things happened. "I went to a try out for my school jazz band and knew I could play bass so I picked it up, but the places I wanted to put my fingers were wrong. The other players were looking at me like I was crazy, so I just retuned the instrument like a cello and started playing. Then the notes came out right". Seth's ability to play bass notes that are correct but with his fingers in the wrong place has had more than one bass player look at him with a strange gaze. You can always tell another bass player at a Josh Grider show. It is the guy or girl with their head cocked sideways as they watch and listen to Seth play.

Seth is able to pull off such a feat of musical wizardry because he is a wizard. If they gave wizard degrees for music Seth would have a one. Instead his Masters of Science in Music composition from Baylor



Photo By Steve Circeo

University will have to do. In one way, earning the degree is a culmination of a life of learning and playing for the Waco native. It is only natural that a degree from Baylor is a formal education milestone reached and passed. Along with Seth, Kris Farrow, and Josh also have degrees in music from their respective universities. They are all classically trained musicians and when they play it is obvious. They can do more with music and sound than should be possible. In fact it is often so good that most in the audience are sometimes not capable of understanding what they are really listening to. The band and Seth are able

to infuse their classical training with the alternative country rock sound that is their trademark. It makes for a unique blend of notes and sounds that are a joy to listen to. At times it is almost too much and audiences are completely blown away by the amount of sound that comes from the band.

In a recent radio interview Josh commented that because of their classical training the band had some of the nerdiest arguments possible. "We argue about some pretty stupid things about music and music composition", related Josh. With Seth Allen's passion and intensity for music and life it is not a surprise that long road trips with the band might involve some heated discussions about a variety of subjects. Seth is an intense person with distinct values and beliefs. He does not really compromise and has a set of core principles. It is hard to imagine Seth being passive or not opinionated about anything. He has one of those strong willed people who have deep feelings and opinions. He knows what is right and wrong and is genuine.

Seth and the Josh Grider band are undergoing some changes in 2007. Seth may pursue a different career path and Josh may look toward more song writing and acoustic work. No matter what happens the Josh Grider Band and Seth Allen have made an impact on Texas music that will last and we can only hope that they find a way back to the collective stage again soon. However, for Seth Allen the future will undoubtedly hold promise for the ultimate sideman. He will be a success at whatever he does and those he works with will be lucky.

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# BUSTER JIGGS: A REINTRODUCTION

By: Rachel Taylor

I first connected with the Hondo based band, Buster Jiggs, around five years ago, by chance on one rowdy night at San Antonio's Midnight Rodeo. Being the young'ens that we were at the time, a friend and I arrived unbelievably early to the Ragweed headlining event, worried that the show would be a sell-out. Upon entering the dimly lit club, we found a band already playing on the small stage, a handful of fans seated at nearby tables. That night, my friend and I selected our table and settled in for what was proving to be a fateful piece of the Texas Music movement.

Five years later, I found myself seated across from the newest voice of Buster Jiggs, Kristin Muennink. In a bold, yet appropriate move, the consistently male-fronted band has decided to take the sound in a new direction, though a few minutes into any conversation with Kristin will quell any concerns about her ability or presence. An exceptionally talented songwriter and passionate musician, she can also throw back Jager shots with the best of them.

"The band started in 1999, so we've been doing this for seven or eight years now, right?" she said looking over to bassist Cody Scherer for verification. He nodded silently. I was seated across the uneven, wooden table inside Floore Country Store with two of the three original members of Buster Jiggs. Kristin Muennink (at the time Kristin Hale) and drummer Scott Muennink were the masterminds behind forming this band. They soon enlisted Kristin's high school buddy Cody to supply the bass line and eventually moved the group from Corpus Christi to its current home-base of Hondo. Three different front men stepped up and then moved on, each making way for the next. All leading up to this point of passing the mic to Kristin.

With the introduction of 92.5 the Outlaw one year ago, the music of Buster Jiggs found its way to an otherwise unfamiliar public. With the airplay, attendance at shows went up, and the buzz was good. And then, six months ago it happened. That thing that affects many a band at one time or another. Front man Will Dodson gave the group his notice that he would be quitting to spend more time with family. He was followed by lead guitarist Brett Kastner who cited the same. I asked Kristin what it was like to come so close to finally seeing things start to pay off; to finally receive some recognition only to be blocked, yet again.

"It sucks," she said referring to the seemingly revolving door of front men. "But with every loss, we actually gained something positive. With Joey fronting, we went from garage band to actually playing shows. With Brandon, we broke into opening for well known acts like Ragweed and Fowler. With Will, we were just beginning to gain some recognition and that personally helped build my confidence. I also learned to harmonize and I think that as a band, our songwriting progressed."

I noted that within a very short period of time, they lost almost half of their band. I asked her where a group goes from there. "We started interviewing," she said. "We interviewed between 16 and 20 guys. Some had a great sound but had no personality. Some had a great presence but no rhythm. We just couldn't seem to find someone with the whole package that we were looking for and still mesh with the rest of us."

So how did they make the jump to a female lead? "Scott made me do it. He just booked a show opening for the Bellamy Brothers in Houston and told me I had to do it. Terrified at the time, but a good thing. Glad he did it—I wouldn't have done it otherwise." Scott's insistence wasn't misguided.

His main reasoning has always been that most of the songs are actually hers. Surprised?

Nine of the twelve songs on the self-titled album *Buster Jiggs*, credits Kristin as either writer or co-writer. Previously released (and impossible to get,) albums follow a similar trend. She has also worked in collaboration with Micky and the Motorcars' lead guitarist, Joseph Deeb. Kristin's talents are not limited to her songwriting and singing. She also plays acoustic and electric rhythm guitar, as well as mandolin.

Sporting flip-flops and a tee shirt on that particular



Photo By Steve Circeo

evening she pointed out, "I'm a normal chick. I've been writing for a guy for eight years and am used to working in this heavily male oriented scene." Those are the very songs that have proven quite popular as they continue to bask in regular air-play on 92.5 the Outlaw as well as other Texas/Red Dirt stations around the state.

So what happens when recognition has been so closely associated with a certain sound which then undergoes a pretty significant change? "For the most part, the response has been pretty positive. The main thing that we hear is that the sound is 'different.' That's okay with us. People who are familiar with our older stuff tend to be a little iffy when we play it, but they love the new. New fans don't want the old CDs and keep hounding us for release dates for new recordings." As for packing away the old stuff? "I'm gonna keep playing it because it's mine. I wrote it," she says with a hint of attitude in the ownership.

Being familiar with the old material, I fall into that category that labels it different, and I like it. The old songs take on a whole new meaning when delivered by Kristin's low, smooth vocals, now backed by new lead guitarist Joe Talbert. The new material has an edgier, rock quality to it, though it is Kristin's vocals that ground the sound in what is Texas Music.

One long-time fan had this to say. "She has a really relaxed stage presence and as a band they're so approachable. With the music, there is an obvious, heartfelt connection. There is a consistency with the quality of the music that keeps you coming back. 'What the Hell Am I Doing Here?' has a beat that I can't let go of." The quality of music produced and obvious commitment of this band to success demand attention. And I'm certainly not the only one who thinks so.

A few months ago, at the urging of Michael Tucker of the Bellamy Brothers, Kristin and Scott headed a little northeast of Hondo for a brief stop in Nashville. Tucker has been really good to Buster Jiggs over the years and recently set up a couple of meetings for Kristin to pitch a few songs and get acquainted with the way the industry works.

"Tucker set us up for a meeting with the keyboardist of a well-known and highly awarded mainstream country band. Considering the last song that I was familiar with that he took credit for writing, I went in thinking that I'd just take what he had to say with a grain of salt. I was mainly just curious of what he had to say about my music. I took six new songs and surprisingly, he had something positive to say about each one. He said, 'Each song has a melody that I can't get out of my head.' I was really happy with that. I went ahead and pitched a song and as far as I know, it went in the trash, but that's okay. Ultimately, it was a good experience."

Proving her roots in this scene she followed with, "It was my first time out of Texas. You don't realize how thankful you are to have it 'til you leave. It makes you appreciate the shit out of Austin."

Buster Jiggs is currently working on another album with David Abeyta and Cody Braun of Reckless Kelly who produced the band's last CD. Responding to those eager fans who keep asking about a new album she said, "With this new sound, we could have rushed something out, but we want to make sure that anything we put out is quality." No release date has been mentioned as of yet. Can't wait for the production of a new album? "Catch a live show," Kristin says. "We'd love to meet ya."

For additional information on this great band, check them out at [myspace.com/busterjiggs](http://myspace.com/busterjiggs) and [www.busterjiggs.com](http://www.busterjiggs.com).



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# The Bleu Edmondson Band: True Southern Originals

By: Dara Thompson

My first introduction to Bleu Edmondson occurred while I was ordering drinks at the Wormy Dog Saloon in Oklahoma City. I mistakenly thought he was one of the construction workers sitting at the bar. He listened patiently while I expressed my annoyance with having to spend the evening at the Dog listening to a band I had never heard of. Imagine how mortified I was when that construction worker, a.k.a. Bleu Edmondson took the stage.

Despite my somewhat embarrassing first interaction with Bleu (which I am so grateful that he has since forgiven me for), I was absolutely hooked from the first song. Like most Red Dirt music fans, I'm passionate about my music, but it takes something spectacular to captivate me, to really hit me on a personal level. The BEB did that after just one show. Several things captured my attention early on. The bassist, Richard Avants is a native of the same small Oklahoma town where I grew up (Mustang), and drummer David Bowen, is from nearby Yukon, Oklahoma. Lead guitarist Devin Leigh, is from Ft. Worth, just a short drive down I-35 from Oklahoma City. Bleu proclaims himself to originally be from a "small fishing village" east of Ft. Worth, also known as Dallas, Texas, a statement that gives a bit of insight into his sense of humor. However, it was the music that really spoke to me and started my musical love affair with the Bleu Edmondson Band.

Attempting to define the Bleu Edmondson sound is like trying to define an emotion. Words and thoughts can be strung together to project an idea, but until the music is experienced first hand, no explanation can do these guys justice. The band's showmanship takes the audience through a wide range of emotions during the course of a show. When asked how he would classify his band's sound, Bleu simply states, "We just call it music." A BEB show brings a little something for everyone, from the hard-rocking southern fried lyrics of "Southland," to the beautiful, yet wistful emotion in "What I Left Behind." The BEB's music is simple, yet provocative, rebellious at times, yet soulful and real.

Bleu himself is not only a proud Texan (he's razzed

me more than once for my allegiance to the Oklahoma Sooners), he stays true to his southern roots no matter where the band's touring takes them. Last summer, I had the opportunity to speak with Bleu before the band left to take on Chicago and New York City. I reminded him not to let those Yankees get the best of them, and to remember the little people down south who would miss them while they were touring up north. His response was classic Bleu; "None of us, not me or any of the guys will ever forget where we come from. We could never

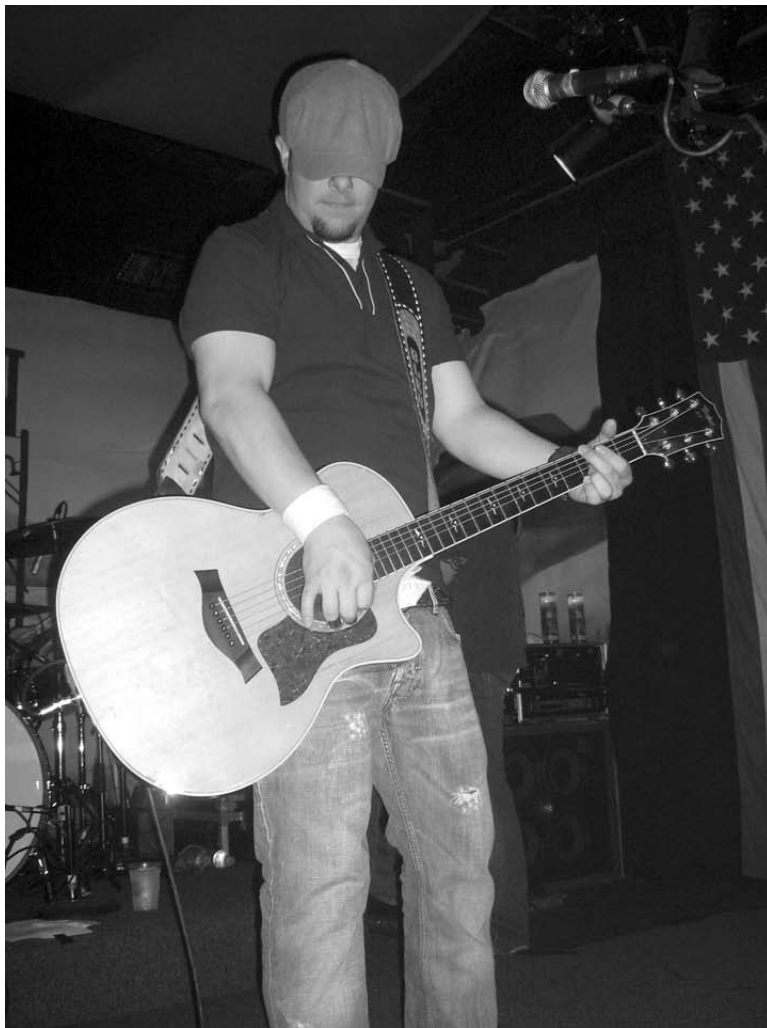


Photo By Author

forget everyone who has supported us over the years; you guys are what keep us going."

I have been fortunate enough to travel frequently to see a variety of live music. I have met a diverse mix

of musicians, and with many of them, what you see is what you get. Those who emit a "rockstar" image on stage, have a tendency to emanate that same vibe off stage. The less flashy performers seem to have an affinity for heading to the bus or bar immediately after a show. However, I have found an exception in Bleu. Bleu Edmondson the musician is energetic, passionate, and often shows his sense of humor on stage. He has broken up fights from the stage, loves to encourage the crowd to come up front and "be part of something, be part of the family," and I have even seen him stage dive into the audience. Bleu the performer radiates what could be considered to be a somewhat mysterious and angst-ridden persona, defined by his unique raspy, soulful voice and famous hat that conveniently covers up his eyes, adding to his "mystique." He has full command of the audience when performing, making it difficult not to hear every note of a song, and impossible not to be captivated by the entire band.

Bleu Edmondson off stage is somewhat a contrast to his stage presence. Bleu has been more than gracious to me by sitting down and visiting about the road, music, family, sports, and even giving advice. He is intelligent, eloquent, observant, and well versed on a multitude of subjects outside of music. Bleu is quite soft spoken and kind, although he never loses his sharp wit. Bleu and all the members of the BEB are also intensely patriotic, often introducing the audience to military servicemen in attendance. Bleu and lead electric guitarist, Devin Leigh often do a riveting encore performance of Skynard's "Four Walls of Raiford," to pay homage to those who serve. Bleu is not the only unique personality in the band. I have found each member of the BEB to be not only incredible musicians and performers in their own right, but amazing people outside of their work as well. They just call it music, and it sounds pretty damn good to me. As Bleu would say, "it is what it is."

If you have not had an opportunity to see the Bleu Edmondson Band live, check the website [www.bleuedmondson.com](http://www.bleuedmondson.com) for tour dates.

## THE BEST ALBUMS OF 2006 THAT NO ONE TOLD YOU ABOUT

By: Steve Circeo

Well, okay, maybe the title is a bit misleading, because some of these have been mentioned in Texas music magazines throughout the year, but they certainly didn't get the exposure that accompanied new releases by Mike McClure, Cross Canadian Ragweed, Randy Rogers, Reckless Kelly, Micky and the Motorcars, Ray Wylie Hubbard, and Jason Boland. All of which are good records.

So, if you care to take a walk with me on the road less traveled, please read on.

**Tyler McCumber Band - *Catch Me***  
The battle for George West, Texas, is on between the Tyler McCumber Band and The Pear Ratz. Who will emerge victorious? Music fans all across Texas! This album rocks, lays back, and just plain delivers some superb Texas tunage.

**Texas Sapphires - *Valley So Steep***  
Austin's Best New Band of the Year, the Texas Sapphires, features fierce guitarman Billy Brent Malkus as its frontman and former punker Rebecca Lucille Cannon as its frontwoman. This is Texas country music at its finest.

**10 City Run - *Somethin' Else***  
Despite the controversy surrounding this San

Antonio band, there's no denying the talent that went into making this album. It's smooth Texas country from start to finish.

**Scott H. Biram - *Graveyard Shift***  
Austin's self-proclaimed "dirty old one-man band" goes mainstream! Just kidding. Scott H. Biram is most comfortable exploring life's underbelly, and he continues his studies with this superb collection of Texas country punk tunes.

**Rich O'Toole Band - *XVII***

This is my favorite record of the year, bar none. It may be too early to slap the "genius" label on College Station's young Mr. O'Toole, but his songwriting is engaging, his vocal style is captivating, and all I can say is I can't wait for more.

**Pear Ratz - *Rat Now***

These guys know how to rock! With a sound so raw you skin your knees just listening to it, The Pear Ratz' original songs are superb and they do a cover of "Imagine" that gets this Lennon worshipper's stamp of approval.

**McKay Brothers - *Cold Beer & Hot Tamales***

The sophomore release from Bandera's McKay Brothers showcases their many talents. From country

whiners to Spanish ballads to winebar jazz, Noel and Hollin show they have the talent to endure.

**Keith Davis - *Sideman Blues***

The former sideman goes solo. After lead guitar stints with several high profile musicians, most recently with Brandon Rhyder, Austin's Keith Davis turns to the blues with a great first album that fully exposes his soul.

**Eric Hanke - *Autumn Blues***

Dallas native Eric Hanke has taken his musical and literary influences and created something all his own with *Autumn Blues*. The songs are at times soothing, at times thought-provoking, but always musically satisfying.

**Brandon Jenkins - *VII***

Tulsa transplant Brandon Jenkins has always been a great songwriter and live performer, and this album finally captures in the studio what his fans have been seeing on stage for fifteen years.

Sadly, I did not hear all the 2006 releases, so there are probably omissions in this list. If you'd like to help remedy the situation for 2007, please send your new releases to Texas Music Times in c/o Steve Circeo.

# Austin City Limits and the Evolution of the Music Festival

By: Scott Jones

Music festivals have come a long way over the years. When I walked through the gates at the Austin City Limits' late last summer, I was once again, thoroughly impressed with the organization. It is a far cry from 33 years ago when I entered the Summer Jam at Watkin's Glen, NY, at 5:00 a.m. I had found myself then without a ticket, but quickly realized I wouldn't need one as the fences had been torn down. Half a million people. Little access to food and water. No beer. Get the idea?

Fast forward to this summer. The Austin City Limits' Festival presents like a Cadillac in a sea of beat up Chevys. There was gourmet food and lots of it. There was brisket, pork, and chicken sandwiches, barbeque, corn, shaved ice, ice cream, fish, shrimp, wurst, meatball sandwiches, sausage sandwiches, gyros, thistle, falafel, and hummus. That's right hummus. There was actually a line for that stuff. Ice-cold beverages were offered throughout the venue. There is beer. Ice-cold and a wide variety of it. It's Nirvana in the desert. Despite the scorching Texas heat, the environment presented at the Austin City Limits' Festival is nothing short of top of the line.

As I walked around from area to area, I marveled at the wonderful execution of the stages and sound systems. Again, this music festival has come miraculously far from the 70s' set-up of tall swaying towers of speakers that put out unequal sound with no evidence of a board mix. Each stage here had its own sound system. The precise angles and placement of the stages allowed the different environments to self contain as long as an audience stayed within the range of the speakers. Unfortunately, there was the inevitable spillover from stage to stage. The large stages overwhelmed the smaller ones between songs, but as soon as the artist on the small stage got cranking, the large stage was drowned out. Also, other than when the wind picked up, the sound remained even, steady and without distortion or fluctuation from outside sources. The engineering and placement of the different stages was well thought out and allowed the festival to flow smoothly and effortlessly.

I was there primarily there to see Los Lonely Boys, though since I was already there, I thought I would take in as many acts as I could before the anticipated set. As an old Joe Ely fan, I figured I would start my day watching one of his bandmate's recently produced acts. I am talking about Lloyd Maines and Terri Hendrix. Lloyd toured with Joe as his pedal steel player for almost two decades. He now plays acoustic guitar, two tiny acoustic guitars, and a dobro in collaboration with Terri. Terri is a San Antonio native who embodies Americana music. Her lyrics are as pretty as she is. Her set was fun, the songs filled with down home lyrics telling life stories. She has a presence on stage that mesmerizes the crowd watching her. It's no wonder she's gained the respect of singer/songwriters throughout the business.

Following Terri, I figured I would sample all the different genres available at the festival. I saw Guster, Wolf Parade, the Stars, Nickel Creek, Gnarles Barkley, Tedd Leo and The Pharmacists, and The

Dears. What an interesting mix. The members of Gnarles Barkley came out with the entire band dressed as lab techs or doctors in long white lab coats. Their funky hip-hop sound contrasted with that of Nickel Creek, which mixed a bit of country and blue grass. Nickel Creek had a mandolin player who was a true virtuoso and rivaled the passion of all the lead guitarists out there. Guster had the best sense of humor, mentioning that they had to make "rock" faces because of the video screen, admitting that the first rule of festivals is to say the state name between each song, and then playing a "request" that happened to be next on the set list. Wolf Parade had the hardest hitting set, despite being without one of their two guitarists. My 18 year-old daughter watched Wolf Parade with me, informing me that they are an "indie rock band" as opposed to the Stars, who are an "indie pop band." The rock band proved much better, with distinct elements of Emerson, Lake, and Palmer. All the acts I saw were surprisingly well received by the largely Texas audience.

As the day wore on, I dropped by del Castillo next. The band, playing out of Austin, has a Latin style, energized by a vibrant percussion section that rocks. The Spanish guitar work is exceptional. Rick and Mark del Castillo are unbelievable talents on the guitar. Alex "El Lobo" Ruiz is a great front man. This great live band laid down licks for movies like *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* and *Kill Bill Vol. 2*. The future is bright for these fellas.

Finally, the Los Lonely Boys were ready. This band from San Angelo can make everyone in Texas proud. They blend the pounding guitar work of Stevie Ray Vaughn, the rhythms of Santana, some of the lyrical prose of Willie Nelson, and the spiritual element from their hearts making what really is a power trio into a band that is melodic and soulful. Even their meteoric rise is something to talk about. In 2004, I remember Los Lonely Boys playing a small venue on the Westside of San Antonio early in the year. A mere seven months later they were on the headline stage at the 2004 Austin City Limits' Festival. I had never seen a band skyrocket like that in less than year. They finished out 2004 playing a sold out Majestic Theater in San Antonio to critical acclaim. As I exited the back door of that show, I stepped onto the pavement coincidentally as the band was heading out of the venue and was whisked towards their limousine. They seemed as surprised that they were getting into a limousine as I did. I guess they were surprised because they were not used to a limousine. I was surprised because I was not in the band. I got kicked out of the limousine.

The three brothers, born and raised in San Angelo, Texas, had music in their soul from the start. As part of their father's band, they played mostly a conjunto mix. Their dad moved the family to Nashville but the boys soon started their own gig. The brothers migrated back to Texas and found themselves recording at Willie's Perdarnales recording studio near Austin. Willie even played with them. The album, *Los Lonely Boys*, was eventually picked up by Epic and rose to the top of the charts, selling two

million copies. The band received multiple award nominations and won the 2005 Grammy for best Pop Vocal Duo/Group. However, they are not "pop" by any stretch of the imagination.

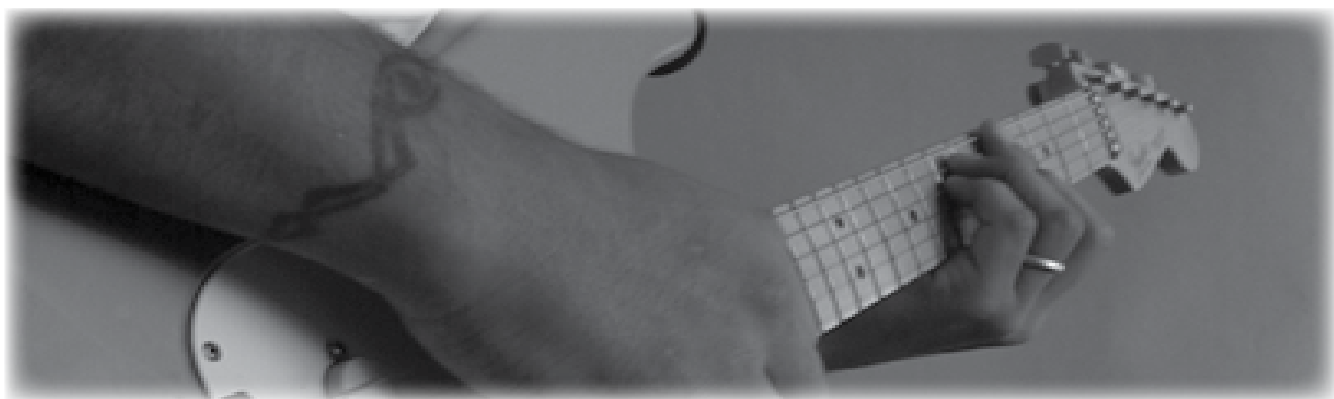
Los Lonely Boys started with a bang, focusing on the new album *Sacred*. The song "Oye Mamacita," started the set sparked by Henry's incendiary guitar work. The next three songs culminated with "Nobody Else," from the first CD and cranked the crowd up a notch. After the ballad "Never Met A Woman," from the sacred album, the fun began. The Boys brought out their Dad, along with the Texas Horns to play a new song called "Outlaws." Senior Garza sang the tribute to all the old outlaw country western singer/songwriters and players. The horns were loud and full of gusto. JoJo dedicated a song to listening to your parents as a preface to "My Way," which is about not listening to anyone. The classic "Heaven" followed and after the obligatory sing-along at the end came a wailing jam number culminating in Henry and JoJo whirling and bouncing on the stage like a pair of punk rockers.

The guitar work of Henry Garza was unparalleled throughout the day. Despite the excellence of his brothers, Henry is the heart of the band. He is as strong a guitarist as any of the leads of the power trios of the old days. He is the Jeff Beck of Beck, Bogart, and Appice. The Clapton of Cream. The Mark Farner of Grand Funk Railroad. Jimi of the Jimi Hendrix Experience. The Los Lonely Boys present better in a small venue because of their interplay with the crowd but they sure did not disappoint the 25,000 or so fans who watched Friday night's set.

Although I was hot, sweaty, and dried out from beer and ready to leave, there was no way I could abandon Van Morrison. By the time I walked down to his stage there was at least 30,000 people there. My daughter and I made our way close enough to see the stage. Van had a sizeable band and he stood in the middle like a munchkin, his small frame clothed in a dapper suit, no tie, with a white fedora. From the first line out of his mouth, there was no doubt he was still "Van the Man." He sounded the same as when I first heard "Stone Me," as a 15 year old in 1970. His sound is a mix of jazz, blues and Irish rock, surprisingly with a new Texas-like flair. He has added a violin and pedal steel, giving the songs a Texas sound. Van himself played sax and harmonica on a couple of songs. Although I left 15 minutes early to catch a ride, his set was solid and included slightly rearranged versions of "Moondance," "Clean Windows," and "Bright Side of The Street." For all of you older folks, Van's vocal cords unbelievably matched that low, gravely, vicious verse at the end of "Bright Side," sounding like John Lee Hooker and wailing as if he was 20 years old again. I was impressed.

As I made my way out, wondering how badly sunburnt I was, I noticed literally thousands of people waiting in a line a block long to get on the buses. I could not imagine how the 50,000 people still inside were going to get home or when they were going to get home. Until next year.

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# KOSCIUSKO TEXAS - THE MUSICAL HAMLET

By Keith Howerton

There is this tiny Hamlet of about 300 people southeast of San Antonio called Kosciusko. It is a Polish community with strong cultural roots that have become Texas Polish traditions. It's imbedded in the food, the people, and the community.

Recently, the non-profit community center has started booking TXRD artists to play at the local hall that holds about 1000 inside and approximately 3000 outside. The town is deep in the heart of 92.5 KRPT "The Outlaw" country and the folks in that area are therefore lucky enough to get a very strong signal. Hank Moon, the program director of that station, calls those folks his people. Fortunately, Hank celebrated his first year on the air at the end of November. He made it a year with a station that everyone said would not work. His station is a big part of this story.

OK...now let me explain what is happening down there. Hank's station plays nothing but TXRD music 24/7. He does nothing mainstream and has fought his regional Clear Channel boss from Ohio by dropping dimes on him with the head of World Wide Clear Channel. The big boss just happens to live and work in San Antonio and listens to Hank. Therefore, Hank can get away with playing what he wants. It is like having a Godfather. When the community hall board of this town started thinking that they need to bring some more entertainment in for the town, some of the younger members of the board went right to work. With Hank, booking help from John Owens of 823 management, and various TXRD bands, they started producing shows this past summer. They have had Roger Creager, Cory Morrow, Kevin Fowler, Reckless Kelly, Micky and the Motorcars, and others.

I have made the trek there a couple of times now, and the scene is unreal. The people come in from a 100-mile radius around the hamlet to pack the place out, and all for the sake of the sound. I went on the eve of Thanksgiving for Reckless Kelly and I was concerned

that the local folks might not get it like the more suburban TXRD fans do. I was thinking 'sure, Fowler and Creager can do well down here...but Reckless?' They're not exactly a pure country band. I think the guys were thinking the same thing and there were some concerned looks early when the crowd was a bit light. However, Ryan Turner did a great job of warming up. He started when the house was almost empty and delivered a great set that had the growing crowd looking with anticipation (and even some with curiosity) toward the stage. During change out between the bands, something amazing happened. The place packed out in about 20 minutes.



When Reckless Kelly came on stage there were fans up front about 25 deep and a dance floor of about another 60 back with couples swinging around with a packed house all the way to the back wall. The folks up front knew every word to the songs. The performance was beyond the normally outstanding show that they always give. They are a band of professionals, but on this night, they delivered at an even higher level and the crowd ate them up.

Reckless Kelly recently finished a daunting West Coast swing and was taking the Thanksgiving

weekend off after the Kosciusko show. They looked tired and a bit worn out. Early on there even seemed a hint of 'let's get this done and get some rest.' However, when they hit the stage, took to the instruments, turned around, and got a good look at that crowd, Willy Braun's face lit up and we were off to the "Motel Cowboy Show." No fancy lights, no fancy production, just pure Reckless Kelly on stage doing what they do so well.

After the show, all the community center volunteers who worked the event, the band and other town folk just hung around and had great Polish gumbo, sausage, and beans. The guys packed up their gear as they always do with every member of the team pulling a load, before making a stop for some good food and quality moments with the great people of a great Texas hamlet.

It was a liberating thing to experience. I have recently found myself worrying a little about the long lasting legs of our music as things evolve and change in the scene. At times this past summer, the scene began to look more commercial with some of the recent productions featured in Texas media. There have been artists which have hit the Texas Music Chart looking and sounding like corporate commercial created productions, while true blue TXRD bands were calling it quits. I truly was beginning to worry. I still do sometimes. But on this night in a community hall of a little town with a name almost as big as its population, those worries were cast aside.

If I find myself feeling that way in the future, believe me when I say I plan to hit the road for Kosciusko, Texas where the synergy of a great radio station and a community center with an enlightened entertainment committee can deliver TXRD music at its best...LIVE and REAL. I suggest that you find your Kosciusko and support and promote the heck out of it.

## AN EVENING WITH CASEY DONAHEW

By: Andrew West Griffin

WICHITA FALLS, Texas – Upon first seeing Texas singer-songwriter Casey Donahew, he doesn't strike one as a hard-drinkin' honky-tonker. In fact, on that particular night, the charming young man sported a colorful shirt, a stylish haircut, and was all smiles while opening act Arbuckle Xpress performed an acoustic gig in the background. And at 29, this former schoolteacher and later construction worker has good reason to smile.

A Burleson, Texas native, Donahew is now making a big splash on the Texas/Red Dirt music scene, and he and his group, the Fort Worth-area based Casey Donahew Band, don't even have a major or minor record label deal. "I've always loved music my whole life," said Donahew as he sat at a table prior to a solo acoustic show at Stage West in Wichita Falls. "I really like writing songs and storytelling." Telling stories is something Donahew does extremely well, be it solo or with his quartet, which includes bassist Steve Stone, guitarist Brent Wall, and drummer Donte "Taz" Gates. "I think I've got a great band," he said. "I've got a hippie guitar player, a rockin' out black drummer, and a redneck bass player." With that diverse mix, Donahew grins and says, "And somehow it worked out really cool. They carry me really well. All of them are great musicians."

Donahew says that while he's loved music all of his life (Elvis Presley was an early influence), he didn't really start playing guitar until he was a student at

Texas A&M, influenced by a guitar-playing college roommate. "I taught myself chords and pretty much

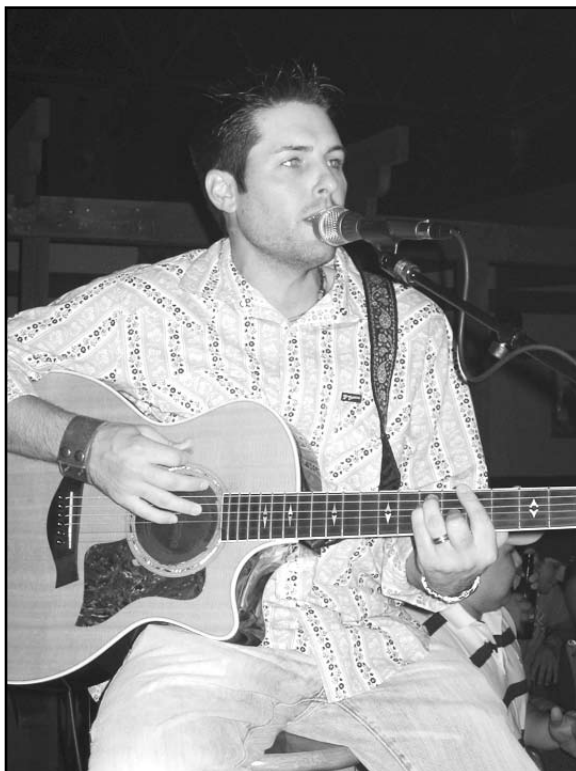


Photo By: Author

learned guitar," he says, adding, "I get by." During this time, he also learned he loved writing songs and

telling stories. Influenced by the godfather of Red Dirt Mike McClure, Donahew says he aspired to be a "great songwriter." It wasn't until 2004 that Donahew tested the water of live gigs, starting out with the Dirty South Band. In 2005, an album titled *Lost Days* was recorded under the name of the Casey Donahew Band. It was here that Donahew was able to show off his songwriting chops and pop-leaning, country-rock sensibilities. After *Lost Days* was released, Donahew said, "We got a lot of grassroots support ... and gained a lot of young fans. It's amazing, we have a really young following, including young people from middle school all the way to college."

Donahew adds that many young fans tell him that they can relate to the songs. With the release of *The Casey Donahew Band*, a stronger album featuring local hit "Let You Down," the honky-tonkin' cowboy country of "No Doubt," the hilarious song "White Trash Story," it's expected that Donahew's following will only expand. On that particular night, Stage West allowed fans as young as 18 to watch Donahew and Cooder Graw's Matt Martindale play an acoustic gig put on by Woody's Acoustic Chaos and Sold Out Productions. After the interview, Donahew mingled with young fans before finally taking to a stool and sipping a beer from time-to-time—all the while, a smile stretched across his face and looking happy to be playing music for a living. I can't say I blame him. Casey Donahew is a name to watch. He's going places.



# Twenty-Two Years at Steamboat - A Conversation with John Dickson

By: Keith Howerton

*"It is not just about being from Texas, it is about a style of music"* John Dickson

Knee deep champagne powder, the backdrop of the Colorado Rockies, and genuine music all provided in one place. What more could anyone ask for? It all comes together in one place, one time per year and for 22 years John Dickson and Dickson Productions have brought genuine music to Colorado and the fans have come with it.

As a Colorado native, I grew up in the 70s with Texans coming to play in the state I called home. Like most of my fellow mountain folk, we were skeptical of our neighbors from that big rich state to our Southeast. We had all sorts of lighthearted jokes about Texans and their gregarious ways. One thing was always agreed upon however, Texans knew how to throw a party and when they did it, they did it right. Little did I realize at the time that 26 years later I would consider myself a Texan and embrace those Texas values of living life to the fullest through song and spirit. For 22 years now John Dickson has thrown just such a party in Steamboat Colorado and a pilgrimage of sorts has been born and grown up to legal drinking age. Music Fest is now 22 years old and she is stronger then ever.

Recently, John took the time out of a busy schedule of final preparations for a sold out music fest to talk with me on the phone. What shocked me about our conversation is how little we really talked about Music Fest or about Colorado. What we really spent more time talking about was the concept of what John likes to call "Genuine Music" and, of course, we talked about a place we both love...Texas. The surprising thing about John is that he truly is not just a great producer of music events like Music Fest and others. He is a true fan and an "expert aficionado" of genuine music. "Genuine music is a culture, it is like hand crafted furniture or art that is passed down through generations" John said. To John Dickson the Texas and Red Dirt music scene is more than just Texas and Oklahoma. It is a movement of genuine music that reaches the entire United States and much of the rest of the world. If you look at Music Fest as a barometer of the movement then John can take a good

amount of credit for making it that way. Of the 4000 participants in this year's fest are visitors from all 50 states and variety of countries including Canada, the UK, and Ireland. "It is the first year we hit all 50 states", John told me during our conversation and it is obviously something of which he was very proud.



John Dickson with his daughters at Cain's

Something I noticed right away about John was that he bristles about a couple of key points concerning the music movement that is embodied in Music Fest. First, it is not only the familiar artists in Texas that are important to the movement and second; it is not a passing fad. On the first point John expressed some amazement when working with booking agents of artists like John Prine, "Sometimes we get these comments like, he's not from Texas and it blows me away that some define it as just Texas music when it is really just genuine music". It is a subject of great passion for John Dickson, he can name almost all of the genuine artists that are not from Texas or Oklahoma but are making a difference, and many of them are not on the Music Fest roster.

It was a point I picked up on immediately and realized how much he really knew about music. Our conversation evolved into discussing some of them and a current favorite of mine came up named Corb Lund from Alberta Canada. "That guy is great, his songs and lyrics are about a ranch and hard working lifestyle. You cannot write songs like that unless you live that life. It is impossible for it to come across as real and genuine", he said. In addition to knowing his music, Dickson is adamant that it is only going to get better. When asked if "our genuine music scene" was a passing fad like many in the music industry suggest, he responded, "I never hear this from anyone that really appreciates the real things in life. Are all of the good things like Willie, Waylon, Bob Wills, Cindy Walker, Gruene Hall, Luckenbach and grandma's home cooked meals come and gone? People are in search of the real things in life instead of the crazy pretentious things being thrown at us. We are witnessing a historic time for real music and technology is helping it along the way. The internet is changing everything and the day of the passionate DJ on internet, satellite, and regular radio is coming back". It was the question John felt most strongly about, and it was his best and most direct answer. I was impressed by his sincere conviction.

In addition to Music Fest, Dickson productions host a fest called "Ski Jam" the week after fest to say thank you so Steamboat where more local bands are featured. Dickson productions are also responsible for the "Crusin with Ragweed" cruise and "For the Sake of the Song" at Luckenbach. It is a full plate each year to bring these great events to the fans.

Music Fest has come a long way from the first one when there were about 500 people, DJs, and a band called "The House Flies" that played a Black Crows Texas blues style of music. John told me that they had an out door show for one of the gigs and the stage was not covered or heated during a good snowfall. The lead guitar player kept getting shocked and the sax player's lips froze to the reed. "We planned the gig in 90 degree weather" John said. The mental picture of it made me smile. Crazy Texans, you just got to love them...ugh...I mean us. Good luck my fellow music fans and let's have a great Music Fest as we celebrate her 22 birthday.



## Texas Music Photos

Mark Chesnutt, Jack Ingram, Darren Kozelsky and Jeremy Watkins, Stoney LaRue.

Next Page: Bleu Edmondson, The Dedringers, Kelly Willis, Kimberly Kelly, Guitar Pup, Cory Morrow, Cedar Creek Studios.

All Photos by Jason Willey





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# Exodus to Texas: A Perspective on Red Dirt Music

By: Dara Thompson

Growing up in Oklahoma, “red dirt” meant two things to me. It was the gritty substance that stained the sky during a dust storm, and stained your white socks at recess. It was also the driving force behind the Dust Bowl that swept the southern plains around the turn of the century, spawning the John Steinbeck novel The Grapes of Wrath. As an adult, “red dirt” means something different. Red Dirt is a way of life unimpressed by materialism, commercialism (in the form of corporate music), and conformity. Red Dirt is a philosophy to some and a religion to many. Oklahoma musicians translate this attitude through powerful lyrics and soul stirring sounds. This rebellious musical movement is not unique to Oklahoma. We proudly share our talent with neighbors south of the Red River. The Oklahoma and Texas music scenes so often intertwine that it’s almost impossible to see or hear the difference. Texas not only boasts a similar outlaw or rebel way of thinking about their music and culture, but the roots of this movement arguably began deep in the heart of Texas. We share the ideology of not selling out to big Nashville, being true to your roots, and love for God, family, and freedom. I’ve often pondered this question; why do Oklahoma musicians so often make their homes down south?

Many of the facts speak for themselves. Texas not only boasts a massive population to develop a fan base from, more venues to play in than you can shake a drumstick at, but it also has a very rich musical heritage which continues to intrigue and inspire musicians. My instincts tell me there has to be more to it, something else drawing my fellow Oklahomans to chase and live out their dreams south of the Red. After all, Oklahoma does have some legendary venues as well, and while our populace may not be as bountiful, we do have a mighty band of passionate music fans and some amazingly talented musicians who are all proud of their roots. Are these musicians being drawn to Texas, or are they being run off from Oklahoma?

I recently spoke with a friend who is a singer/songwriter in the TXRD music scene. I asked him if he ever got tired of his hectic schedule. His answer was surprising. He said sometimes he wished he could move to Oklahoma where no one would recognize him. He could just show up at a dive, pick around on the guitar with the locals, and go home. He said, “Oklahoma is a maker of great artists, but the people just don’t get it.” I have stated this very sentiment many times. After all, much of the musical talent (of the Red Dirt variety) in Oklahoma eventually finds welcoming arms south of the Red River.

I know that many music fans from Oklahoma don’t get it. I am a born and bred Okie, but I get it. I live it. I am

a “Gypsy Wild” (thank you Bleu Edmondson and Rusty Wier for writing the soundtrack to my life). There is a very fervent (albeit small) fan base here, which really understands, loves, and supports these artists and the music. These are the folks who trek to the venues to see their favorite performers or to welcome a new band to the state. I meet terrific music fans from Oklahoma in my travels, and often run into them at out of state shows. We are a small tribe, but mighty in our passion. What boils my blood are the people who sit with their backs turned, never listening to or taking in the terrific sounds around them. They swear up and down to be great music fans, but have no idea about Stoney Larue, Scott Evans, Brandon Jenkins, or Mike McClure. People that oblivious never take advantage of one of the greatest aspects of the TXRD music scene, which is the ability to actually meet and interact with the musicians.

A multitude of reasons may exist for the “don’t get it” syndrome. A tremendous lack of promotion exists for these artists in Oklahoma within every form of media. Word of mouth is the best promoter around these parts, and while that can be a very potent means of advertising, it doesn’t reach as many potential fans as radio. Radio that supports these independent or minor label artists is almost non-existent, especially in the larger Oklahoma City and Tulsa markets. Sure, a couple of the local stations have their “Red Dirt” blocks of music late at night, or on a Sunday afternoon. How tragic it is that we get so excited to hear Wade Bowen on the radio here that we actually text message our friends so they can tune in as well? We have to bombard request lines to hear a little Stoney around here. I cannot fail to mention the time one of my fellow music junkies called a station in OKC to request Bleu Edmondson only to be asked by the DJ, “Who is that? Never heard of him, are you his mother?” Thirty seconds later the same station was running a rare commercial for the only live TXRD venue in town where Bleu plays several times a year. I hear that our friends up north in Stillwater have slightly better luck than we do. However, radio is not helping our cause up here one bit.

Support from print media locally is dismal as well. The largest newspaper in the state has a terrific weekend section giving coverage for other forms of live music, but nary an advertisement, interview, show or CD review on an Oklahoma or Texas artist (unless they are backed by a fancy Nashville label). There are several weekly entertainment publications in OKC and Tulsa that may run an ad or two for one of the few venues, but what good is an advertisement for a band if there is no article/review to get the word out about what the music is all about? Once again, we have to travel to our local live music venue to pick up a publication (publications which are from Texas,

of course) so we can get the scoop on what’s new out there in the world of OKOM-Our Kind of Music in case you’re a TXRD rookie (thank you Kelley Peterson for introducing me to that phrase!).

In my travels and conversations with people in the business, I have heard rumors that certain “big time” entertainers (unfortunately native Oklahomans) of the Nash Vegas variety encourage our indie artists to move south. Why is this? Is there a little fear and loathing in Oklahoma? Jealousy and intimidation that there are real artists out there who are capable of writing their own lyrics, writing their own music, recording their own CDs, and putting on a live show without the need for fluffy production? Is it some sort of guitar envy that most, if not all of these TXRD performers not only put on one hell of an amazing full band show, but they can also put on a three hour acoustic set that will captivate an audience? Apparently the “we’re doing our music our way” brand of thinking is not very popular with these “stars” who prefer to do it how men in suits up north tell them to. I don’t have answers to these questions, but my curiosity has certainly been awakened.

The bottom line is very clear. Far too many Oklahoma artists leave the state for greener grasses in Texas. The fan base and venues are plentiful down south; the rich musical heritage cannot be overlooked. The potential fan base in Oklahoma still needs some growing, refining, and the people need to understand and appreciate that the musical tradition here is as valuable as the football tradition. That fact mixed with the lack of promotion in various media outlets leaves those of us who do understand in the dust, wanting more than we have, and having to travel to get what we want. I consider it my duty to continue to examine this issue and educate my fellow Oklahomans, so that more and more of us will one day “get it.” Whether one calls the north or south side of the Red home, I encourage everyone to continue to support TXRD artists. Pack the venues, buy the CDs, call the radio stations, tell strangers! I’ve also found that simple things such as displaying band swag can get people talking, as does participating in online forums to promote and advance the movement. Remember, those singers and songwriters are telling the stories of our own lives, recording aspects of the unique culture and history we share. I am not bragging when I say that many of the most talented musicians in the world belong to our special music scene. We are lucky to have them in our own backyards, regardless if that backyard grows redbud trees or bluebonnets.

Dara Thompson lives and works in Oklahoma City.

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# TYLER MCCUMBER BAND

## Catch Me

By: Steve Circeo

From *Catch Me*'s opening song, "White Trash Farm," which is destined to become a classic, through the album's closer, "Lemons," which is a sad goodbye to a friend who was taken too early, the Tyler McCumber Band took me to places I hadn't recently been.



Frontman McCumber's voice is gritty, real, and emotive. I feel his pain, his joy (though there's not much of that), and his sadness when he sings. Tyler's had a rough life, and this album allows us to live it with him, albeit, fortunately for us, from the comfort of our favorite listening areas.

All the songs on the record were written by Tyler McCumber, with the exception of "Hollis, Oklahoma," which was penned by Wayne Thomason, and proves that McCumber can handle other writers' material as well as he can handle his own. The songwriting appears to be quite simple, but I think you may find that, as you listen, your mind fills in the rest of the lyrical iceberg not visible on the surface.

For example, when Tyler sings "Daddy had a 10-acre white trash farm – I was never hungry and always warm – I was raised Christian so I know when I die where I'm gonna go," you will actually become the title character, Bo Jack Loomis, and understand where he's been, what he's faced in life, where he's going. Like the very best fiction writers, McCumber infuses his songwriting with so much naked reality that it's difficult not to relate to it – even if, in this case, you are like this city boy, and never even had a concept of a "white trash farm" before.

*Catch Me* includes the requisite songs about leaving lovers behind, being dumped, and unrequited love, all of which are deftly handled. But the real strength of the album is in the songs that rip your guts out. "Uncle Sam's Gun" is a moving anti-war/pro-troops song. "Windmill" achingly describes the lasting and therapeutic quality of happy memories, when sometimes that's all you have left. And if you can put on your headphones and listen to "Lemons" all the way through without misting up, then you are tougher than this old cynic.

Musically, if you want catchy guitar hooks, you got 'em. The first is in the title track "Catch Me," which is my choice to shoot up the singles charts. (That's in my perfect little world where the best music actually makes it onto the radio.) The second guitar hook belongs to "Ghost," and it is, in a word, badass.

Produced expertly by red dirt rocker Mike McClure, *Catch Me* has a one-take quality that is perfect for this rough and ready band, which hails from the George West area, the same place another of my favorites, The Pear Ratz, call home. Much of the instrumentation on the record is provided by McClure and his bandmates, Eric Hansen on drums, and Red Dirt Hall of Famer Tom Skinner on bass. Kevin Webb slides in on steel, Chris Wiser tickles the organ keys, and multi-instrumentalist Travis Linville fills in the gaps. Tyler McCumber Band lead guitarist Trey McNiel also injects his expertise, while Camille Harp's soulful voice rounds out the sound.

*Catch Me* is one of those albums that can rock you out at a beer bash. But if you allow it to, Tyler McCumber's songwriting can also take you through a whole range of emotions, maybe even help you examine some places inside yourself that you haven't seen in a while. That's a good thing ... and so much cheaper than a shrink.



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# Beacons in the Night: The Roadhouse Tradition

By: Nick Morgan

How many times have we all been in that situation? That dreaded drive home from the three-day weekend spent at the river. Sun burnt, tired, hung over, in desperate need of a break, and still two hours from home. I have been there many a time myself, rolling back towards Lubbock down Highway 84 from a show somewhere east. Always east. It never fails; I reach a point when I am about an hour or so from home, on the long stretch of road between Snyder and Post, when I just want to stop and start my vacation over again. That's when the beacon appears just ahead on the road, with a flashing sign inviting road weary travelers inside for a good meal and some good music.

Jesse Jane's Roadhouse is about an hour east of Lubbock on 84. Now make no mistake on a daylight drive by, it may not seem like much, but by 8 p.m. on any given weekend, the lights come on and the people roll in. It is, in the truest sense of the word, a roadhouse. For me, Jane's is my oasis on the road and a regular stop.

There are venues similar to Jesse Jane's all over. These are the places where aspiring musicians step out of their shells and practice their craft among the people that have influenced them so much. And in general, the crowds that fill these roadhouses and bars are as good as any you could hope for. They are there for the same reason any musician is and that is to be a part of something special. They want, if only for a little while, to sit back, forget about their jobs, their bills, and spend the night with friends. Music speaks to people in a way that many other things cannot. Moreover, when it's good music, those who are willing to listen can hear the message loud and clear. When you get down to it, that's what

the whole Texas and Red Dirt music scene is about—making real music for real people. The spit-shine and polish that has become the standard in mainstream country really has no place in the hometown honky-tonk, VFW hall, or local bar. Someone that has spent all week working on a ranch or even in an office just trying to get by doesn't always want to hear about relaxing on a boat in the Florida Keys. These folks would rather see one lonesome, old country boy on stage pouring his heart out over an acoustic guitar and a beat up, pawn shop sound system, than listen to someone carry on about Honky-tonk Badonk-a-donks (whatever the hell that actually means.)

When in one of these fine establishments, patrons don't worry too much about dressing in their Sunday best; just come as you are because that's all anyone there really asks of anyone. That's one of the many beautiful things about this scene. It's part of the tradition that has made this Texas and Red Dirt music revolution what it is. It is a lifestyle for the everyday, average, hardworking folks that just want to kick back, twist off, and relax. Can't find one of these places to visit? Stop in on an open jam at the White Elephant Saloon, or go catch a show at Gruene Hall, or take in the experience that is songwriter's night at Cheatham Street Warehouse. The opportunities are all around in both widely known, legendary establishments, and in the low-key roadhouse that offers a break from the long trip home. But if you stop in at Jesse Jane's, be sure to pack your own brand in a cooler, and be sure to tell Frank and Jessica hello. In a place like that, no one stays a stranger for long, and they will see to it that you'll never be a stranger again.

## Zack Walther – From “Roger Wilco to the Cronkites”

By: Keith Howerton

My introduction to Zack Walther's music (pronounced “Walter” with a silent “H”) came via Hank T Moon's Texas music only radio station KRPT at 92.5 FM in San Antonio. Hank spins nothing but Texas and Red Dirt music and does not play the normal Clear Channel bull sh\*t games and his signal and internet stream are a normal part of my day. He knows his music and will play what is good and not what it forced by record companies and promoters. It is the way radio used to be.

The song that turned me on to Zack was a tune with a band called “Roger Wilco.” I thought it was so good that it had to be a national level pop hit. The tune is not really a country or alternative country song but in reality a great pop song. It had to be one of the few nationally known pop songs from a Texas based artist that Hank often adds to his rotation. The song called “With You in Rome” with a great melody and Zack's distinct voice on the lead give the tune an automatic hit quality. In reality the song was played only regionally around the San Antonio, New Braunfels, and San Marcos area with stations like Hank's and KNBT Americana radio in New Braunfels. “With You in Rome” became one of the songs I wanted to learn about and see the band that recorded it perform it live. Unfortunately, by the time I got introduced to “Roger Wilco” the band had already disbanded. According to Zack it was just that each of the band members had different views on where the band should go. Sounds like a common “Band Break Up” story.

Stephanie and Matt Briggs had one view and Zack had another. Zack calls both of them along with the other member of the band, Michael Romos, “three of the most talented people I have ever known.” They all remain good friends and when they parted ways no one wanted to hurt the other's feelings. It was according to Zack a civil parting of the ways for the band, but still was hard after the 5 years that they had performed together.

After “Roger Wilco”, Zack took off on his own and

learned that leaving a band or a break up of a band has the normal starting over period. No one really knew Zack Walther, even if they had heard of “Roger Wilco.” He had to remake himself, form a new band, and get back in the studio to make a new record. All of those tasks can be difficult and daunting. It is a process that often pushes players out of music for good. A process called “quitting music by most players and song writers. However, with Zack the process was tough but not impossible.



Photo By Steve Circeo

In his 5 years with “Roger Wilco” he made connections in the business and met many talented players around New Braunfels. He formed a new band and returned to the studio to make a new record. Using the formula that combines cost savings with the need for a new release of original material, Zack and his new band called “The Cronkites” (obviously a word play off “Walter Cronkite”) entered the studio and produced

an EP instead of a full record. The result titled, “Death of Roger Part One” was released in the fall of 2006 and has put Zack back on the performing circuit with a new record and a new band. One of the songs on the EP titled “*Wrapped for Me*”, recorded with Zack's girlfriend Clair Cunningham, is a beautiful love song that is destined to become a regular wedding anthem. In fact a wedding planner company in New Mexico is using the song on their website.

Zack's reasoning for the “*Part One*” of the title was that he might release another EP called “Part Two.” However, now he is leaning toward doing a full record and having a completely different title. In the end “The Death of Roger” may become a one part play.

Whatever the next project is called or if it is an EP or a full record, Zack is in full game form with music at present. He and his band play a full schedule including a normal weeknight gig at Tavern in the Gruene in Gruene Texas and Zack, along with his friend Sam Sanchez, host the regular Tuesday night open mic night at Tavern that is held after Ray Wylie Hubbard's KNBT radio New Braunfels “Roots and Branches” show. In reality Tavern in the Gruene has become the home venue for Zack Walther and it is a fortunate position to be in. Having a good venue for a regular weekly gig is always a plus as it allows an artist a location to base out of and Tavern has a good vibe like no other bar in the state. In addition to gigging at Tavern Zack and his Cronkites are becoming a regular draw outside of the New Braunfels area as well.

They regularly play in San Antonio and other cities in the area. Things are going well for the 26 year old and they are going to get better. His voice, his song writing, and his extremely talented band of Luke Leverett, Bill Allen, and Mel Nolte will continue to gather fans as they roll from town to town and show to show. Even if the “*Death of Roger Part Two*” is never written



## ~CD REVIEWS~

## UNLABELED

The Britt Lloyd Band

By: Elizabeth Planer



As a fan of the Texas alt-country/rock genre, I eagerly anticipated the arrival of the debut offering from the Britt Lloyd Band. I am pleased to report that the band did not disappoint. Coming in at just under 50 minutes, their debut album, aptly titled "Unlabeled," is a tightly wound set of songs that display the dynamic fusion of the band's abilities and sound. Most of the songs were penned by vocalist and lead guitarist, Britt Lloyd, with the exception of "Day in, Day Out," the collaborative effort of Lloyd and bass player, Chris Byrd, and "3 Ring Show," written solely by Byrd. The first three tracks are energetic, melodic rock songs driven by Lloyd's solid songwriting and pleasantly unrefined vocal styling. Byrd's smooth, rhythmic bass and Thomas Van Arsdale's well-timed beats balance out Lloyd heavy guitar riffs. The tempo slows down with the fourth track, "Rose and a Song," which is an obligatory ode about an unrequited love. On the track "Broken Down" and on the hidden track, Britt Lloyd's vocals closely mirror those of Cross Canadian Ragweed's Cody Canada. "Chokin on Air," "Three Ring Show," and "Ride On" continue the trend of

succinct, guitar-heaving anthems. "Our Fairytale" is lyrically simplistic, but the haunting, acoustic melody buoys the song. The only blemish on the album is the awkward arrangement of the fifth track, "Weekend," which did not particularly resonate with me. The lyrics seemed forced, amateurish, and nearing the dreaded "hokey" territory—an unfortunate malady that most mainstream music has succumbed to. Perhaps "Weekend" was a last-minute filler track. The melodramatic piano intro to "Drift" was a bit of a contrast to the rest of the tracks on the album. I felt Lloyd's vocals were too raw for the soft piano interlude. But overall, this is a quality recording. Any fan of this genre will be duly impressed with the Britt Lloyd Band's unique, well-honed musical style. If the band sticks with their current formula, I expect they will see increasing throngs of fans at every show and a befitting longevity on the Texas music scene.

BRANDON  
JENKINS  
VII

Hats off to Brandon Jenkins! With his latest release, VII, Jenkins has delivered not just a tightly produced collection of beautifully written songs with awe-inspiring guitar work and powerful vocal performances, but if you re-arrange the tracks to match the listing from his website (as of December 9), you will hear the moving story of a man's rise and fall, plainly told in three, or make that III, acts. I don't know if this is intentional, but it seems too coincidental to not have been planned. Curious? Read on.

## ACT I - Exposition

In "Saturday Night" we are introduced to our hero,

let's call him BJ. This is a fast-paced song about a country boy itching to get into the more exciting life of the city. He's out to meet girls, and apparently he found one, because in "Call Of The Road" BJ, who is now a musician, is explaining to his lady that, while he loves her, the road is calling him away. "Why Did We Ever Say Goodbye" has him rethinking his decision, though, and as our lovers are re-united, BJ seems ready to settle down.

## ACT II - Complication

Sure enough, "All I Ever Wanted" shows that BJ has matured, as he lets his lady know that she is, indeed, the love of his life. "When I Look In Your Eyes," continues the theme, and we hear our happy couple, who seem to have been together for some time now, planning the rest of their future together. Somewhere between that song, though, and the next, "Stay Here With Me," something has happened. She's having second thoughts about this relationship — perhaps he's been unfaithful -- and our hero is pleading for her to stay with him. He has his pride, even in his broken down state, and he refuses to tell her he loves her, but he promises to take care of her, if only she'll just stay. But it's not happening.

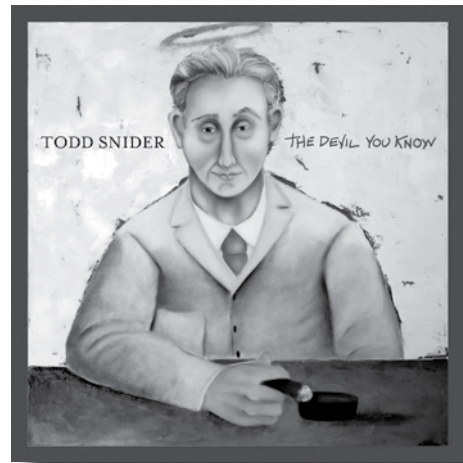
## ACT III - Resolution

BJ's on his own now, and "Livin' Down On The Line" finds him down on his luck. It's a raucous song with some cool licks and a badass guitar solo as its centerpiece. At long last, "The Ghost," fills in the gap in the story, explaining that BJ lost his

## TODD SNIDER

*The Devil You Know*

By: Nino Trevino



Todd Snider's latest album, *The Devil You Know*, is a great combination of music and social commentary with political overtones. Snider takes the experiences of a country at war and composes a collage of alternative-country and folk music, that is enjoyable for passive listening and thought provoking for the active ear. The album is highlighted by the popular single "Looking for a Job," which can without a doubt be argued as this generation's anthem of the working man. Reminiscent of Johnny Paycheck's "Take this Job and Shove it," "Looking for a Job" turns the tables on the blue-collar working scene with a great tune that, perhaps ironically for some, will have the listener singing at work. Unfortunately, this is the only track from the album I've heard get air-time, but it is not for lack of supporting tracks. Other songs deserving recognition include "You Got a Way with It," in which Todd takes a shot at the privileged upbringing and election antics of our current leader in a round about fashion. "The Highland Street Incident" is a song based on the personal experience of a mugging. By telling the story from the point of view of the muggers, Todd displays his gift while challenging an audience to think. He even includes a sweet ballad "All that Matters" to his wife Melita, who is an artist in her own right and responsible for the artwork on the cover. And of course the title track, "The Devil

You Know," which paints a striking picture of the desperate means of survival everyday people seek due to forces that are often outside the realm of their own control. One particular tune I enjoyed was "Happy New Year." This song is a great observation of the current religious fanaticism our country is experiencing. This album includes a supplemental CD containing an interview with Todd Snider and acoustic versions of selected songs. Along with the liner notes, the interview with Todd gives insight into the inspiration for some of his songs and offers his personal views of things. You need not be a "Folkie" to enjoy this CD. Todd Snider still remains the same artist who gave us "Beer-Run" and "Double-Wide Blues," but this time he gives us a twist of social consciousness. Much like his self-professed agnostic religious views, Todd Snider does a great job balancing himself between alternative country and folk music, while retaining fans from both sides. I thoroughly enjoyed this CD and continue to appreciate Todd Snider's song writing ability. The more I listen to it and I can't help but recommend it to those who enjoy alternative/Texas/folk music with a side of food for thought.

wife not because he cheated on her, but because he turned to drugs and alcohol after blaming himself for the untimely death of his son. "I Still Think Of You" is a letter to his lost love. BJ is apparently resigned to a fate of never seeing her again, but he has her phone number, so we hold out hope that he could turn his life around, and maybe they'll get back together. The final song, "Painted On Smile," lets us know that BJ did, indeed, turn his life around, but he never made that call, or maybe he made it and was once again rejected. He's resumed his heavy drinking and is stuck in a dead-end relationship with nowhere else to go.

I honestly don't know if Brandon actually constructed VII as this countrified rock opera I've presented here. But if he didn't, why does he display the alternate track listing on his website? If you listen to the songs in the order of the production CD, VII is a really good record, with several great songs on it. But if you use the alternate track listing, VII is a masterwork by one of our very best singer-songwriters, and to that I say, "Gentlemen, hats off!" — and let's get this thing produced for the stage!

By: Steve Circeo



# BEHIND THE SCENES WITH THE BAND OF HEATHENS

By: Elise E. Tschoepe

The Band of Heathens--a more diverse band one may never set eyes on when the members arrive to assemble the stage. They appear in everything from sandals, sneakers, tanks, tees, and the occasional earring. From the moment of that first song though, there is perfect harmony. I heard this amazing band live one night and loved their music instantly. There isn't a whole lot of information out there about them yet, so Intrigued by what I had pieced together thus far, I decided I wanted to find out more.

An opportunity to see this band live is an entertaining one to say the least. Not only will their music amaze, but so will the camaraderie that they have. The guys demonstrate a good natured and well tuned banter between songs, regarding everything from deciding that Ed may have hit a new high note, to discussions of sending Brian to the bathroom for the rest of the night to hand out mints, soaps, towels, and other items (don't worry they never did send him). I had the wonderful opportunity to sit down with each member of the band, with the exception of the elusive drummer Jeff who I managed to catch only briefly, sneaky as he is. In my quest I was able to find out more information about the origin of the name. It seems the band was originally to be called The Good Time Supper Club, because they were only going to play on Wednesdays, and only at Momo's. But then the fated misprint happened and The Band of Heathens they became. As Colin said, "It stuck like mud."

As they started arriving, I was able to pull them aside and talk for a few minutes. I started out with bassist Seth Whitney. He is quite the man of mystery, but I have been cleared to finally release his city and state of origin. "You know I'm from Olympia, Washington, that is more than anyone else." There you have it folks!

Originally from Boston, Ed Jurdi has toured the country extensively, performing in 23 states, and now calls Austin home. Everyone likes to ask musicians about the craziest job they ever had—Ed's was digging sewer lines up north at 6 a.m. "That is when I knew that writing (music) was what I wanted to be doing full time." Among his more memorable moments in his music career was a past opportunity where he played with Chip Taylor and other musical greats.

Brian Keane and I started discussing the first time the

guys all came together, noting that early on, it was a little rough. "It was kind of, no, it was exactly an accident, and then Fat Caddy asked us to do a record." As I spoke to each of the guys throughout the night, I would ask for a little behind the scenes information. The first one of the evening came directly from Brian, about well, Brian. "It was this last Sunday when we played Gruene; I had missed the last show there. I had to play a show in Connecticut. A lady came up to me and said, 'We missed you last time.' I said, 'Thanks, sorry I couldn't be here.' She then asked if I was feeling alright, I said I was feeling fine. She said, 'Well, we heard you had an ingrown toenail so you couldn't make it.' About this time, I look over at Seth he just starts laughing." Don't worry folks its all in good fun!

Gordy Quist came over to talk to me after they had



Photo Courtesy of The Band of Heathens

finished their set for the night. He hails from just outside of Spring, Texas, but says the Houston music scene is very different from that of Austin. All of the members of The Band of Heathens have played in other bands before with Brian, Gordy, Ed, and Colin all having had some experience fronting. That is one factor he attributes to what makes them great. "We all know the pressure of being the front man. Now no one has to do that, but it makes a better show. I can't wait for Colin to say something stupid or funny and we can make fun of it." Gordy quoted Ed saying, it creates a "big rock and roll stew." It was at this point that I did get another story out of the guys.

Gordy decided to take my recorder and interview Brian about this one himself. Apparently, one night they

decided to fire Brian. They even hired someone from the audience, who played three songs with the band. Brian though, does not make for a good audience. He apparently heckled the band so relentlessly from the audience they knew the only way to quiet him was to re-hire him. As if his talent wasn't enough, he apparently has extra job security now.

Colin Brooks, said of the first night they played together, "I wasn't particularly enamored with the idea, but I went along with it because we had all been playing together as sidemen in each other's bands. So, we came up with this idea, or someone did. I thought at first, it would be a song swap or something, but it actually turned out great. Now...I like it better than my own band." He further commented that some of the best things come from not planning (i.e. The Band of Heathens.) He also informed me of an incident with Brian which resulted in a ruling that Brian is no longer allowed to stand on stage, but I can't go into the details. Notice the pattern of how these kinds of stories always seem to involve Brian, hmmm...

When watching all of them onstage, one can't help but notice that the guys all trade off what instruments they play. This only further demonstrates how musically talented they are as individuals and how well they have been able to bring that together as a cohesive unit. This caused me to ask the question, "Is there any instrument that they wouldn't play?" Ed said, "No horns so far, but if it has strings we'll play it at some point, maybe. Except for the harp." Brian, while laughing, responded, "We try it all. We've even thrown in a banjo a couple of times, but we try not to torture the audience too much."

With their debut release, *Live From Momo's*, these artists blend so many genres, even discussing the original heathen with "Judas 'Scariot Blues.'" Each track is one that was brought from the individual artists, though their next CD will be more of a compilation of songs co-written together by the members of the band. They are hoping for release in the Spring of 2007. I for one will be first in line for the new album to add to my Heathen collection. Until then, I will make sure to catch every show possible that these talented guys are performing, and I suggest you do the same.

For more information check out [www.bandofheathens.com](http://www.bandofheathens.com) or [www.myspace.com/thebandofheathens](http://www.myspace.com/thebandofheathens)

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# TMT PROFILE FIVE



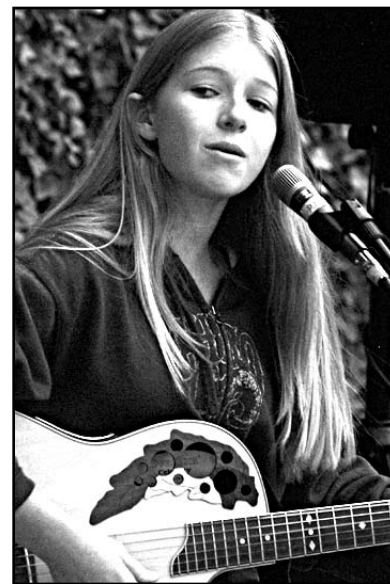
## NICKI LEE

Nikki Lee is from the west Texas town of Lamesa. She is a young phenomenon and at the young age of 15 has already cut a record titled "Countryfied" which was released in September 2006. This attractive youngster can sing with the best of them. She has mainstream country appeal with a solid sound that is solid gold. The cuts from her record contain great instrumental work that fit her great vocals. The fiddle work on the track "Underappreciated" is superb and grooves through the entire song. Nikki has a young "redneck girl" attitude that is sassy but nice. Even on her Myspace she

lists her influences from Gretchen Wilson to Patsy Cline and that is fitting with her "pop country" style that delivers a bit of attitude. Nicki is getting some notice of some of the bigger Texas icons like Kevin Fowler. Fowler even had her autograph her CD for him. She is destined to be something of a sensation in country music in the years to come as she grows up, and even now plays a small number of shows that fit within the busy schedule of being a high school age teenager. She tours close to home in west Texas and plays the circuit around Lamesa and Abilene. She is even getting some media attention and has been featured on the cover of "Sounds of Texas" magazine. Like all young artists and Nicki reaches her fans via the internet and Myspace. Her Myspace already has thousands of fans and friends posting comments of praise. You can find out more about Nikki Lee at [www.nikkileecountry.com](http://www.nikkileecountry.com) or at [myspace.com/nikkisherelee](http://myspace.com/nikkisherelee). Go check her out and take a listen to her tunes.

## RACHEL LAVIN

When The Lavens play a gig, families bring their kids not only to enjoy the music, but also to inspire them musically. At the age of ten, Rachel Laven begged to stop piano lessons and get a guitar. Her dad promised to get her one if she learned six chords. Rachel's brother, Niko, taught her nine, just in case, and the next day Rachel received a Johnson acoustic guitar. Within a couple of weeks she had already written three songs. In the grand spirit of sibling rivalry, Niko also started writing songs -- and the race was on. Rachel now has quite a few songs under her belt, and the song we're featuring this month has been entered into the BBC World Service's international contest, "The Next Big Thing." The song made the cut to the final twenty and we're still waiting to hear if it will move on from there. You can find out more about Rachel and the rest of the Laven family at [www.TheLavens.com](http://www.TheLavens.com) or [www.MySpace.com/TheLavens](http://www.MySpace.com/TheLavens).



## Britt Lloyd



Born in Sweetwater, Texas, Britt Lloyd was raised on music ranging from Dwight Yoakam to Nirvana. He first picked up a guitar at the age of ten and he started writing songs as a soothing pastime. From heartache to head over heels, from slower relaxing songs to the bang-your-head sounds you'll find at the live shows, listeners find themselves caught up in Britt's driven, yet relaxed, attitude. The Britt Lloyd Band is built of solid sounds, from the detailed guitar and bass parts to the steady backbone of experienced drums and songwriting. This band was formed by Britt to accompany his deep singer-songwriter material and broaden the musical aspect of his work. On the edge of Texas Country Rock, this band will take you to a higher level of appreciation for that kind of music. From the originals to the covers, a BLB live show is mixed with influences from Lynyrd Skynyrd, Led Zeppelin, and Tom Petty, to the works of modern Texas music greats like Jack Ingram, Cory Morrow, and Reckless Kelly. Giving their all is what this band is about, and they will continue doing so as long as they possibly can. With a strong foundation of friendship between the band mates, Britt on vocals and lead guitar, Thomas Van Arsdale on drums, and Chris Byrd on bass and backing vocals, you can bet we'll be hearing from The Britt Lloyd Band for a very long time. Find out more at [www.BrittLloyd.com](http://www.BrittLloyd.com).

## Graham Weber



The songs on his latest release, *Beggar's Blues*, serve notice that Weber is a songwriter worth paying attention to. A native of Cincinnati, Weber began writing while living in Los Angeles. After returning to Ohio he joined the Cleveland roots rock band, The Whiskeyhounds. In 2003, he recorded and

self-produced his first solo studio record, "Naive Melodies", garnering airplay on independent radio stations throughout the U.S. In December of 2005, Weber and his wife moved (sight unseen) to Austin, Texas. Since arriving in Texas, he has found a home at the legendary Cactus Cafe opening for Eliza Gilkyson, Butch Hancock, Chip Taylor and Carrie Rodriguez, Hayes Carll, Darden Smith, Lori McKenna, as well as headlining and filling the seats for the release of his second album, *Beggar's Blues*. Nationally, he has opened numerous shows and toured with Slaid Cleaves, and recently opened for other songwriters such as Leon Redbone, Todd Snider, Vance Gilbert, and Ellis Paul. Besides opening, Weber has headlined his own tours across the entire continental United States three times over in the past year and a half, receiving overwhelmingly warm receptions in nearly every town he's played. Weber plans to release his next album, *The Door To The Morning*, in February 2007. For more information about Graham, please visit [www.grahamweber.com](http://www.grahamweber.com).

## TRACY NICOLE



Tracy Nicole hails from Ada Oklahoma and is a disc jockey at KYKC 100.1 FM radio. It is one of the local country stations in Ada. She is also a singer songwriter, and has cut a demo with her hometown friend and producer Mike McClure at the controls. Tracy has been in radio for a good amount of time in addition to her own performance schedule continues to spin great tunes for her hometown audience. In addition to being a performer and DJ, she has arranged, booked, produced, and promoted many bands from both Nashville and the Texas and Oklahoma music scene. As a radio DJ she is continuing to hold the line against bad music on the airwaves and she is truly a talented woman with many aspects to her talent. Check out some of Tracy's tunes at her Myspace site at [myspace.com/backroadmanagemet](http://myspace.com/backroadmanagemet).

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# Adam Hood - Alabama Red Dirt

By: Gina Stricklin

Simple sense of style sometimes makes for the best guitar players. Combine that with a natural ability to write songs and a laid-back southern drawl, and you have all the ingredients that make up one Mr. Adam Hood.

Alabama roots, a heavy southern accent, and commander of one mean guitar are just a few ways to describe Adam. With an ambitious soul and a great knack for writing songs, Adam is able to put a distinctive mark on his music. And as Adam says, "Living in Alabama has a really unique effect on my writing and on my career. I live in the same small town both my parents and grandparents grew up in. It really keeps me grounded and gives me a nice, secure place to come home to. I think those roots help my style. I like to write and play so that people can hear where my music comes from." So growing up in Opelika, Alabama and having that sense of style has definitely given Adam his own unique way of delivering his music.

Trying to say Adam's music has a label would unfairly force it into one category or genre when there are too many aspects of his music to be able to define it accurately in such a narrow way. But Adam and Patrick Lunceford are making their way around the home of Red Dirt/Texas Music and are being welcomed with open arms. Having been together on the road since last January, Adam and Patrick are traveling from town to town, making a name for themselves in Oklahoma, Texas, and surrounding states. So with a guitarist and a drummer, most are probably thinking, "Two guys and no more? Where is the rest of the band?" With the certain kind of spin on Adam and Patrick's well-tuned set up, there isn't a need for anyone else. With the diversity on the guitar, added with the right touch of drums, they are able to reach every emotion.

Adam says, "Texas and Oklahoma have been really good to me. People are very responsive to music here. Everyone is eager to hear something new and if they like your stuff, they'll tell EVERYONE and come out to see you EVERYTIME! It's really cool. I feel very welcome here." With a compelling voice and an intense stage persona, an Adam Hood show is one that is always as good as, or even better than the last one. That is why so many Adam Hood fans will faithfully show up when he is in town.

Adam and Patrick are busy right now, touring with Leon Russell and are making their way across several states. The opportunity to work with Leon Russell

came about through some mutual friends. They are very excited to be a part of Leon's tour and say they are being treated just like family.

In the meantime, Adam is currently working on a new full-length studio CD with Peter Anderson, of Little Dog Records. Anderson is also overseeing the arrangements and production. A trip with his daughter from Birmingham, Alabama to Ruston, Louisiana inspired him to write what is his favorite song on the new CD called "22 Days."

He hopes to have the new CD out by next spring. After landing a record label, an endorsement by D'Addario strings, and a touring opportunity with Leon Russell, Adam is humbled by the acceptance he and Patrick have received in these last few months by their new and loyal fans. Adam relates, "It's really neat and a little scary to see how quickly word gets around when people in Texas and Oklahoma believe in what you do. I hope it keeps on going!"

Adam's manager and booking agent are from Austin so he hopes that he and Patrick will be stopping in more consistently. Touring dates and additional information can be found on his website at [www.adamhood.com](http://www.adamhood.com). Give Adam a listen and check him out as soon as you can and get in on the best-kept secret in Texas and Red Dirt music.



Photo Courtesy of Adam Hood

## THE TALE BEHIND THE TUNE

BY: GEORGE BANCROFT

### THE TUNE: LA FREEWAY THE TALE TELLER: GUY CLARK

Guy Clark's "LA Freeway" wasn't the song that changed the course of my life, but it was among a relatively small handful of songs that did, and they were all on eight LPs made by Jerry Jeff Walker and his cast of characters during the 1970s. My mom had a friend living in Junction, and she came to visit us in Big Spring for a few days. When she left, she forgot to pack a Jerry Jeff album she'd brought along for the visit. I wore that thing out, and then I hunted down and bought seven more Jerry Jeff records. I would have bought more, but seven was all I could find. "LA Freeway" was on one of the Jerry Jeff LPs, and it epitomized the attitude of all those records. I was delighted when so many years later I got to interview Guy Clark and have him tell me how the song came about. Here's what he had to say:

*I was living in Los Angeles, my wife and I, trying to get in the music business, pitching songs and working in the dobro factory, and I'd been playing in a little string band down in San Diego one night. We were driving back to LA, about three or four o'clock in the morning, and I'd fallen asleep in the back seat. I just kinda woke-up, looked up, and looked around, and it just popped out of my mouth - if I can just get off of this LA freeway without getting killed or caught. A little light bulb went off. I got my wife's eye-brow pencil and a burger sack and wrote it down.*



*I carried that around in my wallet for about a year before I actually wrote the song. That's one of the things about writing. Everybody has those ideas, great little ideas, but if you don't write it down, you will forget it.*

I called Guy Clark to talk about all the songs on his Keepers CD. That recording was from a live performance of Clark's in 1996 at the Douglas Corner Café in Nashville. "LA Freeway" is the lead track on the Keepers CD. I listened to that version of "LA Freeway" and the one I had on the old Jerry Jeff LP while I was writing this article. The words are slightly different in each, and they're both different than what is printed in the liner notes of the Keepers CD, so I thought it best to just type out what I heard Guy Clark sing.

Guy is one of the Texas music pioneers. He and others like Jerry Jeff, Gary P. Nunn, and later, Robert Earl Keen were responsible for turning me into a tireless ambassador of Texas music. There are many of us who encourage others to listen to what, as a body of work, has so much more to offer than what is available from the mainstream.

You can chase your tail all afternoon trying to define for the unenlightened just exactly what Texas music is. It's a noble effort, but it's just impossible. I have a suggestion. If you really want to spread the Gospel of Texas Music and do so effectively, button your lip and just leave a copy of LA Freeway behind. Come back in six months. If they're not converted by then, shake the dust from your boots and move on, and do so quickly or you might find yourself talking to a pillar of salt.

LA Freeway  
(Guy Clark)

Pack up all your dishes  
Make note of all good wishes  
Say good-bye to the landlord for me  
That son-of-a-bitch has always bored me  
Throw out them LA papers  
Moldy box of vanilla wafers  
Adios to all this concrete  
Gonna get me some dirt road back street

Chorus:  
If I can just get off of this LA Freeway  
Without getting killed or caught  
Down that road in a cloud of smoke  
To some land that I ain't bought bought bought

Here's to you old skinny Dennis  
The only one I think I will miss  
I can hear an old bass singing  
Sweet and low like a gift you're bringin'  
Play it for me one more time now  
Got to give it all we can now  
I believe everything you're sayin'  
Just you keep on keep on playin'

(Repeat Chorus)

Put the pink card in the mailbox  
Leave the key in that old front door lock  
They'll find it likely as not  
I'm sure there's somethin' we have forgot  
Oh Suzanna don't you cry babe  
Love's a gift that's surely hand-made  
We got somethin' to believe in  
Don't you think it's time we were leavin'

(Repeat Chorus)

So pack up all your dishes  
Make note of all good wishes  
Say good-bye to the landlord for me  
That son-of-a-bitch has always bored me



# A CONVERSATION WITH JOHNNY COOPER

By: Andrew West Griffin

On a recent Thursday night in Lawton, Oklahoma, singer-songwriter-guitarist Johnny Cooper was sitting at a table in the outdoor portion of Duvallz. The night air was pleasant for fall and opening act Bobby Dale was just about to take the stage. Cooper, wasn't sipping a beer on this night. No, the young, curly-haired Wichita Falls resident who bears a vague resemblance to pop star John Mayer, was sitting politely with friends enjoying the atmosphere. This is the 18-year-old Johnny Cooper that has many in the Texas and Red Dirt scenes talking. And the talk is positive, to be sure. The talented teenager, born in Arizona and raised in Texas, and who has just released his first full-length studio album "*Ignition*" is well on his way to becoming a mainstay on the Texas and Red Dirt music scene, playing gigs just about anywhere. But tonight, he and his band's guitarist, Jason Brown, are toning things down a bit from their normal, full-band set up. The two, playing in front of a decent crowd for a weeknight, will offer an appealing acoustic gig peppered with Johnny Cooper originals like "Down at the Shop" and covers like The Eagles' "Victim of Love," a song, we're told, he just learned to play.

Speaking of just learning, it's amazing to discover that Cooper only began learning to play guitar five years earlier, after he'd taken to pounding away at his first musical instrument, the drums. But long before he even played an instrument, young Cooper had learned how to dance, from his dance-instructor mother Cindy Saillant. She says he was a terrific dancer and also loved music, thanks to his father, Jimmy Cooper.

Johnny Cooper explains that the drums were the first musical instrument he was drawn to back in his early teens. But it was Wichita Falls-based promoter Woody Hodges, of Sold Out Productions, with his connections within the Texas and Red Dirt scene, who encouraged Cooper to sing and reach the level of success he is enjoying today. "I switched to guitar," Cooper said. "I'd discovered it was a lot Harder to sing and play drums than it was to sing and play guitar." Meanwhile, Hodges is cheering on the teen, recognizing his talent. In fact, early on, Hodges believed in Cooper so much that he booked Cooper to open up for The Great Divide at a Wichita Falls gig in early 2004. Cooper said he was flattered by the offer to open up for the popular, Stillwater-based Red Dirt band. But then he took a good look at the calendar. "I realized I had just two-and-a-half weeks to learn 15 songs," Cooper said with his winning smile. His desire to perform live and perform music he loves, Cooper did open up for The Great Divide and the crowd really enjoyed what they heard. From there, Cooper, still a student at Wichita Falls (Old) High School, spent his nights not only doing his homework

but finding time to take to the stage in local clubs. "We kind of started finding places to play," Cooper said. "Woody would put us in a bar in Wichita Falls and we started playing anywhere we could." The young singer got better on guitar and began writing his own songs, mixing in some covers during his live shows. He did

this in addition to dating, playing on his high school tennis team, singing in the acappella choir and trying to balance it all. Hodges, who watched young Cooper grow has nothing but praise for his friend. "He just gets more talented every time I see him," Hodges said. "He's one of the most progressive players I've seen in forever."

Two years into his burgeoning career, Cooper, backed by a Southern rock band called A.A. Bottom (a play on the name of fellow Texans ZZ Top), also known as the Johnny Cooper Band, recorded his first album, a live disc called "*Live at the Pub*" which featured originals like "Rain" and "Tequila Girl" to covers like Johnny Cash's "Folsom Prison Blues" and Cross Canadian Ragweed's "Carney Man." Yes, there was a somewhat hostile review of the live album in his hometown paper, the *Times Record News*, something noted by Cindy Saillant, Cooper's mother, manager and biggest fan. "They said, 'how can a kid whose hardly experienced anything sing a Song like 'Folsom Prison Blues'?" recalls Saillant. But a fickle review didn't faze Cooper. By this time he was gaining incredible experience opening for everybody from

Pat Green to Gary Allan to his pals in Cross Canadian Ragweed. In fact, Cooper became friends with Cody Canada, the band's lead singer and guitarist.

"Cody Canada really got me to up the guitar and play that (expletive)," says Cooper, sounding like a friend and a fan. Not only that, Johnny Cooper even sounds like Canada. Listen to his popular, new radio track, the crunchy, upbeat guitar-pop of "Nothing To You." Cooper is a dead ringer for Okie Canada, at least vocally. A story Cooper likes to tell involves Cody Canada. Because he had covered Ragweed's "Carney Man" on "*Live at the Pub*," Cooper was required to pay songwriting royalties to Canada. Tracking him down after a Texas show, Cooper handed the blond-haired singer a check. "He said, 'I don't want your money' and ripped the check up into a million pieces and threw it in the trash can," recalled Cooper. Woody Hodges, sitting nearby, said he recalls that encounter and added, "He then said, 'If you want to do one of my songs, then just do it.'" And that was that. Another example of an artist in the Texas/Red Dirt music scene helping another artist working to get established. For more information on Johnny Cooper and how to get "*Ignition*" or other merchandise, go to [www.johnnycooper.com](http://www.johnnycooper.com).



Photo by Joy Greer

## Michael Oneill Comes to Texas

By Keith Howerton

Veteran performer and Americana music chart stand out Michael Oneill made a surprise visit to Texas in late November. The occasion was to perform at the Mean Eyed Cat in Austin and with the Cibolo Creek cattle company bull riding rodeo in Charlotte, Texas. In addition to those performances Michael took the time to play a segment in an all day benefit at San Antonio's "Red Room". The "Red Room" is a down town listening room in the warehouse district of the city. A beautiful handcrafted guitar donated to the benefit by Michael was auctioned for several hundred dollars and was part of the effort to raise money to help keep benefit the Red Room and keep it in business as a premier listening room location.

It was a good time for Michael as he met old friends from Austin and got to see some people he had not seen in some time. Michael's fiddle player from his

current CD called "Who's Bad Now", Alex Ruiz, happened to be in San Antonio on an unrelated business trip and was able to perform the shows and hang out. Alex is a superb fiddle player and performer who can work up fiddle parts to almost any music that he hears and he can do it in seconds.

"Whos Bad Now" had a great year in 2006 with the single of the same name reaching the top 20 of the Radio and Records Americana charts and the CD being selected as number 84 in the R&R Top 100 records of 2006. In addition to the recognition in Nashville Michael received great media coverage in national songwriter publications and west coast media outlets. In addition to the national attention, Michael's single has generated some decent airplay on Americana and country stations in Texas.

Now calling Gig Harbor Washington his home, Oneill has come a long way in the music business. In the 70s and early 80s he toured with top names in music



including the then relatively unknown U2, along with Stevie Ray Vaughn, and others. He traveled regularly from New York to LA with a daunting schedule. His prolific songwriting produced hits that included chart toping songs by mega rock bands like Molly Hatchet. He left music as a full time in the 90s and became a successful business man in his native Washington. He has continued to tour the west coast and is a regular in venues and on the rodeo circuit where his brand of country rock is a hit.

Michael plans on continuing to tour and support "Who's Bad Now" in 2007 including performance dates in Texas.

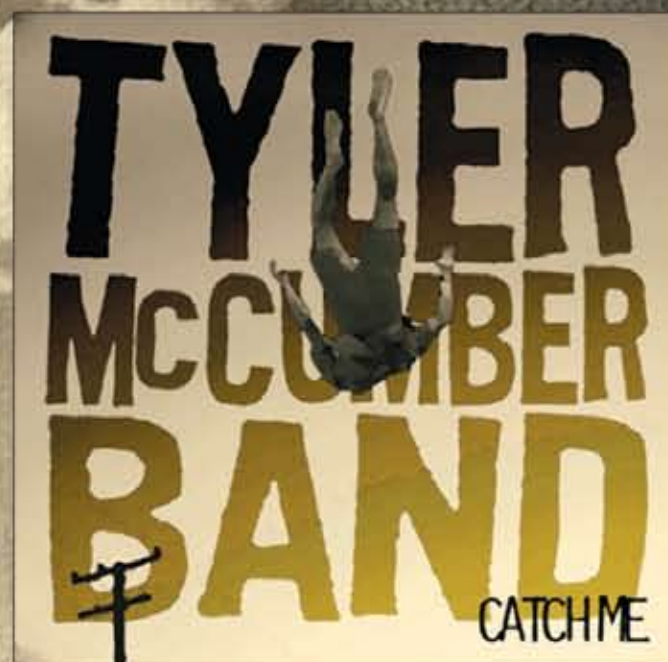


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