

Richard James Dobson – Bio

Richard James Dobson II was born on March 19, 1942 in Tyler, Texas. Richard's introduction to music came early in life, *"My dad had an enormous record collection of European music from the Renaissance on. Verdi, Bach, Mozart, Beethoven and dozens of lesser known composers"* [#]. Mary Eileen, his mother, loved musicals. From an early age, Richard and his younger sister Margaret were regulars at local theatres and movie houses.

By his mid teens, to the disapproval of his parents, Richard was listening to *"Hank Williams, R&B and early rock and roll. Chuck Berry was the king for me. Big Mama Thornton's version of "Hound Dog" really knocked me out."* Richard spent his formative years on the Gulf coast in Houston, Galveston and Corpus Christi. His father, was a Petroleum Geologist/Engineer with the Shell Oil Company. When Richard was aged eight the family lived in Holland for a year.

Richard purchased his first typewriter, a Smith Corona, in Albuquerque, New Mexico during 1960 with the intention of *"writing that first novel."* He completed his schooling at St. Michael's High in Santa Fe, attended Georgetown University in Washington D.C. and then spent some time in Cali, Columbia. Instead of composing narratives, Richard picked up his first guitar - *"Playing was just a hobby for me back then."* Back in the States, in 1966, Dobson gained a degree in Spanish from the University of St. Thomas in Houston. Between 1967-68 Richard worked for the American Peace Corps in Rinconada De Mantiales, a town located south of Chile's capital city, Santiago.

Later, he taught Spanish and English at a school in Michigan for a year, and lived in New York for a time, while working as a barman at the rock club, Max's Kansas City. By the dawn of the seventies, Dobson had moved to the New Mexico ghost town of San Miguel. Hoping that the seclusion would see him begin work on *the novel*, instead, Richard recalled *"I ended up playing guitar all the time and began writing songs."*

During the period 1971-74, Dobson lived in Nashville. Guy Clark cut a demo of one of Richard's early songs and David Alan Coe included "Piece Of Wood And Steel" on his album **"Once Upon A Rhyme."** That apart, Nashville was a hand to mouth existence and Richard worked variously as a barman, carpenter and labourer. In the updated/extended 2003 version of James Szalapski's documentary **"Heartworn Highways"** [1975] Richard performs "Hard By The Highway" and "For Ever, For Always, For Certain," while toward the end of the documentary it's Christmas Eve 1975 at Guy & Susanna Clark's house and Steve Young, Guy, Rodney Crowell, Billy Callery, a young Steve Earle and Richard sing "Silent Night."

Returning to Galveston, for a number of years, Richard worked on drilling rigs and shrimp boats. He never lost faith in his music and in 1977 self-released his debut album. A second album was available by the time he returned to Nashville in 1981. While still a Galveston resident, Richard joined the local band, Dick & The Dirt. By 1981 Richard was working the Houston clubs with his own band, Earthmover. The combo cut one single "The Hard Way" c/w "Swamp Rat." In fact, for the opening half of the eighties, from time to time, Richard was domiciled in Tennessee and on the Gulf. **"Save The World"** was recorded in Nashville at Jack Clement's Cowboy Arms Hotel and Recording Spa, and was co-produced by Dobson and the legendary Jim Rooney.

By 1985 Richard was a full-time Nashville resident once more and **"True West,"** cut at the Nashville studio of the same name, was a Dobson and Mike Dunbar production. Previously, Mike Dunbar had been Head of Faculty of Chicago's Old Town School of Folk Music. Dunbar joined Richard's road band, State of The Heart, and their album production partnership continued till 1992. Through the late eighties, Richard co-penned six tunes with Guy Clark's wife, Susanna. Guy even *pitched in* on a couple, and one of them, "Old Friends," subsequently became the title of Guy's 1988, Grammy nominated, Sugar Hill album. Supported by his band, in March 1988 Richard cut a live album at Nashville's Station Inn. As the eighties drew to a close, Richard began breaking into the lucrative European country music tour circuit.

Richard initially self-released **"Hearts & Rivers,"** and when the Swiss based Brambus label issued the collection in Europe, it launched a musical partnership that continues to this day. Nanci Griffith nicknamed Richard the *Ernest Hemingway of country music*, and her Rounder/Philo album **"Once In A Very Blue Moon"** [1986] included his "Ballad of Robin-Winter-Smith" – the tale of a daredevil English motorcycle rider. Richard's interpretation appeared on his **"Save The World"** album. In the late eighties, Richard *re-issued* a 21 track CD titled **"Back Tracks"** that featured all the **"Save the World"** and **"True West"** tracks, excluding "Goosebumps" from the latter album. Richard's songs have been covered by David Allan Coe,

Lacy J. Dalton, Carlene Carter & Dave Edmunds and Kelly Willis. On **“Amigos”** [1994] Dobson covered fifteen Townes Van Zandt songs. **“Mankind”** [1994] was only released by the Austin label, Sundown Records.

In 1998 Richard finally published his book. Titled **“The Gulf Coast Boys”** [Greater Texas Publishing Company ISBN 0-9665764-0-3] it included recollections from the seventies when he toured with Rex (Wrecks) Bell, Mickey White and the legendary Townes Van Zandt. Richard’s **“Doppelgaenger,”** a *back to basics* voice and guitar recording, was issued by Brambus in late 2002. These days Richard makes his home in Switzerland. Richard’s ninth release on the Swiss Brambus label, **“A River Will Do,”** [and his 16th album in total] was released in late 2003, and was followed in early 2006 by **“On Thistledown Wind.”** **“Back At The Red Shack”** was recorded in Texas during December 2006, and appeared the following Spring on the Brambus label. The Red Shack in the album title was Rock Romano’s Houston studio, and the collection which found Dobson revisit a handful of old songs and present many new ones was co-produced by the pair.

Discography : **“In Texas Last December”** only on vinyl [1977] ; **“The Big Taste”** only on vinyl [1979] ; **“Save The World”** only on vinyl [1983] ; **“True West”** only on vinyl [1986] ; **“State Of The Heart – Live At The Station Inn”** only on vinyl [1988] ; **“Back Tracks”** reissue of **“Save The World”** and **“True West”** on CD [1989] ; **“Hearts & Rivers”** [1990] ; **“Blue Collar Blues”** [1992] ; **“Amigos”** [1994] ; **“Mankind”** [1994] ; **“One Bar Town”** [1995] ; **“Love Only Love”** [1996] ; **“Salty Songs”** [1998] ; **“Global Village Blues”** [1999] ; **“Hum of The Wheels”** [2001] ; **“Doppelgaenger”** [2002] ; **“A River Will Do”** [2003] ; **“On Thistledown Wind”** [2006] ; **“Back At The Red Shack”** [2007] :

Arthur Wood

Kerrville Kronikles 01/03, 11/03, 02/06 and 02/07.

[1020 words]