

## Folkwax Review – Kerrville Folk Festival 2003

### 32<sup>nd</sup> Kerrville Folk Festival 2003, Days 10 to 18 – Hill Country Avalon, Part 2

Last week, in Part 1, I attempted to describe how Kerrville's Quiet Valley Ranch becomes a vibrant community, for over two weeks, every year. In this week's episode I'll look at Festival events, official and unofficial, on Days 10 through 18. Elsewhere in this week's issue of Folkwax, you'll find my Festival Day 15 [Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> June] interview with Kerrville's new producer, Dalis Allen.

In this age of corporate sponsorship, no Festival can survive without a Hospitality Booth. This year, the Mainstage Booth, open for business from 5.00pm till midnight on the eleven nights of Mainstage concerts, sported memorabilia such as plastic drinking cups of numerous sizes c/w logo [another aspect of Kerrville's green recycling policy in action] and the latest T-Shirt designs, embroidered sports shirts, caps and jackets. The foregoing items vied for sale alongside shirts from previous years events. The Hospitality Booth was also the main sales point for recordings by the one hundred or so artists who appeared on the Festival's two stages. This year, the Booth also had books for sale, including titles by Bobby Bridger, Steve Gillette and Judy Collins. And there was more....down in the campgrounds next to the Kerrtry Store [an oasis that sells hot/cold drinks, food and ice to campers], I found a small, new covered structure bearing the legend, Staff *Rekerds* [phonetics rule at *Kerrville* !!!]. Many of the people who volunteer to work in the numerous Festival crews – trash collectors, security, first aid etc. – are also performing musicians of varying skill levels, with recordings for sale. Where, in years past, such sales were a *face to face* underground activity in the campgrounds, pleasingly, those musicians now have an outlet for their work. Also in the campgrounds, adjacent to Threadgill Theatre during the seven 7.00pm to 9.00pm Sundown Concerts, a small stall springs to life purveying the recordings of that evening's performer[s]. Based on the foregoing, leaving Kerrville without a single new CD is akin to performing a miracle.....leaving Kerrville with a heart chock full of treasured memories is a given.

With the arrival of the third and final weekend of the Festival, members of the volunteer staff – many being those aforementioned *performing musicians* – are given the opportunity to brave the eyes and ears of their peers for the two hour long Staff Concert. This year's show, held on the final Saturday [Day 17] took place during the *blazing blow-torch* hours of 1.00pm through 3.00pm at Threadgill Theatre. Displaying a suitably deft way with words, Peter Yarrow's son, Christopher, was compere. Personal highlights of this year's presentation included the poetry of Assistant Staff Co-ordinator, Joe Montgomery, and in particular his familiar-to-all *audience participation* saga "Sittin' In The xxxer At Kerrville." Also of note [unintentional pun] was Butch Morgan's set of guitar tunes, and I can't recall the name of the female vocalist who performed the late Blaze Foley's "If I Could Only Fly" – but God bless her for that contribution. Darlene [of the Road Dog Divas] and her irrepressible band of trash crew operatives, complete with a *cardboard cut out* trash truck, closed the show with a ten minute plus, barn-storming skit, which finely balanced trash crew *in jokes* with *insight*, concerning the virtues of recycling.

On the Saturday and Sunday of the three Festival weekends, the religious services needs of the community are met, respectively, at Threadgill Theatre with an 11.00am Shabbat Service, and at the same hour on Chapel Hill on the following day, with a Folk Mass. Although omitted from the official programme, a House Concerts Seminar was held at Mainstage on the final Saturday [Day 17] and around twenty folks attended, a mix of veteran promoters as well as future recruits to *the folk cause*. Through the five weekdays of the second full week [Days 12 to 16], and *free to teachers* attending the festival, between the hours of 9.00am to 5.00pm, Threadgill Theatre became the venue for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Professional Development Programme for Teachers, and this year's syllabus included lectures by Anne Hills ["Voice Yoga"], Billy Jonas ["Bangin' And Sangin'"] and Vince Gilbert ["Top To Bottom"].

Among Kerrville's daily roster of unofficial events, Corndog Night [Day 15] included the crowning of the Corndog King. Underpinning the event was yet another culinary extravaganza, corndogs being batter coated weiners [sausages]. There's nothing more unofficial at Kerrville than the weather, and, on the whole, this year's was mighty fine, except for the early hours of Wednesday June 4<sup>th</sup> when a storm blew through the ranch – 60mph winds followed by a couple of hours of torrential rain - toppling countless tents and canopies, and bringing the Mainstage speaker system crashing to the ground. A temporary sound rig was used for the final weekend's concerts. While the various Camps displayed evidence of a minor Armageddon the morning after, by early the following day, a large pool of muddy water remained in the lower meadow. Making full use of the facility, the younger generation spent much of Thursday [Day 15] indulging in an all comers, all sexes, mud-wrestling competition. That sporting event over, a

game of *mud puddle soccer* ensued through the late afternoon.....with a First Aid crew permanently in attendance.

Noon through 3.00pm on the second Sunday [Day 11] at Threadgill Theatre, the 2003 New Folk Songwriting Competition winner's concert took place. The performers, in order of appearance, were Anais Mitchell, Colin Brooks [ [www.colinbrooks.com](http://www.colinbrooks.com) ], Jonathan Byrd [ [www.jonathanbyrd.com](http://www.jonathanbyrd.com) ], Kathy Hussey [ [www.kathyhussey.com](http://www.kathyhussey.com) ], Rob Heath and David M. Bailey [ [www.davidmbailey.com](http://www.davidmbailey.com) ]. Heath, an Edmonton, Alberta based Canadian, was the only artist who didn't have a CD on sale. Circa 1998 through 2002, Bailey released seven discs with an eighth *in the can*. Apart for Mitchell, and Byrd whom I'd heard perform one song – "Ashe Country Fair" - at a campfire during my first night at this year's Festival, the participants were *comparatively* new to these ears. As I noted last week, five of this year's winners came from the New Folk Heats on the opening Saturday. Sadly I'd missed those heats due to an interviewing commitment.

Rod Kennedy and the effervescent Steve Gillette jointly compered the winner's concert, and in his introduction Steve noted that Vermont bred Mitchell had been a participant in the first of his 2003 "Texas And Tennessee" song circles – an hour long [and quite often more] daily critique/discussion for amateur as well as professional songwriters. Anais opened with the Pennsylvania mining disaster song, "The Quick Creek Flood," and her set included "This Is Just To Tell [I Wear Your Dress Sometimes]" - one of the competition winning songs [the dress having been made by her grandmother], as well as the 9/11 inspired "When Rome Fell." Joined by Jonathan Byrd, Mitchell closed with "Amen," an epitaph to a friend who had recently died. Colin Brooks is currently based out of Austin, and was introduced by Kennedy. Following a few sound problems, and accompanied by Jonathan and Anais, he launched into "Show Me The Way" – a song about confronting and resolving issues of love and hate. Song over, Brooks commented "*That's pretty much my only transcendent song, the rest are kind of whiny and bitchy.*" Armed with a national steel guitar, and still supported by Byrd, Brooks closed with "It's A Long Way Home."

I harbour no doubts that time will confirm Jonathan Byrd as a *major songwriting find* of the 2003 Kerrville Festival. Opening with "Wildflowers" his five-song set included the aforementioned "Ashe Country Fair" an original work that contains those essential traditional folk elements, love and death. Byrd dedicated it to one of folk's finest scribes, Chuck Brodsky, and added "*He kept bugging me to come to Kerrville.*" When his rendition was met with rapturous applause, Byrd quipped "*Tough crowd.*" "Tape Full of Love Songs" proved to be a story song with a humorously sharp final line, and Byrd closed his set with "Portapotty Man" – a *fun* tune – containing an endless stream of double entendres - concocted on the way home from last year's festival. In a matter of three minutes the song became a *Kerrville legend*.

Kathy Hussey, a Nashville based writer, was supported by a band and opened her set with "Sophie Says" and closed with a song about ice cream !!! "*This song is for anybody who has ever watched somebody eat an ice cream cone and have less than pure thoughts*" – I guess you had to have been there. Rob Heath, the 2002 winner of Canada's Songwriter of the Year Award, opened with "You Think It's Magic." Lyrically his songs possessed many great lines, although I have to report that his guitar playing let him down on occasions. That said, I look forward to hearing his forthcoming album. What can I tell you about David M. Bailey, a long-time cancer survivor, except that his set was rapturous. His ethos - "*live life as if every day is potentially the last one.*" When you've come that close to the edge, it's the only way forward. You - dear reader - can make up your own mind regarding his creations by listening to the samples at <http://cdbaby.com/group/dbailey> "Live Forever," "One More Day" and more, made for a memorably uplifting half-hour. In a year's time, I'll tell you whether those songs possess genuine longevity.

As for the Day 10 through 18 highlights on Mainstage and at Threadgill Theatre, here are my recollections. Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> May [Day 10] opened with ex-pat Brit, Zoe Lewis, now a Massachusetts resident. Her humour filled presentation, much in the vein of the late and legendary [British comedienne] Joyce Grenfell, soon had the sparse early evening crowd rooting for her....and for more. The South Austin Jug Band, winners of last year's Telluride Troubadours competition, are a five youngsters who played high energy roots music. A name to mark down for the future with a Lloyd Maines produced album on the way. Randy Sparks and the Minstrels, with Barry McGuire, furnished evidence of how far Folk music has evolved in the last four decades. Introduced by Peter Yarrow, Judy Collins set proved to be a trip down *memory lane* and included tunes by Joni Mitchell, Ian Tyson and Leonard Cohen, plus her

own "My Father." Joined by Yarrow and his daughter, Bethany, the trio encored with "Where Have All The Flowers Gone." Ellis Paul's set the following evening included the anthem "3000 Miles" and "The Speed Of Trees," while the irrepressible Vance Gilbert, whose Mainstage set followed, joined him for "Sweet Mistakes." Rounder/Philo will issue their duo album later this year.

Back at Threadgill for Day 12 saw Freebo, whose bass and tuba had supported many of the Mainstage acts since Day 1, and Severin Browne [Jackson's younger brother] provide an entertaining evenings music. Steve Seskin was unable to make the Festival due to a family matter, and Steve Gillette replaced him. Among the players supporting Gillette on his "*no capo*" Sundown set were Brian Cutean, Mike Williams and Jonathan Byrd, and Steve encored with "Two Men In The Building" and "The Ways of The World." Acoustic Eidolon, the guitar and cello duo of Joe Scott and his wife Hannah, were the Sundown surprise of Day 15 with a richly varied, mainly instrumental, set that merged original contemporary material with a few classical works. Back at Mainstage, the following night saw the annual multi-instrumental David Amram extravaganza that Festival regulars have come to know and love. On a stop over that had seen him perform at the City Lights Books 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary show in San Francisco the previous day, and would take him next to Paris – that's Paris, France by the way [sic. Not Paris, Texas] – Amram sang and scatted his way through a set that featured old as well as brand new material.

On Day 17 fresh from her debut UK solo tour, Eliza Gilkyson, accompanied by Jeff Plankenhorn [guitar] and [her son] Cisco Ryder [percussion], furnished a set that was verbally sassy between songs, and totally on the money when she sang. Jimmy LaFave brought the final Saturday's proceedings to a rowdy climax, and accompanied by Gilkyson, Jimmy performed "Deportee" a feature of their recent Woody Guthrie tribute tour "Ribbon Of Highway, Endless Skyway." The final night saw a fine set by North Dakota writer/farmer Chuck Suchy, while Festival veteran, Allen Damron, included a rendition of the finest Texas song ever written [OK, so it's just my personal opinion] in his set. I'm talking, of course, about Steven Fromholz's "Texas Trilogy." Fromholz recently suffered a mild stoke and is reported to be on the road to recovery. Damron's rendition was poignant, timely and appropriate. Ponty Bone And The Squeezetones a seven piece, San Antonio based, outfit played the final full set of the Festival. The line-up included Texas music veterans Booka Michael [perc.] and Bone [accordion], plus a youngster that I rate as star of the future, Kimmie Rhodes son, Gabe [guitar]. Considering the foregoing trio's links to local legends Ely, Hancock, Gilmore, Gracey and countless more, here, surely, was living proof that Texas music was alive and flourishing.

The Festival closed, as it has for the past 24 years, with a performance of Bobby Bridger's song "Heal In The Wisdom" and darn of the composer hadn't driven up from Houston to share the stage with Damron, as audience and performers linked arms, onstage and off, and raised their voices in praise of all that is Kerrville. The sign at the entrance gate reads "*Welcome Home*"..... and that's no lie.

Arthur Wood.  
Kerrville Kronikles 06/03  
[2200 words].

#### **Footnote.**

FYI the missing word in the title of the poem "Sittin' In The xxxer At Kerrville" in paragraph 3 is **shitter**. I think we'd better leave the xxx's in place, don't you ??????????