

Wildflower! Arts & Music Festival

Singer-Songwriter Stage

Michael Terry Tribute Concert, May 25, 2011



Some of the Wildflower! audience dance as Sara Hickman performs Michael Terry's favourite song Simply. © Arthur Wood

The closing event of the sixteenth Singer-Songwriter Stage at the annual three-day Wildflower! Arts & Music Festival in Richardson, Texas, while tinged with a deal of sadness, produced a memorable and evocative, sometimes humorous, celebration of a man who simply loved the spectrum of shades embraced by roots music, and who, having discovered it, for over two decades actively promoted and encouraged musicians who played it. Founded in 1982, Uncle Calvin's Coffeehouse is a smoke and alcohol-free church hall venue in the North Park area of Dallas, which has rightfully gained a reputation second to none as a national listening room.

Initially a volunteer, Michael Terry soon became the venue's tenacious booker/manager. He passed away aged 65 on April 14, 2011. According to his widow, Kendra: 'His whole thing was scouting out new people, finding musicians that really touched his heart or in which he saw potential. He would let them open for Patty Larkin, John Gorka or David Wilcox to give them exposure, and he would talk them up to other Texas venues.' Initially featuring local folk performers, under Michael's tutelage allied to his annual Kerrville Folk Festival/Camp Coho pilgrimage, Calvin's became the 'must play' venue in Dallas for national touring folk artists and bands. Back to Kendra: 'He worked with many Texas venues, helping sensibly route performing musicians through the state. Later still, he was involved with Folk Alliance.'

The scheduled Wildflower! tribute performers—Pierce Pettis, Sara Hickman and Tom Kimmel, were augmented by one of Michael's favourites, Buddy Mondlock. Front stage and centre, an electric lamp under a pyramid of logs simulated Kerrville's Coho campfire. With the musicians seated and sound checked, Michael's widow, Kendra, took her seat, centrally, immediately in front of the raised stage. Flanked by a coterie of Calvin's redoubtable volunteers something unexpected occurred—high up, behind the musicians, a banner dropped bearing a black-pen line,

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and totally unmistakable, likeness of the goateed man whose life was about to be celebrated. Pierce launched the 'in the round' with (Bob) Dylan's early career classic *The Times They Are A Changin'*. Following Hickman's ethereal take on *Shadowboxing* which she dedicated to Kendra, Kimmel's first offering was *Pages* a 2000 co-write that reflects upon time passing, and Mondlock followed with *The Leaving* a song Michael always requested.

Next up, Pierce aired the late Mark Heard's *Nod Over Coffee*, and Sara followed with *Before You Change Your Mind* from last year's ABSENCE OF BLAME. Before performing *No One Gets To Heaven*, Kimmel noted that his Calvin's debut was one of his first solo performances in Texas—"I'm grateful he booked me again." Kimmel also recalled the occasion when his trio the Sherpas performed at the Cottonwood Festival and how Michael approached each member individually suggesting that since they were the better player, they should enjoy the biggest financial cut. Kimmel added: "That's when I began to get an idea, what a rascal Michael Terry was. Of course it endeared him to me." Yet to be released on a recording, Mondlock reprised *The Golden Room* which he performed at Michael and Kendra's wedding. Making a guest appearance on keyboards, Bill Ward, festival performer/sound engineer, then offered a vocally chilling rendition of the late Dave Carter's *When I Go*.

Prior to singing *We Will Meet Again*, Pettis regaled the audience with a tale of how Jimmy Landry—who bears a striking resemblance to actor Christopher Lloyd—was late for a Calvin's appearance. Undeterred Hickman, who was in the audience, stepped into the breach and performed a set as Landry. When Jimmy finally arrived at the venue, Sara attempted to convince everyone it was Lloyd. Breaking a string 'on behalf of Michael,' she switched to Kimmel's guitar—"This one smells pretty good"—and finally settled for Mondlock's. Those audience members seated by the stage responded to her request to form couples and slow dance while she performed *Simply*, Michael's favourite song. Kimmel and Mondlock performed their co-write, *Poetic Justice*, as a duet, and Buddy prefaced *The Kid* with: "I'm so glad to be here. Michael was so good to me." Messrs. Pettis and Kimmel, two thirds of the New Agrarians, drew the tribute to a close with the Kimmel/Danny Flowers collaboration *Ride Across The River*.

On behalf of the Singer-Songwriter Stage at the Wildflower! Arts & Music Festival and in recognition of Michael's tireless support of musicians at Uncle Calvin's and other statewide venues, Al Johnson presented Kendra Terry with a Wildflower! Lifetime Achievement Award. When I spoke with Buddy Mondlock following the tribute concert he recalled: "Michael saw me at Kerrville in 1989, and booked me for Calvin's. In the process, he realised: 'This guy doesn't have an agent.' Although he had never done it before, Michael took it upon himself to be my booking agent and was a huge help in getting my career going and keeping it sustained." Tom Kimmel recalled how Michael Terry: "was a little crusty on the outside, but had a marshmallow centre," while Pierce Pettis offered: "Some of the best shows I've ever done in my life have been at Calvin's. The people are so great to work with. Michael was the ringleader, and chose great people. Calvin's volunteers are more professional than some professionals I work with." The first Calvin's performance that Michael Terry attended was one given by the unsinkable Sara Hickman. "Michael and I laughed, argued, cried, smiled, and grew into a deeper relationship, especially as we grew older. I was thrilled when he married Kendra. I thought she brought him true joy and balance. Michael will be missed, and I am grateful for the opportunity to have known him."

Here's insights from gentlemen thoroughly familiar, like Michael was, with presenting musicians in performance, namely Wildflower! producer Al Johnson and Kerrville's now retired founder/producer Rod Kennedy. The former offered: "Over the year's Michael has been my sounding board, any crazy idea we'd first run it past him. Because of the volunteers he brought from Calvin's the artists feel comfortable, and we've gained a solid reputation as a festival," while the latter added: "He was like the songs that our songwriters sing, a man full of goodness and insight, gentleness and kindness—yet he could nail something down if he had to. I don't understand why the great guys go first." Finally, here's a closing comment from Kendra Terry: "Terri Hendrix and Lloyd Maines have purchased a bench for the mainstage at Kerrville and the inscription will read: 'Remember Michael Terry. All about the song. Camp Coho.'" Ain't that the truth! Michael Terry knew that it will always be about the song. **Arthur Wood**



Al Johnson (Wildflower! Festival producer) and Kendra Terry following the posthumous presentation of a Wildflower! Lifetime Achievement Award to Michael Terry. © Arthur Wood