

A 1985 Interview with Rod Kennedy [1930 – 2014]
- Founder of Kerrville Folk Festival

Sadly departed but never to be forgotten.....he lived for the sake of the song



Rod Kennedy - Mainstage, the Kennedy Memorial Theatre, 2011 Kerrville Folk Festival (Folk Villager)

Rod Kennedy's legacy is incalculable for those who truly love music, he departed this earthly plane on Monday 14th April 2014. R.I.P.

The following "warts and all" late May 1986 interview with Mr. Kennedy, the founder of the Kerrville Folk Festival, was the lead feature in the debut issue of the Kerrville Kronikle fanzine sometime around 1988. No serendipity, that placement was intentional. The 1986 Festival, the fifteenth, was my first. That year also marked the sesquicentennial of the Texas state. Prior to the event I probably thought, if I'd had one, that I was going to see and hear a "bunch of Texas musicians perform." I rapidly learned that Kerrville painted on a much larger canvas, musically and socially. For the duration of the event, the Quiet Valley Ranch becomes a self-contained living, pulsating community. A place that cares, a place to share, a place to repair, a place to find sanity.....and much more. In addition to the post-interview Addendum 1988 that appeared in Issue # 1, following that there's a narrative that attempts to portray Kerrville Folk Festival 1988 – 2014. I had been on the ranch for seven days when this interview took place.....

The interview with Rod Kennedy was conducted at one of the picnic tables in the seated area of the Kerrville Theatre main stage on the afternoon of Thursday 29th May 1986. Thanks to Bob Gibson for the introduction.

Where do we start.



My early childhood was spent in Buffalo, which is in upstate New York. I was born in 1930. My education was completed in both public and private schools. I started singing with a dance band in Buffalo in 1946, when I was 16. That was with the Bob Creighton Orchestra. I also came to Texas in 1946, and went to High School here for a year. Later I went to High School in Albany, New York. Then I attended College in Boston and later joined the Marine Corps., for a few years.

Was there a musical background in your family.

My dad was a barbershop harmony singer. He was one of the founders of the Buffalo Chapter of the S.P.E.B.S.Q.S.A.. The barbershop quartet, the Buffalo Bills who were in the "Music Man" - the Broadway musical - came from our Chapter. Society for the Preservation and Encouragement of Barbershop Quartet Singing in America Inc. is what the initials stand for. My mother was musical. She played the ukulele and sang, and almost married Al Jolson. My older brother was musical and he played piano. I was in choirs when I was a kid. Episcopal Church choirs, High School and College

chorales and Glee clubs. I also sang with the dance band, for money. By the time I was 18, and I was in Albany, I had a radio show on a local station WABY.

Were you the featured singer.

There was me and a girl, hosting what was called the "Backyard Follies". It was a children's show, broadcast live from a downtown theatre, where all the kids would come down. I think it was a babysitting service, but I'm not sure. The parents could go shopping, while the children were "out of their hair". It was a good show. We did a lot of music. I was also in the Glee Club there. Then I moved to Boston, for my freshman year of College. I was president of the Jazz Club of Boston and produced concerts there, at Symphony Hall and Tufts College and other halls. That was where I met George Wein, who eventually produced the Newport Folk Festivals. George was in College at B.U. - Boston University, and I was at Emerson. He was a jazz pianist by hobby, and we were associated with Frankie Newton, the trumpet player who recorded with Billie Holliday. We opened a Frankie Newton Room at the Fencegate Hotel with George playing piano and Frankie playing trumpet. We were involved with all those people - Edmund Hall, Wild Bill Davidson - a lot of people who were two-beat musicians. Dixieland artists of the time, like Kenny Ball, the English trumpet player. That style of music.

What sparked your interest to start producing concerts. Did you feel there was a gap there.

I was an enthusiast of traditional jazz. I found a real good band that had Bobby Wilbur on clarinet and soprano sax. He was a young protege of Sidney Bechet. That band also included, Dick Welstead the ragtime piano player, and some of the Red Hot Peppers, and the late Pops Foster on bass. We formed a Jazz Club and became interested in greeting the band, when they got back from playing in Nice, France and places like that. Then we began producing other concerts. I guess that's where I really started producing, when I was 18. I went into the Marine Corps. when I was 21. In 1954, I came back to the University of Texas, as a 24 year old freshman. I studied Radio and Television, which teaches you

everything - regulations, how to cue a record, broadcast ethics and all of that. In 1957, I bought my radio station KHFI-FM, and that's where I did the folk music radio show. That's how I began doing what I'm doing now. The station is still on the air, with a different format and a different owner. It was independently ours till 1968. Then, we bought an AM station and a TV station. Put those on the air, and then I found out I didn't like television. I left those stations in about 1972, and that's when I started the Kerrville Folk Festival.

Tell us a little about the programming on KHFI-FM.

Apart from the folk music show, it was classical music, mostly - generally recordings. We did some live performances as well. The first stereo recordings that were done in Austin were done by us in 1956-57. On the folk music show, I played the recordings that were available at that time – for instance, the Lomax's Library of Congress recordings, The Limeliters and Ed McCurdy. There was not much foreign folk music available then - mostly American, and some of it commercial American folk music. Later we did specials on people like Harry Belafonte and Judy Collins. In about 1962, I received a call from Ruth Hester, Carolyn Hester's mother who enquired if I would present her daughter in a concert. She'd been in New York and was having some success. Carolyn wanted to come home to Austin and do a concert. Her new album was about to come out on Columbia Records and featured a then unknown harmonica player, Bob Dylan. I presented Carolyn and her brother and a duo called Tommy and Sandy, at the Austin Civic Theatre which had a capacity of about 175 people. I think we played two nights. That was really the beginning, and why we're here today. After that, I began to do the Summer Music Festival in Austin for KHFI-FM. We did that for four of five years. It was a six-night format. We did folk music on Monday, traditional jazz on Tuesday, choral music on Wednesday, modern jazz on Thursday, chamber music on Friday and a little Festival Orchestra playing Mozart and what not, on the Saturday. The Monday night concerts outdrew all the concerts for the rest of the week. On these concerts we had people like Tom Paxton, Mark Spoelstra and Segal Fry and some of the people that are here.

The Zilker Park Summer Concerts which you presented, tell us a little about the first one.

That was with Tom Paxton, Roger Abrahams and the Dallas County Jug Band. That band included Michael Martin Murphy, Steven Fromholz, Marty Javors and Segal Fry. A bunch of interesting people who were to surface repeatedly during my life.

Had you by this stage, noticed the divergent fields in folk music - the traditionalists and the new singer/songwriters who wrote their own material.

I didn't really know much about traditional folk, except what I had heard on the records that I played on the show. Some of the young artists were singing things like Huddie Ledbetter songs and Pete Seeger songs and I didn't know where they came from. I just knew they were alive and vibrant. I didn't always agree with the political position they took, but I thought they said it real well. I have always been a conservative, and I'm amongst a hotbed of liberals here, but I find liberals far more exiting than conservatives.



In 1967 you opened "The Chequered Flag" club in Austin, and next door was the Texas Speed Museum.

Yes. I'd heard Allen Damron at the "Eleventh Door" on San Jacinto in Austin and thought he should be playing in a better place, so we built him one. He ran it, and we had a lot of performers come through

there. Steven Fromholz and Dan McCrimmon who were performing as Frummox, Kenneth Threadgill, Gordon Lightfoot and Ramblin' Jack Elliot. Bill and Bonnie Hearne met there, and got married later. Jerry Jeff Walker - Carolyn Hester, came back into my life again. Jimmy Driftwood and a whole bunch of other people played there. The Texas Speed Museum was my collection of racing cars. I sold all of those. I have a tractor now. We had MG TA's, TD's, MGB's and a Lister MG. Three Ferrari's and two Maserati's. We also had a birdcage Maserati and a 1935 Grand Prix Maserati. A RSK Porsche which was driven by Ken Miles, one of your countrymen. He developed the Cobra and Mustang cars that ran at Le Mans.

You seem to have a deep affection for motor racing.

Absolutely. My father was an attorney for Bernie Oldfield, who was an early racing car driver. My older brother raced stock cars. I raced sports cars very effectively. We won 42 races in our first year on tracks in Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana and Arkansas. These were on road racing courses. I won the 12 hour duration race at Sebring in 1971 in a Lancia, which was, an under 2 litre touring car. The previous year, I had been a guest driver on the Lancia team, which included Innes Ireland. Lancia dropped out the following year, and we were an independent effort when we won the 12 hour duration race. I also raced in Mexico. I eventually got out of racing because it frightened my wife, and it was expensive. I also lost a lot of friends who were drivers. Joe Siffert, Pedro Rodriguez and Jimmy Clark - a whole bunch of good friends. Jim Hall flipped his Chapperal at Las Vegas and was badly burned. I just decided it wasn't fair to NancyLee to continue to indulge myself, because I like to go at 160mph. I quit in the early seventies.

Why did you stop organising the Zilker Park Summer Music Festival.

We couldn't get the police to adopt the correct attitude. They were too permissive. They were allowing kids to throw fireworks in the aisles and stuff, and I just quit. It really is what started me looking for some other place. The "some other place," was suggested to me by telephone in December of 1971. Murray Coates, executive director of the Texas Commission for the Arts and Humanities called and said, "There's going to be an Arts and Crafts Fair at Kerrville with no music. Don't you think the private sector should do something about that." I said, "Yes, I'll call and see if they have a little Concert Hall. Where's the Fair being held?" He said, "It's going to be at Schreiner College". I said, "When does it begin and end ?" He said, "It begins at ten in the morning and ends at six o' clock." "Good," I said, "We'll do some evening concerts on the weekend." I came down here, and looked at the little 1200 seat hall. We hired it for three nights - June 1st, 2nd and 3rd, 1972.



This is the Municipal Auditorium on Main Street In Kerrville.

Yes. We had a total seating capacity of 3,600 for the three nights, and we sold 2,700 tickets. We had a real good turn out. In fact on the Saturday night, the second day - the 2nd of June, the hall was really full. We were very worried, that we would have a problem with people trying to get in, without tickets. The second year, we had the same three concerts, but on the Saturday and Sunday nights, we added a second concert at midnight. Midnight to three am, and they sold out. We had 5,600 people altogether, and again we were frightened, because people were rushing through the doors and pushing each other.

I understand that in 1973 you had to turn people away.

Well, we didn't actually turn people away. We put them in the aisles and everything. You know, George Wein had had trouble at Newport with the kids not being able to get in. The police turned the horses on them, and then the kids started throwing

rocks at cars. It frightened us, to see this "stampeding cattle" attitude on the part of people trying to get into our concerts. I either had to quit doing the Folk Festival, or I had to buy some place where we could go outdoors. Some place where there would be room for everybody. That's when I bought this ranch. We bought it in '73, and started working on it during December. In '74 we had our first outdoor Festival. It seems to me, that we went to four days that year. I don't think we went to five days till our fifth anniversary. We added the camping in '75, we only had the Theatre ready in 1974. In 1981, we went to two weekends and the next year we're going to three weeks.

Do you see any potential end to this spiraling progression of adding an extra week every five years.

Well, that's my conservative background I suppose. Some people would jump in and do it all at once. My feeling was to let the fans, and the space, and the business pressures determine our growth. I think that we're getting to the place where a lot of the original people already think it's too big. When we had 5 to 6000 people, they thought that was way too many. I felt that if we went to three weekends, then we'd siphon off some of the numbers that we now get. People would be going to other weekends and it would start growing again. Maybe we'll have to add a fourth weekend someday. I'm 56 years old. This is our 15th anniversary this year. I feel like I can continue doing this, if I stay current and alert, and in tune with the young people, for ten more years. By then we could be running for four or five weeks. Who knows? I'm sure that the Festivals will survive without me.

You seem to be totally in control of what is going on around here, particularly during the concerts, backstage and onstage. It reminds me of a pyramid. There is one guy there at the top, and he calls all the shots and everybody else follows.

That's right. Consensus was tried at Newport, and it failed miserably. The Board of Directors tried to do something like this, by Committee. There was too much give and take, too many compromises, too many deals. I'm absolutely, totally open, and up front. I pick the artists that I feel are appropriate. I reject the ones that are not appropriate, or the ones who do not behave appropriately. Our attitude is that this is an inclusive community for everybody, until they screw up. At that point, they may be asked to either revise their attitude, or leave. That's an afterthought though. It's not the premise of how we do it, it's just



the way it is. We have appointed a dozen to fourteen Directors at Kerrville, and these are musicians who know that I trust them implicitly. They can call me at any hour of the day or night. They can make any suggestions or any criticism, at any time. That's what that job means. They have no duties, except to keep me, the way they like me. I require a disciplined situation for them to perform in, because I think they play best when everything is known. The quality of the sound system, the quality of the lighting, the length of their set, the amount of their pay, the amount of advertising and publicity, their accommodation and their treatment. Everybody is treated with respect,

as an individual, and for the most part, that works. I'd say it works 98% of the time. When it doesn't work, it's usually that either, I am fatigued and I'm shortsighted, or I am rude, without meaning to be. Alternatively the other person may be tired, or using drugs, or some other problem, that I am not aware of.

Since 1972 there has been one guy who has done all the recordings for the Kerrville Folk Festival albums.

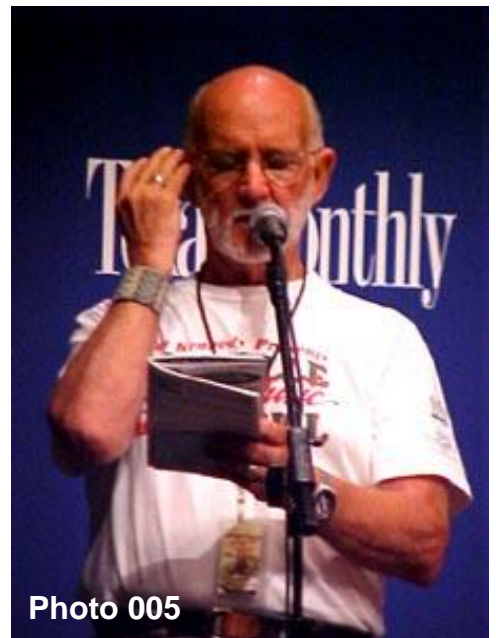
Pedro Gutierrez. He's a Cuban refugee who put together and built his own recording equipment, back when I was in the radio business. We would get commercials recorded, and he would do them. When we started Kerrville, he came up here too. He's never been paid for what he does. We pay his hotel room and his gasoline and some expenses. He has never been paid for an hour of studio time, or an hour of editing or anything. He has just done it all for the love of the music. We've done, I suppose, fourteen or fifteen albums over the years.

Can we look at some facets of what goes on at the Festival. Who appeared at the first Festival.

There were twelve performers, who were all friends of mine. Mance Lipscomb, John Lomax Jr., Michael Martin Murphey, Ray Wylie Hubbard's trio Three Faces West, Allen Damron, Carolyn Hester, Bill and Bonnie Hearne, Bill Moss who is a black disc jockey who plays a 12 string and sings a lot of blues. Segal Fry, a friend of Roger Abrahams, who sang a lot of Woody Guthrie tunes. (ED. NOTE. It's funny how time plays tricks with your memory. The liner notes to the 1972 Folk Festival album quotes "thirteen standing ovations" over the three nights of concerts. Of the artists quoted by Rod, Bill Moss appears on Vol. 2 of the 1973 album, while Three Faces West are included on the 1974 album. The following artists not mentioned by Rod, were included on the 1972 album liner notes - Texas Fever, Dick Barrett, Robert Shaw, Steven Fromholz, Peter Yarrow and Kenneth Threadgill. Threadgill's recordings proved unusable and Murphey couldn't get recording clearance – so neither appeared on the final vinyl).

Segal Fry had an association with the "Chequered Flag" didn't he.

I brought Segal in there, to help me run it. Eventually he bought the club. Anyway, there were twelve performers scheduled. (ED. NOTE. Things should now become clear about the famous first thirteen). When Peter, Paul and Mary broke up in 1970 in Austin, it took them about a year to get out single albums of their own. They were all released by Warner Bros. simultaneously. I was called by George Wein from the Newport office, and asked if I would go out on the road with Peter Yarrow. He'd never been out on the road by himself before. He'd always had his management and his booking people around him. I took Peter out, and this was probably in February of 1972. He said, "I hear you're having a Folk Festival. Can I come?" and I said, "Sure. We're only paying everybody \$100.00." He said, "I don't care. I'll come anyway." He envisioned the New Folk Concerts for emerging songwriters, which he had conceived at Newport. Buffy St. Marie was discovered at Newport. Peter wasn't even listed on the first poster, because he wasn't part of the Festival. He joined us anyway. His spirit, became the spirit of Kerrville. That was the loving inclusive idea and the non-competitive idea, the sharing idea. I think that was as healthy a start as we could have had. You've got to realize that I was a middle class, right-wing Republican conservative and a broadcaster. I was into broadcast ethics. I belonged to the Rotary Club and all that business. I wasn't really into protesting and that sort of thing. I wasn't aware of that sort of thing.



This year, you had 210 entries for the New Folk Contest. How many entrants did you have in 1972. Have you ever exceeded the figure of 210.

In 1972, we had twenty-three songwriters but it varies from year to year. Generally it's around 165 to 200. Since its inception, New Folk winners like Kurt Van Sickle, Nanci Griffith, Lindsay Haisley, Chuck Pyle, John Ims, Bobby Bridger and Rick Beresford have all moved on to become recording artists. On this year's Festival main bill, out of the sixty-odd performers, nineteen are former New Folk winners. **(ED. NOTE.** Rod forgot to include Lyle Lovett whose first self-titled album, for MCA, enjoyed phenomenal success. His second album "Pontiac", despite a number of false starts, was finally released Stateside during the second week of January 1988. Lyle's old school friend, Robert Earl Keen has also won the Contest and has an album available on the Philo label. Of the 1986 New Folk award winners, I would suggest that Suzanne Sherwin, who has already recorded an album in Nashville, is a name to look out for in the future).

During one of the early years at Kerrville, the Flatlanders turned up.

They tell me that they appeared in 1972. I think they came in 1973. It seems to me, we were walking through the Arts and Crafts Fair and these kids were sitting under a tent playing this funky music. Jerry Jeff said, "Why don't you put them on the Festival with us tonight." I said, "Yes, I guess we could do that. They sound pretty good and it might be fun." I asked them which ones had bought their tickets, and which ones hadn't and so forth. I can't remember if we refunded their tickets or not. I don't believe we did. They came and played, and it was six or eight years later, that I found out that it was Joe Ely, Butch Hancock, Jimmie Gilmore, Steve Weeson and Tony Pearson. They've been real good friends of ours ever since. We've had a couple of Flatlanders Reunions in the last few years.

Over at the other end of the ranch on Chapel Hill, there's a cross, an alter and some wind chimes. Which year were they erected.

The cross and the alter were put on Chapel Hill in 1975, when they were consecrated for religious purposes by the Rev. Charlie Sumners. The idea for this was mine. The organized church really bothers me. The institution called "the church", that spends most of its money and energy on maintaining buildings, alter guilds, air conditioning committees, robes and frocks and ceremonial things like that - they're not saving many souls or feeding the hungry. They're not solving the problems of the day. I came very close to God in the trenches of Korea as a Marine. I had a hard time finding a church, or a place where I could worship. Chapel Hill fills that space for me. The Folk Mass is about as real and as genuine as it could be. I feel real close up there.



Also on Chapel Hill, is the Ballad Tree. Around that tree every afternoon, there is an informal concert - The Ballad Tree Sessions. Whose idea was that.

That was Bobby Bridger. Bobby had been a New Folk artist in 1972, and it was fun then. It was a sharing experience. A lot of fun. By 1975/76, the record companies started sending their singers to the New Folk Contest. Some of the young professionals also began getting into it. No matter how hard we told them to relax, it became a very competitive situation. Bobby said, "Why can't we have another space and another time, for songwriters who don't have a competitive spirit, for the musicians who don't want to enter a

song, but who want to reach an audience." I said, "That sounds great." So we started the Ballad Tree.

Over towards Chapel Hill, there's a small stage where the children's concerts take place. Who suggested them.

That really was mine, and I don't like children. I've had a few crawl into my lap, that I love, but I've been married 29 years and I don't have any children. I don't want children. I have met a child that I like, but they are few and far between. I think most parents are irresponsible, and that kids are brats, and that I don't want to be around them. Nevertheless, I realize that they are the future of everything. I make jokes about it onstage. I don't know whether you've heard them or not. Every five years, I do something for the children whether they need it or not. I have young people who love children, who are around me constantly, and they keep mentioning how wonderful they are. They send their beautiful little daughters to sit on my lap and hug me, hoping that I will soften. I had heard Peter Alsop in Canada, and he'd been sending me records for years. I had met Kim Wallach from Boston. She just kind of won me with her warmth. I've been in love with Gayle Ross, the Cherokee girl, for years and years and years. I knew her even before the Festival started. When she looks at you and says, "I would like to do this," it always seems like a pretty good idea. Those three were there as a beginning, and with Bob Gibson's recent interest in children's music, through "Uncle Bob's" in Chicago, then things have really developed. Steve Gillette and a lot of other wonderful people around here seem to tolerate, to a greater extent than me, children of all ages. I thought, well this is a need, and that we should be doing something about that. The stage has been there for two years. This is the first year that we've had the money, and the time, and the organization to get the children's thing really going. We did a major effort a number of years ago, and it was a fiasco. I just decided that the people I had to do it, were not competent. They were dreamers, and they spent too much money. There were only 50 kids showed up, and it just seemed to me, not to be a practicable effort.

The Fish Fry and Concert was held last night. I was under the impression prior to the event, that it was the first one. That isn't the case, is it.

We started that in 1981. We were so surprised to still be in business after ten years, because we had lost hundreds and thousands of dollars in the rain, during the seventies. In 1975, '76 and '77 we had three Festivals a year. We had, out of those nine Festivals, six where we had two to ten inches of rain, and we lost money. We had been kept in business by patient creditors of all kinds - musicians, insurance people, banks - everybody. As we began to get to the place where it looked like we were going to make a little money, and be able to pay our debts back, we wanted to have some event that would express the gratitude that we felt, for those who had supported us - something where sponsors, advertisers and press people could come along, and where the performers could get together in a social situation. Now, the Ball which was held at the Y.O. Ranch Hilton Hotel last night, is a new thing this year. When we go to 17 days next year, we haven't decided whether to have the Fish Fry one week and the Ball the next, or to have two Fish Fries and two Balls. The Ball last night was like a High School dance. We had a great time. When you get two-hundred friends in one room, with that wonderful music from Beto and the Fairlanes - it was incredible.



How many years has the Staff Concert been running.

Steve Fromholz suggested that. It must have been four years ago, because Steve hosted the first one. Lindsay Haisley and Uncle Walt hosted the second one. Jerry Jeff hosted the third one. Steve Gillette is hosting the fourth one on Saturday. Most of the people who volunteer to work music festivals in the United States not only love music, they play music. Maybe they're not of a professional stature yet. We wind up sometimes, out of a staff of 120 people, with 60 musicians. They all play around the Campfires, and everybody knows who plays what. We designed it, that the staff would elect ten people to play the Staff Concert. In order to get more staff involved, we allow those ten people to each pick three back-up musicians from the staff. When that concert is on, nobody is watching the gates. Nobody is cleaning up. Nobody is selling T-shirts. They're all right down there, watching the show.

You said earlier that the campgrounds opened in 1975. When did the campfires become a regular occurrence.

They actually started in 1974, before the campgrounds opened. Allen Damron invited Peter Yarrow and some other people, over to his land at the other end of the ranch. I think that was '74. Maybe it wasn't. Maybe it was '76. My idea of opening the campgrounds was, I wanted people to be able to get together around the campfires. Like the bluegrass people do, under the shade trees. I knew once they began to do that, that it would be something that would bring them closer together, and that there would be a lot of music. It was a chance to hang out, and have a party. For a lot of people, it's the only chance that they get to sing. While my schedule doesn't allow me to make the campfires as much as I'd like to, it's my understanding that the music is just as good out there, as it is on stage.

You also hold a Bluegrass Festival. This year's being the thirteenth. There's also the Goodtime Music Festival. Is it constantly in your mind to keep changing and evolving with new things.



I think like a songwriter, a producer is a creative person. You do develop different ideas. I mean, it's inevitable. The Bluegrass Festival started in 1974. We found that after having the first Folk Festival, even with 6000 people, we were not going to be able to pay back the investment in the facilities that we'd developed. I looked for something else to do. At that time, it seemed me that Bluegrass was an American style of music which was valid, which was real and which was not getting any support in Texas. There was only one other Bluegrass Festival in Texas in 1974, and that was at Glen Rose. Now in 1986, there are twelve to fourteen Bluegrass Festivals in the state. They're all smaller than ours, but they exist. There's one at Nacogdoches, Texas which could develop into something pretty good. The Goodtime Festival was an attempt to serve the Celtic and traditional music fan. The Celtic movement has grown in Texas over the last seven or eight years, led by Tinkers Dam in Dallas. There has also been a lot of support from bands in Austin, San Antonio and Fort Worth and other places. They've actually formed a Celtic Music Society state-wise now.

Have you ever brought any of the British Celtic bands over to Texas.

Yes. We've had the Battlefield Band. We've had Boys of the Lough. The idea was to have a meeting place, a gathering place once a year, where all kinds of traditional music could be heard. We have square dancing and we have clogging. We have contemporary songs written in a traditional style. We have blues, and we have hillbilly music. We have bluegrass, Mexican conjunto music and mariachis and old-time swing. People like - Roy Bookbinder who plays old metal guitars. That Festival is in its fourth year this year, but it's not developing fast enough to suit me. I'm not sure that it will continue.

At one time, you held a Classical Music Festival.

We had a Classical Music Festival out here for three years. It was magnificent, but I found that the people of Kerrville were more interested in sipping tea, than in raising money. It was a social thing for them. For me, it was musical experience. For them, it was a social experience.

A place to be seen rather than to hear music.

In a way, that's a fairly good appraisal. They would not get out and raise money, and they were supposed to. I turned it over to them, and they now have the Kerrville Performing Arts Society, which handles all that. They're doing an average to mediocre job of it. I can take profits, and do Classical Music for the fun of it, when I want to.

In November this year, you're having an Anti-Litter Day.



I guess the thing that probably turned me off, about the trash and the litter on the Texas Highways, is Highway 16.(**ED. NOTE.** This Highway runs north from San Antonio, through Kerrville and peters out, just south of Wichita Falls on the Northern border of the State). This is beautiful, beautiful country and it used to be beautiful all the time. Now it is full of trash. I began to notice that the Highway to Austin was full of trash. Then I noticed the Highway to Dallas was full of trash. I began to get information from the Highways Dept. that it cost \$20,000,000 a year to pick the trash up. Now it's \$24,000,000. Six years ago it cost \$16,000,000. The cost is escalating. The event is to study the history of the litter

problem in Texas. We'll have speakers from Alco Aluminium and from Coca Cola and from the breweries. The "Beautify America" and the "Keep America Beautiful" people, will also talk about the problem. We'll discuss past attempts to solve the problem, and what we're going to do about it in the future. Currently they're spending \$2,000,000 on the "Don't mess with Texas" anti-litter campaign. Stevie Ray Vaughan and a lot of other musicians are helping with that. They've put up "Don't mess with Texas" signs, and what do you find right under those signs, but a bunch of trash strewn along the Highway. I have become an activist on behalf of cleaning up the State. I'm not going to force the issue now, but my view at this point and until November, is that we need a mandatory container deposit law in Texas. Everybody pays for every can and every bottle and every six pack and every plastic ring. If they pitch it out the window, then anybody can pick it up and get paid a nickel for it. If we appeal to their greed, then there will not be this trash. In other States where this law has been passed, they have decreased the cost of cleaning up litter by 40% to 60%. In Texas that would save us \$10 - 12,000,000 at present levels.

We need that money for our farmers, and a lot of other things. I think it's a bad example to have children out cleaning up trash. Boy Scouts and other people. This year, we're going out touring nationally, and we're going to invite people to Texas. To have our front yard filled with our garbage is disgusting to me and unacceptable.

You've just mentioned the "Celebrate Texas" national concert tour, which you are undertaking in a few weeks time. Is it something that you've wanted to do for years.

We've played 27 Texas cities over the years. We toured with a similar group, as the Kerrville Folk Festival "On The Road". We'd play groups of three concerts, over three days, in three cities, in the Spring. Then we'd play in the Fall, and the next year we'd do the same. We got to thinking in 1982 that we were going to have a big birthday party in Texas in 1986. Music pretty well reflects the culture, and helps to break down walls and what not. We thought it would be a great idea to take our music across the country. It has worked out very well. We're going to be playing a lot of good places. We start out in Austin, then go to Houston. We play Little Rock, Nashville, Washington DC - The Kennedy Centre, The Bottom Line in New York and the Summerville Theatre in Boston. At Penns Landing in Philadelphia we'll be outside for a free concert. Grant Park in Chicago will also be a free concert, and Peony Park in Omaha is also an outdoor show. Then we go to the Paramount Theatre in Denver, Colorado and finally back home to Dallas.

You didn't mention any West Coast dates.

There has been some interest there. Not just there, but also in Wyoming and in North and South Dakota. We also want to go to Europe and Scotland and England. I'm an Anglophile. I've driven Jaguars and MG's and Austins and Lotus racing cars. That was my first connection with the English, and with their spirit in World War II. I'm part English anyway, and Irish and Scots and French. I want to go to England very much. I want to be there. I want to run up to the first Englishman I see, and hug him, and see what he does. I have a great respect for the English, even though I think they've screwed up their Government. Ours is screwed up too, so it's OK. The people are great though.



Most other Festivals are, drive there, park your vehicle, see the show and then drive home. It's different here.

There is a community here. What we have here is rare, relative to other Festivals in the States. There are Bluegrass Festivals and there is the Philadelphia Folk Festival, and other Festivals where this kind of thing exists, yet they don't have the same spirit. The physical facilities, and the camping out and the campfires exist, but they're different. The performers and the fans don't mix the way it is here. It's just mostly the fans having a campfire and picking their guitars. We would not expect to impose our system on anybody. We just want to share our music with them, and hear them play and be with them – in England, Ireland and Scotland; maybe Switzerland and Germany and a few other places. As the Edinburgh Festival invitation developed, then somebody said, "You've got to come to London first". Then

somebody said, "I'd like to have you in Frankfurt if you're going to be in London". It just got out of hand and I had to say, "Well this will have to happen another year, not this year".

So 1987 may be the year for "Kerrville over Europe".

Yes, I really think it is a strong possibility. I have a Festival in Midland Odessa, Texas in July. I may have another one in Santa Fe, and I have one in October in Mexico. The months that we are available are very limited. If we can find an invitation, and a proper financial guarantee that we can get back home, then we'd like very much to come over - maybe not with as large a group of people that we're touring nationally with. Somebody wants us to go to Australia - because of the interest between Australia and Texas over the sesqui-centennial. There are possibilities there. We'll certainly pursue them. I would love to go to England. I'd rather go to England I think than anywhere else, except maybe Ireland. I have some Irish blood and I'd love to see Ireland. I grew up celebrating St. Patrick's Day and I have a feeling of kinship for the Irish.



Can we talk about a gentleman who appeared on stage the other night - David Amram.

David is a Jewish, middle class, Philadelphian who is a brilliant musician. He is a bottomless source of energy. He is a classical music composer, a French horn player, a jazz pianist and a flute player. He's a renaissance man. He was a French horn player for the National Symphony Orchestra. He was Leonard Bernstein's first composer in residence for the New York Philharmonic. He has composed works that have been premiered by a dozen Symphony Orchestras in two or three countries. He has conducted the New York

Philharmonic, the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Chicago Symphony and the Cairo Symphony. He loves his classical music and makes the greater part of his living conducting major orchestras. He is also involved in producing his works of chamber music, operas, symphonies and shorter works. He is one of the Top 20 American composers who belong to BMI - Broadcast Music Incorporated. In America he is one of the Top 20 played classical composers. He has a broad musical spectrum. He also has a broad viewpoint of what is valid musically. He feels that the music in Texas is, in many ways, much more valid than Bach or Beethoven - much less contrived and much more natural, and much more communicative. He likes to be a part of that. He came down here 7 or 8 years ago, as a guest of Bobby Bridger. Three or four years ago, he became a Director of our Festival. He's as good a street musician as I've met. He has conducted my Orchestra as well, on my Classical Music Festivals. He has conducted for me in other cities, Port Arthur and so forth. I knew of him before Bobby Bridger brought him to Kerrville. I'd seen him in concert with the Austin Symphony. I knew about him, but everybody knows about David Amram, who is connected with classical music.

He seemed to me to be rather outrageous, because here was this guy with a classical music background, dressed in a rather disheveled manner, and yet musically putting it all together.

Well, I think that one of the things that is wrong with society these days, and wrong with the world, is that we have preconceived notions about everything. It makes it difficult for us to get along, as human

beings, and as members of different countries. There are notions about clothing, about accents, about hair, about music and about fashion. All of the trappings of man are undoing him. Music is the one trapping which can pull mankind together. That is, unless you formalize it, and put it on a pedestal. Call it "his Grace" or "her Grace". It's got to cost so much, and you have to wear this to go hear it. You have to sit in box seats and you have to look through opera glasses. Those kinds of trappings hinder reaching out to each other, touching each other, communicating with each other, practicing humanity. Mankind is blessed with a lot of things - the ability to communicate specifically to his friends and enemies, about how he feels and what he feels, what he needs, and what he doesn't need or like. Yet, he builds up these barriers - coats and ties, and silk stockings and high heels, and all the phony things that go with this society that we've created. It serves no real purpose, except to spend money and build walls between people. David Amram says, "Music takes down the walls".

You planned to have a book about the first fifteen years of the Kerrville Festivals available for this year's Festival, and written by Larry Willoughby. Is this the same person who is a musician, and is also Rodney Crowell's cousin (ED. NOTE. Got that one wrong! Yes, there are two Larry Willoughby's, because I met the musician one time).

I don't think Larry is a musician. Larry wrote a book titled "*Texas Rhythm, Texas Rhyme*", and he is a teacher of History at Austin Community College. He has a tremendous interest in music, and the music scene in Austin as it evolved, which has gotten him involved. His book will be out in time for Thanksgiving, this year.

When will we have the 1982 Folk Festival album, which is the next one in the series.

The 1982 "Festival Highlights", will only be available as a cassette. They're working on the labels currently. The tapes are finished and it should be out this weekend. In future, we're going to do cassettes the middle four years and do a double album on each fifth anniversary. We've got too far behind, and we'll never catch up if we continue to do albums. We can't afford it - financially or physically. The time and the effort needed is too great. The cassettes have more songs, pro-rata for less money. The annotation, the notes and stuff are not there, as of right now. We can do them, but it would take me 25 or 30 more hours to get the notes. Who is playing with who, and that sort of thing (Yawns).

It's day eight of the Festival now. Are things beginning to catch up on you.

Well, people put out publications or publicity stating that they can do something when they can't. They make promises and they make it look real good. Then you do business with them, and they don't do what they say. That's why we try so hard here, to do what we say. To give people more for their money and more for their time, than they get anywhere else. We try to keep the prices low. The food prices, the beverage prices and everything. It has escalated over the years. It has gotten higher and higher, because that's the way the economy is, but we try to keep it reasonable.



Addendum 1988

On the evening of Friday 22nd May 1987, the small Texas town of Saragosa, which lies about 400 miles due west of Kerrville was virtually wiped out by a tornado. The weather in that area remained unsettled for quite a number of weeks afterwards, including the period during which the extended seventeen day, 16th annual Kerrville Folk Festival was held. As a result of the almost continuous rain, the paying customers didn't come through the turnstiles in sufficient numbers, and the Festival suffered a financial loss of somewhere in the region of \$50 - 60,000. In an attempt to recoup some of the losses, a number of fundraising events were held during the Fall of the year. We can only pray that they were a success, and that the Festival manages to weather this particular storm.

Regarding the Larry Willoughby book, to the best of my knowledge, it has never been published. The release of the "Live Highlights" cassettes moved on apace, with the appearance of the 1983 and 1984 tapes during the past year.

The Still Evolving Kerrville Folk Festival: 1988 – 2014

Where to begin? So much remains the same, yet in terms of the Quiet Valley Ranch's physical layout and festival events, so much has changed. In terms of executing those changes and improvements, from the outset let's congratulate the countless legions of faithful Festival volunteers for their decades of tireless effort.

Over the past twenty-six years the festival has weathered a raft of financial storms. The Texas Folk Music Foundation (TFMF), a non-profit public benefit 501(c)(3) corporation, was formed in 1999 and in 2008 acquired the assets of the Kerrville Folk Festivals, thereby ensuring the events long-term future. Amen to that.

On Saturday June 3rd 1989 Threadgill Theatre hosted a two-hour long Native American Tribute featuring Bobby Bridger, Carolyn Hester, Bill Miller, Gayle Ross, David Amram and the late Roxy Gordon and Floyd Westerman. It remains one of the most amazing musical events I have ever witnessed. For a few years, Kerrville subsequently hosted the four-day long Native American Festival of the Eagle – a midweek festival within the festival.



The 1996 25th Festival ran for a mind numbing twenty-five days. I was there for the duration, and fellow Kerrverts having become acclimatized to eighteen days duration, the additional week was akin to tussling with the Twilight Zone. It was accomplished willingly, for the song.....

In April of the following year, as a storm passed over the ranch, the Chapel Hill Ballad Tree was struck by lightning. While the tree may be gone, for those 'mad dogs and musicians' who care to share mid-afternoon songs the Ballad Tree Sessions remain alive and thrive. Useable parts of the Ballad Tree now provide shade and shelter on Chapel Hill. What can be recycled is recycled.

Willoughby's book never appeared, but during the Spring of 1998 Rod's festival history MUSIC FROM THE HEART was published in slip-case hardback and soft-back format. In the copy that Rod sent to me he wrote, *"Here it is at long last – more than you want to know about my life! I hope you enjoy traveling the long road with me."* As I noted at the outset of this tribute, Kerrville 1986 was a personal revelation. For as long as my legs can carry me, I'll be a willing pilgrim on that long road.....

In 2002 Rod produced his final Kerrville Folk Festival and, bowing out, handed over the reins to his long-time assistant Dalis Allen. In retirement Rod mellowed considerably, and was a presence on the ranch most days during the ensuing festivals. Festival regulars could doubtless write volumes regarding their personal moments with Rod. I could, but they are personal. The self-confessed, staunch conservative even became a radical liberal and voted for Barack Obama.

Mainstage was subsequently renamed the Kennedy Memorial Theatre, and along the perimeter of this outdoor theatre, craft and food booths remain a Festival staple. Conscious of the passing of time, and the Festival's significance, in 2009 one booth was set aside for the volunteer run Kerrville History Project.

The Kerrville Folk Festival never accomplished the plan to tour Europe. The shorter, sometimes three-day, for a few years four-day, festival held over the Labour Day weekend – aka Little Folk to longtime attendees – succeeded the Bluegrass Festival and ran as the Wine & Music Festival for a number of years, complete with wine tasting seminars organized by the Hill Country's numerous vineyards. It was renamed the Kerrville Fall Music Festival last year.

Between the opening and second weekend of the main May/June festival aka Big Folk, the Songwriters School continues to flourish, to which, over the years, other daytime/midweek events have been added including a Roots/Blues Guitar Workshop, Harmonica Workshop, Capo Workshops, a Music Law Panel Discussion, and a Professional Development Program for Teachers. There's probably more, so please forgive any omission.

Out in the campgrounds, the campfire jam sessions (sometimes without the 'fire' if a burn ban is in place) remain a 24/7 festival staple. There's also weekend Hill Country bike rides, and canoe trips on the Guadalupe, the Sunday Folk Song Services and a Saturday Shabbat Service. As I mentioned at the outset it's a self-contained living, pulsating community.

The campground Kerrtree Store continues to be a major social gathering point, where food and beverages can be purchased. Located between the Store and Threadgill Theatre, two further food outlets have appeared in recent years.

For those campground musicians who have recordings to sell, Staff Rekerds is located adjacent to the Store. I presume by now you've realized the significance of the letter K at Kerrville!

If my math is correct the current and magnificent Threadgill Theatre, is the third incarnation of this campground structure. From a musician and audience viewpoint it can't be compared with the original, basic structure circa the 1980's, but it's grand spending under the new canopy. If the Threadgill seating is now a revelation, replacement of the aging mainstage seating began a few years ago.

Late last century parts of the campground were landscaped to allow for the parking of RV's. Kidsville, directly opposite the Kerrtree Store, is a place where youngsters of all ages can indulge in activities –



pretty much 24/7. As for the Saturday/Sunday weekend Kids Concerts, and long a Threadgill staple, following parental requests they were successfully moved from an afternoon to a morning slot a few years ago. If I have omitted other significant physical improvements, it's purely due to time constraint and not intention.

The annual 'Live Highlights' cassettes were issued through the 1991 Festival. Between 1992 and 2003 Vermont based Silverwolf Records issued a series of CD Festival recordings. The vinyl/cassette Festival recordings 1972 – 1991 were re-released as two, limited edition 10 CD sets – THE EARLY YEARS AT KERRVILLE and TEN GREAT YEARS AT KERRVILLE. Sadly, post 1992, the Vermont imprint did not produce an annual recording series. Mirroring technology pioneered by the Grateful Dead, subject to each acts agreement, since 2004 full set performances have been released on CD's by the festival. The Festival Link website also began retailing them online a couple of years ago [<http://flink.livedownloads.com/home.asp>]

For me the New Folk Songwriting Contest, the Saturday/Sunday opening weekend finals and the Winners show the following Sunday, will always be the pulsating heart and soul of Kerrville. A list of past finalists and winners is lodged at http://www.happenstance-music.com/KFF_History.asp Over the years, in describing the contest Rod often resorted to the poetic "*We grow our own crops here*" and it is true...so totally true. On Sunday 2nd June, prior to the 2013 Winners Concert at Threadgill Theatre, sat in his wheelchair, Mr. Kennedy delivered a short introduction in which he captured the history and essence of the event. Sadly his words were not recorded, but thankfully they're swirling around in the ranch's ether and in the hearts of those who listened. Not in the best of health during recent years, I suspect that Mr. Kennedy was knowingly bidding farewell to his beloved festival and its patrons. Rod we love you, for the sake of the song, given by your open heart your earthly legacy is boundless.....

<http://www.kerrville-music.com/>

Brought to you from the desk of the Folk Villager

aka Arthur Wood.

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001 Rod Kennedy, Quiet Valley Ranch, Kerrville - circa 1985 (MariLu Park)

002 Rod Kennedy, Native American Tribute, Threadgill Theatre – 1989 Kerrville Folk Festival.

003 L. to R. Peter Yarrow & Rod Kennedy. At mainstage Rod presents Peter with a birthday gift – 1996 Kerrville Folk Festival.

004 Threadgill Theatre (stage right) Rod Kennedy introduces Mary Gauthier, Jack Saunders & Peggy Bertsch - 2000 Kerrville Folk Festival.

005 Rod Kennedy introduces at mainstage - 2001 Kerrville Wine & Music Festival.

006 2003 Kerrville New Folk Song Contest Winners at Threadgill Theatre. L. to R. Steve Gillette, Rob Heath, David Bailey, Dalis Allen, Kathy Hussey, Anais Mitchell, Colin Brooks, Jonathan Byrd and Rod Kennedy.

007 Rod Kennedy & Dalis Allen at Threadgill Theatre - 2003 Kerrville Folk Festival.

008 Another picture of Rod Kennedy & Dalis Allen at Threadgill Theatre - 2003 Kerrville Folk Festival.

009 Songwriter Stage at the 2011 Wildflower! Arts & Music Festival in Richardson, Texas. Rod is presented with a Lifetime Award for his services to Texas Music. L. to R. Sarah Hickman, Rod Kennedy and Al Johnson (Producer, Songwriter Stage).

010 2011 Kerrville New Folk Song Contest Winners at Threadgill Theatre, Rod Kennedy introduces A. J. Roach.

011 2011 Kerrville New Folk Song Contest Winners at Threadgill Theatre. L. to R. Steve Gillette, Rod Kennedy, David Moss, Grace Pettis, A. J. Roach, Megan Burt, Mai Bloomfield, Cassie Peterson with Doug Mosher and Dalis Allen.

012 2012 Kerrville New Folk Song Contest Winners at Threadgill Theatre. L. to R. Steve Gillette, Korby Lenker, Nicolette Good, Edie Carey, Whit Hill, Alicia McGovern, The Sea The Sea (Chuck E. Costa & Mira Stanley), Dalis Allen and Rod Kennedy.

013 Rod Kennedy reminisces about the New Folk Contest. Long time co-host and songwriting legend Steve Gillette stands to the right – 2013 Kerrville Folk Festival.

014 2013 Kerrville New Folk Song Contest Winners at Threadgill Theatre. L. to R. Steve Gillette, Tom Neff, Honor Finnegan, Eric Bettencourt, Paul Sachs, Rod Kennedy, Ellis, Ed Romanoff, Adrienne Lenker and Dalis Allen.