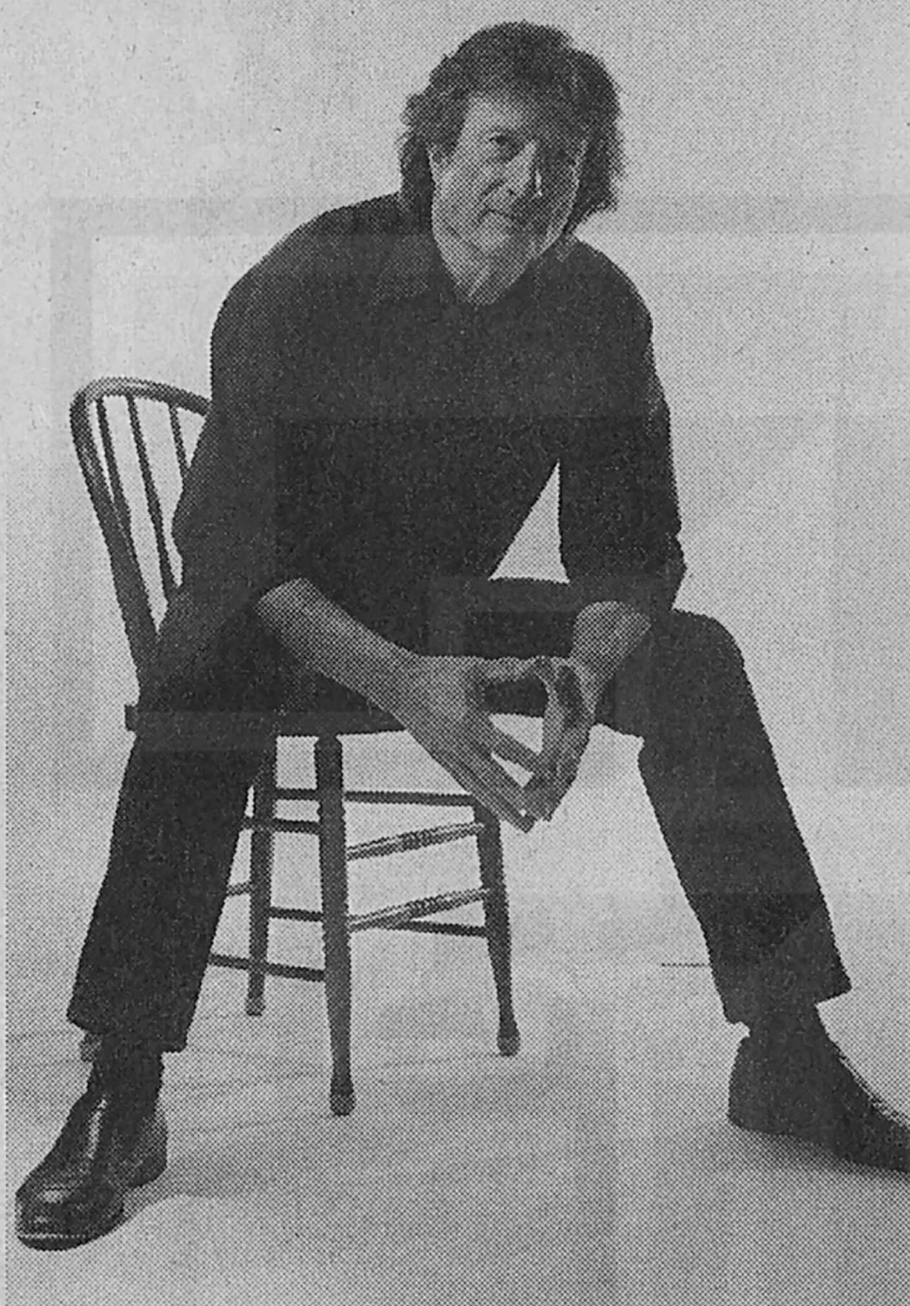


# **3<sup>rd</sup> COAST MUSIC**

**CHRIS SMITHER**

**#186/274 JUNE 2012**



**JOHN THE  
REVEALATOR  
FREEFORM  
AMERICAN  
ROOTS #154  
ROOTS BIRTHS  
& DEATHS  
'NONE OF THE  
HITS,  
ALL OF THE  
TIME'**

## **REVIEWS**

**\*\*\*\*\***

**(or not)**

•

**Cowboy Copas**

•

**Tif Ginn**

•

**Great  
Recession  
Orchestra**

•

**Handbook Of  
Texas Music  
(2nd Edition)**

•

**The Hobart  
Brothers  
& Lil' Sis  
Hobart**

•

**Treasa  
Lavasseur**

•

**Li'l Mo &  
The Monicats**

•

**Red June**

•

**Billy Joe  
Shaver**







## FREEFORM AMERICAN ROOTS #154

REAL MUSIC PLAYED FOR REAL PEOPLE BY REAL DJS

DURING MAY 2012

- #1 JP HARRIS & THE TOUGH CHOICES: I'LL KEEP CALLING  
(Cow Island) \*AB/\*AG/\*CP/\*DP/\*LMG/\*OO/\*PT/\*SH/\*TA/\*TM
- 2 The Great Recession Orchestra: Double Shot (NewTex)  
\*AA/\*DA/\*DWB/\*DWT/\*GS/\*MB/\*MI/\*MM/\*RH/\*TB/\*TR
- 3 Tif Ginn (self) \*BB/\*BR/\*FS/\*KC/\*TF
- 4 Willie Nelson: Heroes (Sony/Legacy)  
\*DS/\*JT/\*KW/\*LB/\*MO/\*OAM
- 5 Grant Peeples: Prior Convictions (Gatorbone)  
\*DT/\*EB/\*MF/\*MP/\*NA
- 6 The Two Man Gentlemen Band: Two At A Time (Bean-Tone) \*MDT
- 7 John Fullbright: From The Ground Up (Blue Dirt) \*SC
- 8 Marty Stuart: Nashville, Vol.1: Tear The Woodpile Down  
(Sugar Hill) \*RT
- 9 Matt Harlan & The Sentimentals: Bow & Be Simple (Berkalin)  
\*EW/\*JB
- 10 Chelle Rose: Ghost Of Browder Holler (self) \*CTS/\*TPR
- 11 Six Mile Grove: Secret Life In A Quiet Town (Rena's Kitchen)  
\*RE/\*RF
- 12= Cornell Hurd Band: Drop In On My Dream (Behemoth)  
Joe Goldmark: The Wham Of That Steel Man (Lo-Ball) \*MT  
Ray Wylie Hubbard: The Grifter's Hymnal (Bordello)
- 13 JD McPherson: Signs & Signifiers (Rounder) \*DC
- 14 Del Barber: Headwaters (Six Shooter) \*JR/\*SR
- 15 Lisa Biales: Just Like Honey (Big Song)
- 16= Moot Davis: Man About Town (Highway Kind)  
JWW & The Prospectors: It's High Past Time (self)  
Linda McRae: Rough Edges and Ragged Hearts (42 RPM) \*RA
- 17= Antje Duvekot: New Siberia (self) \*CJ  
Jason Eady: AM Country Radio (Underground Radio) \*RS  
Paul Thorn: What The Hell Is Going On (Perpetual Obscurity)
- 18= Caroline Doctorow: I Carry All I Own (Narrow Lane) \*DJ  
The Stray Birds: Borderland (self) \*MJM  
Louise Taylor: Tangerine (Blue Coyote) \*BG
- 19= Alabama Shakes: Boys & Girls (ATO)  
Tom Armstrong: Wine Stained Heart (Carswell)  
Leftover Salmon: Aquatic Hitchhiker (Los) \*TL
- 20 Lawrence Peters Outfit: What You Been Missing (self) \*HT
- 21= Tony Denikos: Under The Church (self)  
Dr John: Locked Down (Nonesuch)
- 22= Katya Chorover: Big Big Love (self) \*PGS  
Otis Gibbs: Harder Than Hammered Hell (Wannamaker) \*RC  
Jon Dee Graham: Garage Sale (Freedom) \*JM  
I See Hawks In LA: New Kind Of Lonely (Westerns Seeds)  
Bill Poss: Hay (self) \*BS  
Hank Williams III: Long Gone Daddy (Curb)  
Woody Pines: You Gotta Roll (self) \*CS

## THE HOBART BROTHERS & LIL' SIS HOBART

### AT LEAST WE HAVE EACH OTHER

(Freedom \*\*\*\*\*)

The Hobart Corporation, of Troy, OH, manufactures commercial kitchen and grocery store equipment, and to be a Hobart brother or sister you must, at some point in your life, have slaved over a Hobart sink. At least what's qualifies New York-based Freedy Johnston (born Fred Fatzer, in Kinsley, KS, amazing what you can find on the Internet), Austin's Jon Dee Graham and the flower of New Orleans, Susan Cowsill. Johnston and Graham, mutual admirers of each other's songwriting, originally planned a concept album, and had written a couple of songs, about long ago lousy pay the rent jobs, washing dishes and hauling restaurant trash, for which there may well be a market, if not exactly any urgent call. However, enlisting Cowsill changed the dynamic, and while *First Day On The Job* and *The Dishwasher* hark back to the original concept, the 10 songs, all credited to the threesome, though it's not hard to figure out who really wrote them, and written in three days, are not the musical equivalent of George Orwell's *Down And Out In Paris And London*. Ranging from the desperation of *I Am Sorry* and *All Things Being Equal* to the heartache of *Sweet Senorita*, the nostalgia of *Almost Dinnertime* and the sweet pop silliness of *SodaPop Tree*, the collaboration brings out hitherto unseen facets of three very different talents. Interestingly, all the songs except *SodaPop Tree* are offered in two versions, the full recordings with Cowsill's husband Russ Broussard on drums and acoustic demos which show even more clearly how easily three established solo performers meshed together. **JC**

### TREASA LEVASSEUR • BROAD

(Slim Chicken \*\*\*\*\*)

Not sure how or why I came across the Toronto-based singer, but watching Levasseur performing live on YouTube, I thought, "This is *not* her first rodeo." There's something really refreshing about watching someone quite so (righteously) confident and in control. Confidence was certainly rather essential for her third album, which was made with four different bands and producers, in three studios in two different towns. By rights, this should sound like one of those raggedy-ass albums made in 'when we scrape up some money for studio time' installments, but Levasseur's rich, assured vocals (she also plays piano, Wurlitzer and accordion) more or less weld the twelve tracks together, though the three cut with young Canadian blues band Raoul & The Big Time are noticeably cruder than the four with blues-rockers MonkeyJunk (though I could have lived without Randy Newman's *God's Song*), two with roots veterans Wroxtton Allstars and three with her regulars, The Daily Special. The album title reflects both Levasseur's ballsy image ("If I were a Hepburn, I'd be Katherine, not Audrey") and her range of influences, which go from Brill Building pop to Muscle Shoals R&B via Detroit, Memphis and New Orleans. When you see her being compared to such diverse artists as Laura Nyro, Bonnie Raitt, Carole King and Marcia Ball, it's hard to argue with her website's description, "one of a kind." **JC**

### RED JUNE • BEAUTY WILL COME

(self \*\*\*\*.5)

Charlie Faye lucked out in Asheville, NC, when she was making her connect with the locals and cut one track in each city tour of America (*Travels With Charlie*), which tells me she didn't run into the old timey/bluegrass/folk/Americana trio of Will Straughan (guitar, resonator guitar, vocals), John Cloyd Miller (guitar, mandolin, vocals) and Natalya Weinstein (fiddle, vocals). Mind you, it seems the Asheville region has plenty of music lovers but no music press, at least Red June has a very full summer schedule, including festivals as far afield as Wyoming and Utah, but just one review, and that was from Nashville. The group's great strength is their vocals, individually and, particularly on the acapella call and response gospel of *I'm Willing To Try* (the only cover), in harmony. Weinstein's lead on *Bittersweet* is rivaled only by her terrific fiddling on the instrumentals, *Piney Branch Breakdown* and *Connor's/Scott's (Reels)*, but the guys sing pretty good too. I have to say that this is rather more lightweight than I usually favor, but, while I don't beguile easily, Red June are undeniably charming. **JC**

### TROUBADOUR BLUES

No review as I haven't seen it yet, but Tom Weber's documentary, ten years in the making, featuring Peter Case, Chris Smither, Slaid Cleaves, Sam Baker, Mary Gauthier, Dave Alvin and other singer-songwriters is being shown at Jax on June 14th, along with Troy Campbell and others performing. I'll get back to you on this one. **JC**



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## TIF GINN

(self \*\*\*\*.5)

Back in the early 70s, a friend used a set of LPs as a flipbook, showing Tom Rush evolving (or not) from clean cut folkie to blissed out stoner. You could do much the same with the protean imagery of The Ginn Sisters' three albums and Tif's first solo album. Up to now, the labels have been obvious enough, Goth, hippy, punk, but, like her music, Tif Ginn's style has gone past easy, or any, categorization. During the last few years, she and sister Brit have been part of the Fred Eaglesmith Traveling Show and Eaglesmith is a key element on this album, as producer, using one microphone and one channel through a mono/analog line and a vintage tube compressor to quarter-inch tape, and cowriter with Ginn of nine of the 12 songs, plus the backing is by Eaglesmith associates Scott Merritt guitar/organ, Matt Simpson guitar, Kori Heppner drums and Justine Fischer bass, with Eaglesmith on glockenspiel. While the songs are terrific, particularly for co-writes, Ginn's delivery of them is so riveting it distracts attention from them. The backings are edgy, even spiky, folk-rock, but she floats over them, sounding like a jazz singer on *Here We Go Again* and *Drag*, a cabaret chanteuse on *Little White Pills*, a 60s country queen (you know, back when they could really sing) on *Better Half* and *Over You* (a duet with Eaglesmith) and a primal punk-rocker on *Scream*. And these contrasts all work, she sounds fantastic in every mode. I notice on Amazon that someone has put under Genre, "Folk/Miscellaneous/Rock." This is a new one on me, but if miscellaneous means 'able to do anything she puts her mind to and do it sensationally well,' it works just fine. **JC**

## LPL MO & THE MONICATS • Whole Lotta Lovin'

(Passin Fancy \*\*\*\*)

Covers are usually a good way to triangulate an act, but when NYC old school country/rockabilly singer Monica Passin draws on Marty Robbins (*Pain And Misery*), Baltimore's Arty & Linda Hill (*Waiting And Wanting*), The Coasters (Leiber & Stoller's *Three Cool Cats*, the B-side of *Charlie Brown*), The Nettles Sisters, whose 1956 *Real Gone Five* shows up on rockabilly compilations with titles like *Wild, Wild Young Women* and *Ultra Rare Hillbilly Boogie*, Austin's Teri Joyce (*I Can't Help Myself*) and Richard M Jones' blues standard *Trouble In Mind*, first recorded in 1924 (by Thelma La Vizzo, not many people know that), all we gather is that she has a very cool record collection and some talented friends. Just to help out, on the five originals, Buddy Holly is clearly the inspiration for the title track and Ellie Greenwich is actually name-checked in the girl group tribute *When Girls Sing*. It might sound like this album is all over the shop, but Passin's marvelous vocals, as Bill Kirchen says on the CD cover, "Boy, can she sing," and the sterling assistance of multi (multi) instrumentalist and coproducer Hank Bones, a long time colleague, hold this exploration of her diverse roots together, along with some choice new material. Passin 'disappeared' for ten years after *Hearts In My Dream* (1999), and, as with *On The Moon* (2009), it's good to have her back. **JC**

## COWBOY COPAS • Complete Hit Singles A's & B's

(Real Gone, double CD \*\*\*)

Having died with her in the 1963 airplane crash, Copas and Hankshaw Hawkins have become little more than footnotes in the Patsy Cline story, but Copas, from Blue Ridge, OH (he never contradicted Opry publicists' claims that he was part Native American from Muskogee, OK, still given as his birthplace in most reference books), had a long and distinguished career and the word often used to describe him is "under-appreciated." Getting his start in 1943 by replacing Eddy Arnold in Pee Wee King's Golden West Cowboys, Copas first scored, at #4, in the country charts with *Filipino Baby* (King, 1946), which has to be one of the oddest hits ever—if a son had turned up with an actual "dark-faced" Filipino wife back then, virtually the entire country audience wouldn't have known whether to shit or go blind (hell, many wouldn't be too thrilled 66 years later). Following up with a string of charting singles, notably *Signed, Sealed And Delivered* (#2, 1948), *Tennessee Waltz* (#3, 1948) and *Candy Kisses* (#5, 1949), which featured players like Merle Travis, Speedy West and Roy Lanham, Copas pretty much carried King Records until they parted company in 1955. A pretty good run, but Copas had a second act with Starday, scoring his only #1 with *Alabam* in 1960 plus a few minor successes before his death. The album title is fully functional, all the hits plus their flips (one of which is an early and unbelievably crappy Felice & Boudreaux Bryant song), in order, so it's very different from the last good compilation, *Copasetic: The King & Starday Recordings 1944-60* (West Side [UK], 2001), which was a jumble of hits and non-hits, though to be fair some of the latter are better than some of the hits. However, listening to Copas' work in chronological order, it's striking how the quality of his material went downhill, in fact the second disc has some truly painful moments. Hard to believe that the same man recorded the marvelous *Hangman's Boogie* and the schmaltzy *Goodbye Kisses*. **JC**

## THE GREAT RECESSION ORCHESTRA

### Double Shot

(New Tex \*\*\*\*)

Given that the Freeform American Roots reporters have, over the last 12 years, evinced little enthusiasm for Asleep At The Wheel's many releases, I have to admit that I was a bit surprised when GRO went to #2 with a bullet, behind Marti Brom's unstoppable *Not For Nothin'*, in the January 2011 chart with their first album, *Have You Ever Even Heard Of Milton Brown?* Last month, I was better prepared when the follow up did the same thing, this time beaten out of the top spot by the mighty Cow Island. The mission of this collective of veterans, which this time includes Maryann Price singing lead on four numbers and Floyd Domino replacing the late Mike Hamilton on piano, is pretty straightforward, to remind people of what a Western Swing powerhouse Fort Worth used to be. The title suggests a double-CD, but it's actually two interwoven concepts on one disc, 'The Forties In Fort Worth,' nine wartime jazz, pop and country radio hits done Western Swing style, and 'Shaking The Sheiks,' nine songs from The Mississippi Sheiks' repertoire, plus *The Good Times* by Vern Stovall (who wrote and recorded *Long Black Limousine* in 1963 and is still living near Fort Worth). Some of the 40s songs are more or less familiar, for instance Merle Travis' *Divorce Me COD*, others, such as The Delmore Brothers' *Boogie Baby* (my favorite), rather less so, but the whole set is a combination of unpretentious proficiency with amiable good attitude, and it sure does swing. **JC**

## LAURIE E JASINKSI [editor]

### The Handbook Of Texas Music (2nd Edition)

(Texas State Historical Association, cloth & paper \*\*\*)

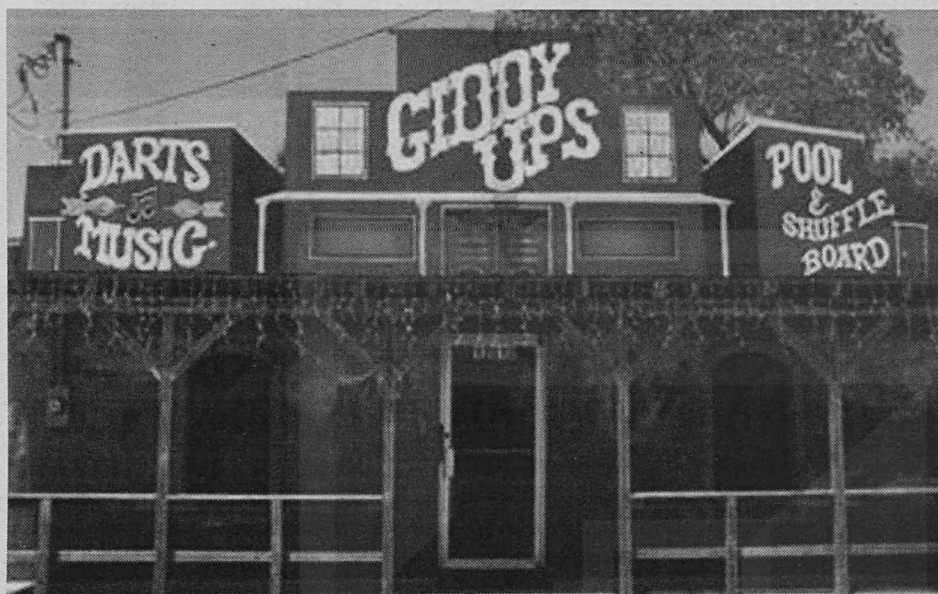
Handbook? Two Hands Book is more like it, in fact a block and tackle might come in handy. Weighing in at a hefty 4 pounds, this second edition adds 410 new entries and 350 pages to the 400 page original (2003). Once again, the individual entries are limited to the deceased, which neatly avoids having to make judgement calls about the living, though some do get at least passing mention in the many topical articles (Armadillo World HQ, Big D Jamboree, Kerrville Folk Festivals, etc). If memory serves, the first editor had a background in classical music, in any case, comparing its coverage with my Births & Deaths database revealed significant omissions, some, but not all of which, have now been remedied. Link Davis, Jimmy Heap, Johnny Dollar and Hugh & Karl Farr made the cut, but not Dave Stogner (Decca/Western Swing HoF), Monette Moore (Paramount/Vocalion/Columbia/RCA Victor) or Fred 'Papa' Calhoun. Still, that's a major improvement, and Lewinski also managed to squeeze in people who only became 'eligible' last year, such as Johnny Preston, Huey P Meaux, Calvin Russell and, shoehorned in at the last minute, Joe Gracey. She also took out a few very marginal entries, but was outvoted on Phil Ochs, who defines marginal in this context. Last time round, I thought "controversial because of his shrewd business practices and dealings with artists" was probably the nicest thing anybody had said about Don Robey in years, and there many other let's say 'careful' phrasings, but *de mortuis nil nisi bonum*, I guess. Even with its erratic coverage, the first edition was still a useful resource, and Jasinski, 17 years with the multidisciplinary, multi-volume *Handbook Of Texas*, has made it a truly valuable one. Once again, the myriad visuals (photographs, sheet music covers, posters, etc) are simply sensational. **JC**

## BILLY JOE SHAVER • Live At Billy Bob's Texas

(Smith Music Group CD + DVD \*\*\*)

Since 1999, there have been almost 40 'Live At Billy Bob's Texas' albums and they've been pretty iffy, ranging from Gary Stewart's bravura 2003 performance to stuff I wouldn't allow into the house, but, of course, were talking Billy Joe here. Shaver has made other live albums, *Unshaven: Live At Smith's Olde Bar* (Volcano, 1995), a 1992 tape which eventually surfaced as *Storyteller: Live At The Bluebird* (Sugar Hill, 2007) and there's a thing called *Live From Down Under* (Sphincter, 2002) with Kinky Friedman which had truly horrible cover art (Jesse Taylor, who played with Shaver, tried to get me a copy but it didn't work out). With 20 tracks plus two alternatives, all Shaver originals, this 2011 recording covers far more ground than the others and Shaver is in great form, even at his most embarrassingly hokey (*Heart Of Texas*, *Good Old USA*, *You Can't Beat Jesus Christ*), and he's giving the crowd what it wants—13 of the songs were on the ill-named *Greatest Hits* (Compadre, 2007) and most of the rest should have been. There are, obviously, big differences between the various live Shaver options, Fort Worth megadancehall, a more intimate Atlanta honky-tonk (with the late Eddy Shaver on electric guitar) or a very intimate Nashville listening room (with Eddy on acoustic guitar) but, even with more songs and a DVD, I'd rank this #3, but then I'm not a huge fan of rooms with a 6,000 capacity. **JC**





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 (July 31, Elizabeth Wills)



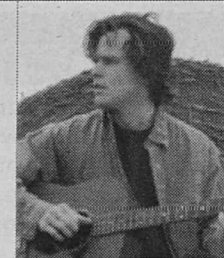
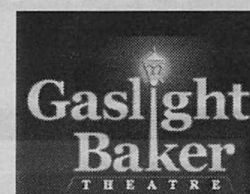
**Purly Gates**



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Purly Gates

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# JOHN THE REVEALATOR

Some mistakes slipped past me last month. In the review of **The Best Of Ripsaw Records Vol 2** (Part [Germany]), which, incidentally was mastered by FARster Gerd Stassen, I misspelled **Tex Rubinowitz's** name twice and got **Jim Kirkhuff's** right first time, wrong (Kirkuff) second time. In The Love Leighs' review, I flat out misread **Jimmie Dreams'** name and also made the unwarranted assumption that he was former Asylum Street Spanker Jimmie Dean. In fact, Dreams is Jessica Leigh's brother, who never played with the Spankers, though he was with Cyril Neville for five years, post-Katrina.

- Michael Corcoran, says his blog on 'Mediocre, Texas,' to which I responded to last month, "won't go away. It's becoming my *Redneck Mother*. Got dragged into another discussion last night about what I meant and these 15 words summed it up: 'Austin is a great place to live, but that doesn't make it a great city.'" In case you haven't hear Ray Wylie Hubbard's albatross warning, he says of *Redneck Mother*, "don't write anything you don't want to have to play every night for the next 25 years."

- Obie Obermark (KNON, Dallas) observes, "On your masthead story on Austin's music scene—first, I thought Corcoran was a waste of ink when he was writing for the notoriously stodgy *Dallas Morning Spews*, but even he couldn't miss this point. Seems like whenever something 'new' or 'revolutionary' breaks in music it always starts with a small group of VERY talented artists, followed by a secondary wave of imitators and those directly influenced by the originals. Then comes the third wave and so on with each new generation further removed from the genesis. I've envisioned it as a fountain, with a central vertical jet and a series of ever-larger cascading basins. With each step the bowl gets bigger, but more dilute. By the time you get to Austin's current state (BIG bowl, highly diluted), mediocrity is almost guaranteed. Plus, while Austin's reputation attracted lots of wannabes, nothing limited emigration to just the actually 'talented.' At least, the influx makes staffing the taco trailers easier, and happily, y'all started with something really cool to dilute."

- From Byron Bay, New South Wales, FARster Carolyn Delzoppo says, "I read your comments about **vinyl vs digital** to my partner Paul—he being a bit of a sound enthusiast and obsessive. He commented that it's a strange thing that most mp3 downloads which are sourced from vinyl have far superior sound to the CD version of the same album even though (quote) 'the standard 70ishMB mp3 file is about 10% of the size of a CD.' He has compared his CDs with downloads of the same album and finds the CDs sound terrible in comparison—sibilant in the vocals, distorted levels, thin sound, instruments merged together instead of separated. He thinks the mp3s are truer to the vinyl than CDs ever were but doesn't understand why this should be."

- Responding to **Ray Wylie Hubbard**, quoted in last month's Revealator, "get a baggs venue di and/or a demeter tube di (costly yes, but sounding good is kinda important)," **Hank Alrich** wants you to know that "If you get a good pickup without additional electronics in the guitar, ie a passive system, so you don't have to fuck with batteries (they always die when you're about to go on stage and/or they're one more burden on the planet) and bunch of other crap inside the instrument, look into the **Red-Eye** acoustic

instrument preamp from Fire-Eye Development, designed by Daren Appelt right here in Austin and hand assembled by Daren and a helper. These sound better than either the Baggs or the Demeter. My first gig in Austin, Mark Creaney offered me the use of his Red Eye so I wouldn't have to swap instruments into the Baggs, and I sold the Baggs almost immediately and got a Red Eye. These things are all over town now, and the world is a better place for that."

- Have you ever heard of Fort Worth's **Tom Morrell**? If the answer is yes, odds are you're either a fellow steel guitarist or a hardcore Western Swing aficionado. Between 1995 and 2007, Morrell & The Time Warp Tophands put out a 15 album series, **How The West Was Swung**, that was almost impossible to find, let alone review. I have a copy of #6, which Chris O'Connell gave me (she was dating one of the Tophands and sang on several volumes), but could never get hold of any more. Now, you may think they just didn't want to fuck with me, but I surveyed the FAR DJs and, while many were enthusiastic about Morrell and his project, apart from a couple of outliers who managed to score some promos, none of them could get much, if any, response from **WR Records**. It's not often one uses words like 'secretive' or 'reclusive' to describe record labels, but they come readily to mind in this context. Shortly before his death in 2007, Morrell told his companion that his greatest fear was being forgotten, but the sad fact is that his posthumous reputation barely rises to the level of 'cult.' The only place I've ever seen copies of the albums for sale is at Ted & Linda Branson's Austin store, Out Of The Past, though I'm told they sometimes surface at steel guitar conventions and can be ordered online and at any record store, though Steve Hathaway remarked that the distributor, City Hall Records, "usually kept only a few of each title in stock as they were not exactly flying off the shelf."

- One oddity that came up when I was talking to **Chris Smither** is that he's married to his manager, **Carol Young**. You may be wondering what's odd about that, seems like half the people I write about are married to their manager. The difference between the Smithers and, let's say, Ray Wylie & Judy Hubbard, Slaid & Karen Cleaves, Marti & Bob Brom or Tif Ginn & Bill Passalacqua, is that Carol started out as Smither's manager, then married him, whereas the others got married and then became managers. Damn good ones I may say, but not their first career choice.

- PR BS of the Month: seems "universally beloved" **Kenny Rogers** is putting the finishing touches on his "first (!) autobiography," scheduled for a fall 2012 release. "Jammed with fascinating stories from life on and off the stage, it's bound to be one of the most talked about books this year." Sorry, not around these parts, sunshine. Rogers himself says, "I have to admit I've had an incredible life." Well, yeah, if you don't count having had to live it as Kenny Rogers.

- You kind of have to admire the sheer chutzpah of the **US Air Guitar Championships**. On the face of it, almost nothing could be more ridiculous than being judged on how well you can mime a real guitarist, but, announcing this years regionals and national finals, they sure take it seriously. "We begin our 10th year of competitive air guitar not proud but humbled. For this milestone—this ascension of our sport to its rightful position in the pantheon of human endeavors—is not our achievement, and is not our

solemn distinction. It is yours. The staggering success of the US Air Guitar Championships belongs to the grizzled veterans of the Regional circuit. To the moral absolutists that judge with unimpeachable acumen. And to the slack-jawed fans, struck dumb by another glimpse of that elusive sublime which we call 'airness.' Thank you."

- Usually, even cackhanded Googling turns up more hits than anyone can handle, but you have to do hell's own precision searching to turn up much about the collapse of **Tim O'Connor's** Austin music empire. La Zona Rosa, which O'Connor turned from a vital musician's clubhouse into a characterless box 16 years ago (but I'm still pissed), was sold last October, the Austin Music Hall and The Backyard now belong to OmniBank. An *Austin American-Statesman* story described The Backyard and La Zona Rosa as "two of the city's best-known live music venues," which I guess is true if by best-known you mean most widely despised, but they had nothing on Austin Music Hall's crappy sound and shitty sightlines (a local venue owner went on record as saying it has no future as a music venue). Far as I can make out, O'Connor's Direct Events were simply overambitious, relocating The Backyard when it got surrounded by a shopping center (as Michael Corcoran cracked, "Backyard, Bath & Beyond"), then expanding Austin Music Hall to fill the gap between ACL Live at Moody Theater and the Erwin Center, and just flat ran out of money. Of course, having three venues nobody liked even if they absolutely had to go see a particular touring act didn't help.

## † TRACI LAMAR HANCOCK

**T**raci Lamar Hancock lost her battle with ovarian cancer on May 11th. If you are not familiar with her and her work you may be forgiven for not knowing what a great loss this is for the musical community of Texas and Austin in particular. The influence of the Hancock Family is legendary, centered around Tommy X Hancock, The Supernatural Family Band and The Texana Dames. They were in the middle of everything good when I first moved to Austin, and unlike many established artists I met when I was first starting out, they were as friendly and generous as can be. It was the indication of a family, both genetic and by choice, based on love in its purest form. I met Traci years ago when she got up and sang a wonderful Ranchera with Santiago Jimenez, Jr, who really hated when people wanted to sit in but admitted to me she was one of the best vocalists he had backed up, quite the feat for a gringa from West Texas (Frankly, I assumed she was Mexican!). Her wonderfully powerful voice, backed by her ever present accordion, coupled with her love of the regional music of Texas added an authentic Tex-Mex tinge to the Dames sound and for a good long while was the soundtrack for the city. Austin isn't like she used to be and 'new' Austin and the newcomers didn't really snap to old line acts like the Dames, for whatever reason. Like for many of us, the work started to trickle and then dry up. Then the diagnosis came. She had to struggle through her illness for several years now without insurance and the effect has left her family more than a little bit strapped. If you feel moved and if you have the means, please see about making a contribution to defray the many expenses that the family is now burdened with (traciforgance.com) Peace and love. May her memory be a blessing to us all.

**Mark Rubin**



# John Fullbright

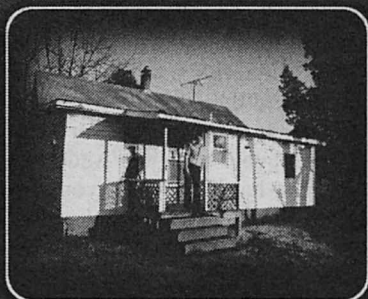
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\*\* Why did they bother? \* Piss on this noise

## DREAM OF GUADALAJARA

**B**ack when I were a lad, I was suddenly promoted from junior librarian to administrative assistant in charge of a London borough's poetry reading program. The Chief Librarian calculated, rightly as it turned out, that being Bob's boy would grease the wheels, given that my father had edited two highly regarded and successful anthologies of contemporary poetry, *New Lines* (1956) and *New Lines 2* (1962).

True story, but change those dates to 2006 and 2012 and see how much sense it still makes. I'm not saying that poetry is a completely dead issue, but it's become, as former US Poet Laureate Billy Collins put it, "the poor little match girl of the arts." My theory is that three or four generations of sensitive young people who might have tried their hands, for better or worse, at poetry, have instead tried their hands, for better or worse, at songwriting. The catalyst, of course, was *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, which demonstrated that if your finger was on the Zeitgeist, you could become rich and famous as a singer-songwriter. A poet's prospects, on the other hand, are somewhat less rosy.

Last month, Grant Peeples' use of two lines from a poem by John Ashbery coupled with John Fullbright's remark about how tired he was of being asked questions about his songs, reminded me of what was a revelation when I first heard it, that the message of Ashbery's 1956 poem *The Instruction Manual* was "If I wanted to be clear, I would have written an instruction manual." For a music writer, there are words to live by.

Ashbery's 'message' goes to the heart of the futility of asking either the greatest living American poet or a rising young songwriter questions about their work. Clarity is for people who write instruction manuals, greeting cards or advertising jingles, ambiguity is the hallmark of great poems and songs. It would be hard to think of a more perfect example than *Pancho & Lefty* (except maybe *Ode To Billie Joe*) of which, echoing Carl Sandburg's "I've written some poetry I don't understand myself," Townes Van Zandt said, "I've always wondered what it meant."

Of course, not all songwriters are as profound as Van Zandt, nor all songs as cryptic as *Pancho & Lefty*, but the point is that a great poem or song means whatever you think it means—you can find many conflicting interpretations of *Pancho & Lefty* on the Internet. Asking a writer to explain a poem or song is a confession of intellectual bankruptcy, you might as well say, 'I'm stumped, please tell me exactly what you're trying to say and remove all the mystery that makes this poem/song resonate with your audience.'

Nostalgia aside, a song needs some obliquity to survive. Do Emmylou Harris, Merle Haggard, Willie Nelson, Bob Dylan, Steve Earle, Gillian Welch or any of the YouTube amateurs understand *Pancho & Lefty* better than Van Zandt? Of course not, but people are still singing it, 40 years after it was first recorded, precisely because it's so enigmatic, perhaps hoping that their nuanced versions will be the key that unlocks the riddles.

Given the subject matter, it seems only right to wind up with a metaphor. A truly great poem or song should make us dream of Guadalajara.

JC

## CHRIS SMITHER HUNDRED DOLLAR VALENTINE

(Signature Sounds \*\*\*\*\*)

**H**aving given up on trying to organize a SXSW label showcase long distance, Jim Olsen of Boston's Signature Sounds asked if I had any use for three of his acts and by happy coincidence I had three hours open that suited Chris Smither, The Sweetback Sisters and Joy Kills Sorrow back to back. Smither also solved my perennial problem—who follows Chip Taylor? Smither has not, of course, been around quite as long as Taylor, but he started out in the 60s folk scare, building his reputation in Boston's coffeehouses, cut his first album in 1970 and, apart from a bout with alcoholism in the late 70s/early 80s ("I was basically drunk for 12 years, and somehow I managed to climb out of it; I don't know why"), has been touring and recording ever since.

A rather esoteric measure of 'success,' the Conquest Audit, which I pass on to you free, gratis and for nothing, is longevity with a label. Discographies can be very revealing: on the one hand you have Bob Dylan, 50 years with Columbia/Sony, on the other Doug Sahm, who never made two albums for the same label, which tells us that much as A&R loved him, accountants hated him. The record industry is not for sentimentalists, labels cut acts if their albums aren't selling, equally artists get out of contracts if they feel they can do better. As Butch Hancock told me when he went back to self-releasing, "I love the people at Sugar Hill, but I need to make some money."

Sugar Hill is one of the many indie labels that crop up regularly in singer-songwriter discographies, even Townes Van Zandt's, along with European labels and maybe even a major back in the day. Smither himself did some bouncing around, Poppy, Adelphi, Flying Fish, even cutting a 1973 album for United Artists (victim of a purge, it went unreleased until 2004). However, since 1995 he has been with either Hightone, five albums and two reissues, which closed its doors in 2008, or Signature Sounds, four albums and a DVD. Clearly, these were/are mutually beneficial relationships.

Hightone's Darrell Anderson recalls that "One of the most significant things about Chris Smither is that he had a team in place from the get go. He and his manager Carol Young had a plan and a vision (I know this is a cliché and if I could find a better way to put it, I would) and we worked with them, not against them. Chris was our first folk act and Carol Young and I talked constantly about working that first release. They had Michaela O'Brien doing publicity and some radio, Mongrel Music booking, and an inhouse marketing person as well, Chris was a road dog, doing something crazy (I think in the high 200s) dates a year. He had built strong relationships with local radio, clubs, and press. They were pure pleasure to work with, understood the importance of tying all the elements together at the right time, always happy to talk anyone that would or might help a date or airplay or press. What's the word I'm looking for? Oh yeah, fucking Professionals from day one!! One more cliché? Honestly, some of the nicest people I ever worked with."

Two operative words here are "road dog." Hightone was very open about the fact that they simply couldn't sign anyone who didn't tour, relentlessly, and Olsen is on the same page with Signature Sounds. However, while his agent says he could book 365 days a year, Smither was able to cut back to 100 shows (he says his high was more like "low 200s") when he became a father seven years ago, and they're either full or sold out. "I really don't have to work that much anymore, it's not a question of survival. I'm doing better abroad than I've ever done, making a ton of money." Echoing Anderson, he credits this comfortable position to his team. "It's partly how hard you work, you and your team. If you're all by yourself, it's easy to get discouraged and then the label gets discouraged. It's about understanding what you expect from each other, so labels need someone they can talk to and musicians aren't always good at communicating."

Of course, it helps the conversation when you deliver consistently fine albums. Though he's usually labelled 'modern acoustic blues,' he was, as Anderson says, Hightone's "first folk act." While I hesitate to use the word 'crossover,' Smither is a mainstay of both the blues and folk festival and club circuits as a master picker, outstanding songwriter and dynamic performer, giving his albums wide appeal. This time, he has a little more help than usual, including longtime colleague David Goodrich, label mate Kim Delmhurst and his seven year old daughter Robin playing violin on one track, but between thoughtful songs, all originals for the first time, including a 'hidden' remake of Rosalie from *It Ain't Easy* (Adelphi, 1984), his wry baritone and unique fingerpicking (he learned to play on the ukelele), Chris Smither compels attention. I'm hoping the Taylor/Smither combo becomes a regular feature of NotSXSW.

JC





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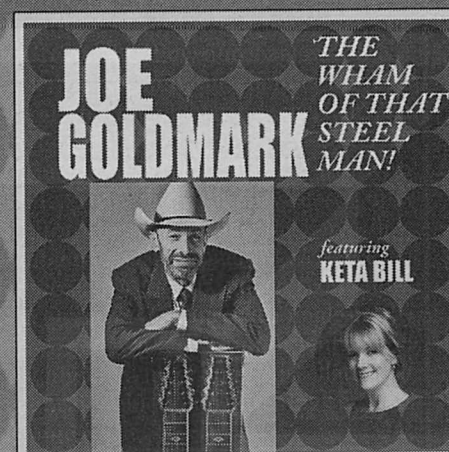


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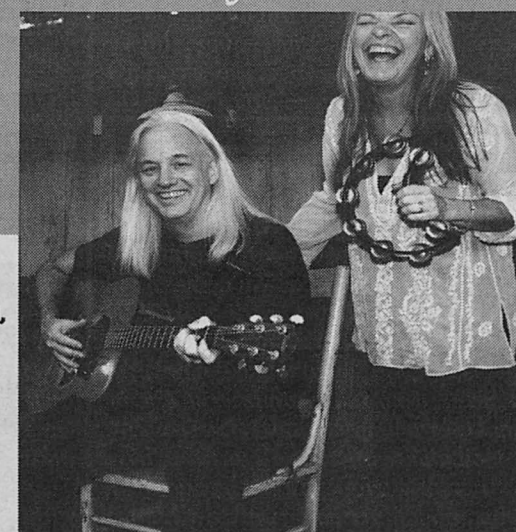
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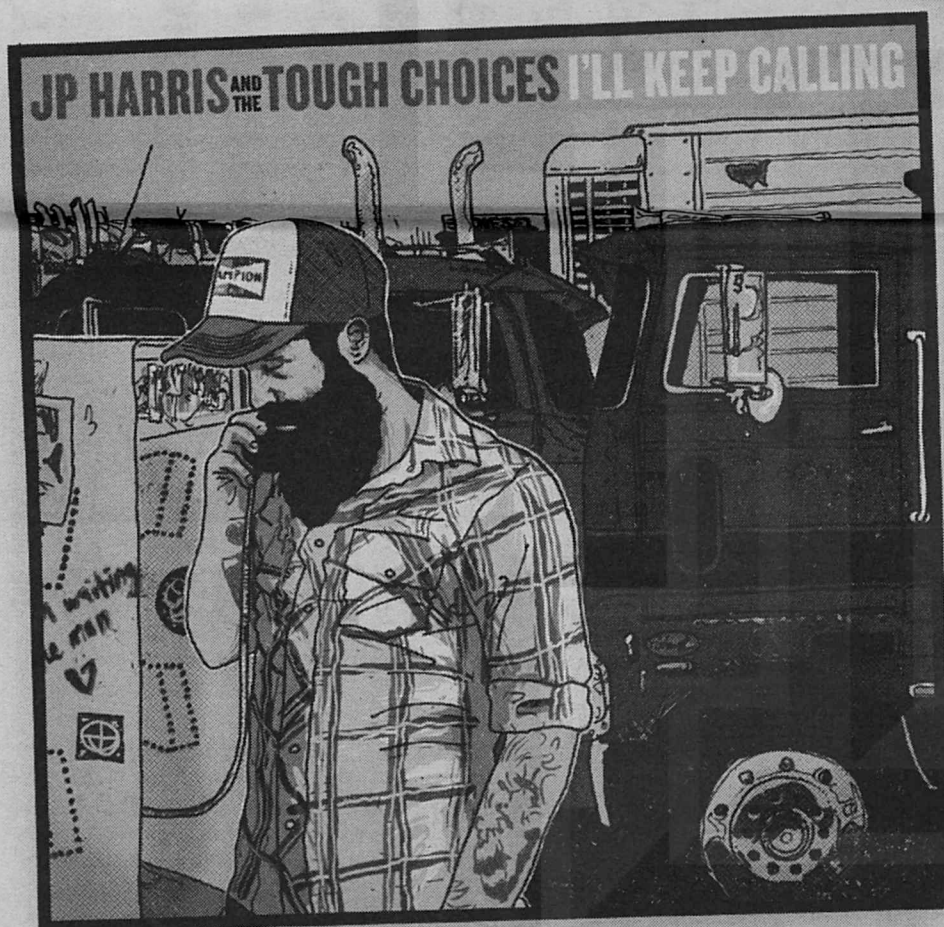
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#### JUNE ARRIVALS & DEPARTURES

- 1st Johnny Bond • 1915 Enville, OK  
Shelly Lee Alley † 1964
- 2nd Carl Butler • 1927 Knoxville, TN  
Bo Diddley † 2008
- 3rd Memphis Minnie • 1897 Algiers, LA  
Buster Pickens • 1916 Hempstead, TX  
Joe Bonsall • 1921 Lake Arthur, LA  
Boots Randolph • 1927 Paducah, KY  
Deke Dickerson • 1968 St Louis, MO  
Billie Joe McAllister † 1967
- 4th Texas Ruby • 1908 Wise Co, TX  
Freddy Fender • 1936 San Benito, TX  
Rabon Delmore † 1952  
John Hartford † 2001
- 5th Narciso Martinez † 1992  
Conway Twitty † 1993
- 6th Gary US Bonds • 1939 Jacksonville, FL  
Joe Stampley • 1943 Springhill, LA  
Clarence White • 1944 Lewiston, ME  
Steve Riley • 1969 Mamou, LA  
Adolph Hofner † 2000  
Smokey Montgomery † 2001
- 7th Wynn Stewart • 1934 Morrisville, MO  
Sleepy John Estes † 1977
- 8th Adolph Hofner • 1916 Moulton, TX  
Steve Fromholz • 1945 Temple, TX  
Alton Delmore † 1964
- 9th Les Paul • 1915 Waukesha, WI  
Herb Remington • 1926 Mishawaka, IN  
Johnny Ace • 1929 Memphis, TN  
Jackie Wilson • 1934 Detroit, MI  
Slaid Cleaves • 1964 Washington, DC
- 10th Howlin' Wolf • 1910 West Point, MS  
Ray Charles † 2004
- 11th John Inmon • 1949 San Antonio, TX  
Bruce Robison • 1966 Houston, TX
- 12th Charlie Feathers • 1932 Holly Springs, MS  
Bobby Earl Smith • 1943 San Angelo, TX  
Junior Brown • 1952 Cottonwood, AZ  
JE Mainer † 1971  
Johnny Bond † 1978
- 13th Clyde McPhatter † 1972
- 14th Wynonie Harris † 1969  
Merrill Moore † 2000
- 15th Tex Owens • 1892 Kileen, TX  
Leon Payne • 1917 Alba, TX  
Waylon Jennings • 1937 Littlefield, TX
- 16th Iain Matthews • 1946 Scunthorpe, UK  
Bob Nolan † 1980
- 17th Red Foley • 1910 Blue Lick, KY  
Henry Zimmerle • 1940 San Antonio, TX  
Mike Buck • 1952 Fort Worth, TX  
Dewey Balfa † 1992
- 18th Bobby Flores • 1961 San Antonio, TX  
Marti Brom • 1961 St Louis, MO
- 19th DC Wine Head Bender • 1919 Arbala, TX  
Bobby Mack • 1954 Fort Worth, TX  
Ira Louvin † 1965  
Louise Massey † 1983

- Boudleaux Bryant † 1987
- 20th T Texas Tyler • 1916 Mena, AR  
Brian Wilson • 1942 Hawthorne, CA
- 21st Clifford Scott • 1928 San Antonio, TX  
Paulino Bernal • 1939 Raymondville, TX
- 22nd Kris Kristofferson • 1936 Brownsville, TX  
Jesse Ed Davis † 1988
- 23rd Zeb Turner • 1915 Lynchburg, VA  
Elton Britt † 1972  
Wade Fruge † 1992
- 24th Lester Williams • 1920 Groveton, TX  
Clarence Garlow † 1986
- 25th Clifton Chenier • 1925 Opelousas, LA  
Eddie Floyd • 1935 Montgomery, AL  
Link Davis Jr • 1947 Port Arthur, TX  
Jody Nix • 1952 Big Spring, TX  
Pee Wee Crayton † 1985
- 26th Big Bill Broonzy • 1893 Scott, MS  
Andy Wilkinson • 1948 Slaton, TX  
Chris Isaak • 1956 Stockton, CA
- 27th Nathan Abshire • 1913 Gueydan, LA  
Elton Britt • 1913 Zack, AR  
Lester Flatt • 1914 Overton Co, TN  
Roy Wiggins • 1926 Nashville, TN
- 28th Lloyd Maines • 1951 Lubbock, TX
- 29th Bill Kirchen • 1948 Bridgeport, CT  
Tim Buckley • 1975  
Juke Boy Bonner • 1978  
Lowell George • 1979

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- 10th Blues Broads + Lisa Hayes
- 11th Carrie Elkin, Anthony DaCosta  
& Danny Schmidt
- 12th Adam Carroll + Owen Temple
- 16th South Austin Moonlighters + Buggaboo
- 17th Gospel Silvertones, 11am
- Hardin Burns + Tyler Stanfield
- 18th Bonnie Bishop
- 19th Tom Faulkner + Zane Williams
- 24th Bells Of Joy, 11am  
Jon Blondell
- 25th Wood & Wire + Aidan
- 28th Bob Schneider's Texas Bluegrass Massacre
- 29th Ray Wylie Hubbard
- 30th James McMurtry + Lincoln Durham

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- 13th Carper Family
- 17th Jazz Talent Of Today & Tomorrow, 2.30
- 20th, Tony Redman
- 24th, AirCargo, 11am

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