

**Oral History Interview of
Seth Sjogren**

**Interviewed by: Curtis Peoples
December 21, 2013
Lubbock, Texas**

**Part of the:
*Crossroads of Music Archive***

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The Crossroads Artists Project encompasses interviews conducted by the Crossroads of Music Archive Staff members. They hope to document the life, career, and creative process of artists and songwriters from all across the Southwestern United States.

Transcript Overview:

This interview features Seth Sjogren. Sjogren describes his time forming the band Death by Vinyl. He describes his experiences with his bandmates, working with record labels, and eventually the disbandment.

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Creating music	10	00:13:18
Getting signed with a label	11	00:17:18
Death by Vinyl breaking up	15	00:26:39

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Curtis Peoples (CP):

Let me just slate this recording here that this is Curtis Peoples at the Southwest Collection in my office, and today is December 20th, the year is 2013, going to do an interview, and if you don't mind saying your name and spelling it, please.

Seth Sjogren (SS):

Seth Sjogren. Last name is S-J-O-G-R-E-N.

CP:

Okay, Seth. So Seth contacted me via e-mail from a newspaper article, I guess from the Plainview Daily Herald. And we were both in Plainview.

SS:

Yes, that's correct.

CP:

So we're going to do an interview about his music. I guess a little bit of biographical information before we get into your music career. If you could tell me a little about growing up in Plainview and maybe a little bit about your family or your likes, how you first got into music, things like that.

SS:

Okay. I grew up in Plainview, lived there all my life until I went off to college at West Texas A&M. I grew up on a farm. My dad was a cotton farmer and a sorghum farmer, so spent many hours out on the field listening to music and driving tractors, listening to, like, eight-tracks. You know we eventually got a couple of cassette players in there, so I listened to those as well, portable CD players, so I'd always just keep listening to music.

CP:

What kind of music were you listening to?

SS:

I grew up listening to Buddy Holly, the Beach Boys, the Mamas and the Papas. Then just stuff on the radio, like eighties singles, pop hits. But I'd say when I started really getting into music was probably when I was in eighth grade. Started listening to the Gin Blossoms. Watched a lot of Saturday Night Live and seeing the artists on there, and also at the time the big alternative movement came through. That was real popular in the pop radio stations. So I would listen to Counting Crows, Pearl Jam, Smashing Pumpkins. It just kind of opened my eyes, made me think somewhat outside the box. So just—

CP:

So maybe for future researchers, could you give us your birthdate?

SS:

Yes. Sorry about that. It is February 16th, 1980. I was born in Plainview, Texas.

CP:

That's good. So growing up on the farm on the tractors, I've been there, I remember the eighties on the tractors bouncing up and down, listening to all kinds of stuff on the radio, but then the cassette player was broken. So I can definitely sympathize with that. Guess—you were going to high school, did you play any music while you were in high school, were you in the band or choir or anything when you were growing up?

SS:

I was not. I just—I guess I listened to it. I always wanted to start my own band, but just never got around to it. I had a few friends that were in one, but we just kind of talked about starting some side project, but it never really came about. Too busy I guess playing football and just other activities.

CP:

Sure. Did you do athletics in school?

SS:

I did. I played football up to my senior year in high school and just kind of got tired and quit.

CP:

Um, so you didn't ever take any kind of lessons or anything growing up? Did your family—any other members in your family have kind of a musical background, your parents, grandparents, did you have any siblings maybe that were—

SS:

I do. I have two sisters. My younger sister was in the band, high school band. Started I guess through sixth grade on playing French horn, clarinet the whole time. And uh, she played piano when she was younger. My mom was the same. She was in choir growing up, played the piano. So, you know, they always did that and I always wanted to as well but just never got around to it.

CP:

So after you went to high school you went to W.T. A&M [West Texas A&M]?

SS:

Yes, that's correct.

CP:

What did you do there? What was your major?

SS:

I was undecided for about two years, then decided to get into the business—so I was just general business, that's what I studied marketing management and computers.

CP:

Is that where your music career began?

SS:

It did.

CP:

In Canyon, Texas?

SS:

It did. In Canyon, Texas. Funny thing is at the time I started buying a lot of vinyl records. I had another friend—or ran into a friend that was buying them too, and we started spending like a lot of money, I guess for college kids at the time, and we were joking around, we said this will probably be the death of us because we're not going to have any money for food, we're going to spend it all on music, so we kind of joked around, yeah, this is going to be death by vinyl. And that's actually how we came up with our band's name. And uh, we both had that idea to want to start a band, but both of us at the time just never had the opportunities to.

CP:

What kind of music were you buying? Just a little bit of everything?

SS:

Just a little bit of everything. A lot of old country. Some eighties new wave. But uh, just some Alice Cooper, you know, Who's Next, a little—good mix of all things.

CP:

And you said you were buying this music with a college friend, and who was this friend?

SS:

Jeremy Butler.

CP:

Jeremy Butler?

SS:

Yes. He was from Altos, Oklahoma. I met him in 2000, and we didn't really I guess start hanging out, talking about music until 2001, and he was a history major, too. But we met up—we lived—he was like right next to me in my dorm. We both lived in the same dorm, so he was just a room down from me. But it was kind of neat because he had the same desire for music that I did, and I'd never met anyone like that, that just could not get enough.

CP:

That's great. Um, so I guess you two would be the cofounders of Death by Vinyl?

SS:

That's correct.

CP:

Were there any other band members that came along, or was it just you two?

SS:

We kind of added my roommate on at the end. His name was Joe Cabezuela from Hereford, Texas.

CP:

Can you spell his last name?

SS:

I—

CP:

Cabezuela?

SS:

Yeah, that's right. But that was kind of more—we wanted him to help with some of the artwork, and we kind of felt, like, you know, he was always hanging around us. He didn't really do much, but we felt like maybe having him part in the band. Like as soon as we were about to disband for good, it was like a tribute, just have him come in, be a part of it.

CP:

So you and Jeremy decide to start this music group called Death by Vinyl. So you've got a name.

SS:

Yes.

CP:

Which is always a good starting point, I guess names can come later. So what was your next step in getting it going? Because you said you hadn't really had a music background. Did Jeremy have a music background?

SS:

He played in a—I think the high school band, too, and I think he had a bass guitar, which he kind of messed around with at times. But not really—I think both of those are things that he did, but as soon as he went off to college, it kind of went off to the side. But for me, I think—I was walking around a computer store and I saw an actual program called EJ, and at the time I was really getting into electronic music, and I thought, you know what, this would be really neat, because it has tons of beats for me to choose, I can make my own beats, I can actually record stuff onto it if I need to, and it's a good way to just get a start. So I ended up buying the program, and sat down after it was installed, spent probably maybe a day or two just like going through it all and came up with actually one song after that day. Then probably the next two weeks, the juices just started flowing. We came up with enough for an EP and we handed it out to a couple of friends, they loved it, they wanted a full-length—so—which it's always good to have

encouragement, especially when you're not sure if you're doing anything that other people might enjoy other than yourself.

CP:

Right. So one thing I'm real interested in here at the archive, especially dealing with so many musicians from so many different genres of music, because we deal with all kinds of genres, is the creative process. So, you know, it's easier said than done, how does a song come to you. You always get that question, how do you write a hit song, or how do you that? Well, sometimes they just come. Did you guys sort of have any kind of—I wouldn't say ritual, or you know, maybe some sort of process that you guys, "oh, I'm going to sit down and write a song," or how did it come about? What was the input from Jeremy and from you, on making decisions over how to write a song?

SS:

A lot of times, we'd just start bouncing things off. Like, we would study in the library a lot together. So I'd be like, "you know what, today start making up a beat," with him. And sometimes he would be like, "that sounds good, let's flow off of that." Then I would go back to our computer and just kind of go, start putting some stuff down, then after that, we would try to add something else on to it. And I mean, sometimes the process was pretty quick and we could come out with a song, other times it would take a while. But then also sometimes we just had a song name, which was probably the opposite way to start, but we just thought of a song name and we were just—

CP:

You'd be surprised how many, you know—what the source may be.

SS:

But we were just trying to go off of that song name. Like, what would fit this song?

CP:

Now, so you said you were using the software EJ, which had a lot of beats and things like that. Did you also write your own beats or program in your own beats, or would you just generally go off of whatever beats were in the program?

SS:

I would say for the most part we did use what's on the program. I know for about maybe ten to twelve songs out of the twenty we had—I actually used quite a few of my own beats that I made up. They did have like a keyboard-type system, where you could go in and kind of like, you know, program a type of computer—just like how you would want the keyboard to sound. I'd come up, make a loop, copy that down, then just like, replay it.

CP:

I guess we should clarify for people. Keyboard, do you mean like a typing keyboard—

SS:

Oh, sorry.

CP:

--or a, like, a piano-type keyboard?

SS:

Piano-type keyboard. Sorry about that.

CP:

No, I mean, that just dawned on me. I was like, people might—what kind of keyboard? Because you can do both.

SS:

Oh yeah, yeah. But we actually had that on the computer, so I would use a mouse to click on—

CP:

The notes.

SS:

The notes, and that's how it'd come about.

CP:

Okay. Now, a typical song. So you'd get a beat down, and you've got a beat that you like, and so you've got a song title, you've got a beat going, what would be the next part in a song? What would you decide on the instrumentation or—is it all instrumental? Were there any vocals or anything?

SS:

There were vocals, but they were all, like, included on the program. We both don't have great voices, so we didn't decide to add ours, and we didn't know anyone else to do it as well. So we'd just use what was on there. But basically, yeah, we'd just lay down our beat, we'd go down through the list of waves that were already on the program, and just kind of listen to one, and I was like, okay, we need some percussions, so let's try to add some more, or some more bass to one part. This song is missing a little bit—so it was just kind of like—I guess like a painting, you start with like a background, or like a you know, just one certain thing, then you start adding on to it. So that's what we did.

CP:

Okay. So you said you've got an EP, people are liking it, want a full-length album, so you start writing a full-length album?

SS:

Yeah. This came during the summer of 2002. Jeremy went to Altus and I did—I had—was in Plainview, and I think I did about thirteen songs and he did two, because we both had a program, but this is kind of I guess where we all started like parting ways in our views of things. So I mean, I spent quite a bit of time coming up with it. You know, lay down some beats, walk away, come back maybe like a day later, see what needed to be added, add some more. A song would take about a week or two to really get it to how I wanted it to be. I think with him, he was just

kind of rushing through it, at times. But yeah, by the end, that summer, we had enough for I'd say fifteen songs, so we had a good LP on hand.

CP:

So after you get the LP and you kind of got it laid out the way you wanted to do, what was your next step? Do you start, like, burning copies or did you—

SS:

Yeah, we started burning copies, and I started trying to do the artwork for it as well.

CP:

Is this back in Canyon?

SS:

Well—yeah. Canyon. So you know, doing the best I could with my own artwork. Burning copies, just wanted to get our—hand it out to all my friends that liked it. Wanted to give it out to a few other people, too, see if—what their tastes were on it. We kind of came back with some not as positive reviews as what we did with the EP, I think it's just because we kind of did our own thing instead of working together on it. But good enough, where people were kind of still really pleased with it. People started telling us that we should start seeing if maybe a label would want it, and so that just kind of led to that. We just started, like, going out there, looking for—or I did, went out and started looking for different labels where it might work—

CP:

How did you do that? Was it—I guess in the early 2000s, were you able to search on the Internet easily or were you looking through trade magazines? How were you finding these labels?

SS:

A lot of it was on the Internet at the time. I know we sent one to London, to a place up there, just because I know they're more into electronic music. Then we sent one to a place in Atlanta, Georgia, Shuteye Records, then basically just—I turn on the back of a lot of my CDs that were electronic. So, like, Grand Royal, but at the time I didn't know they were closed, but I sent them something. But I found out the label who was producing these. I look up, get their address online, you know, included a letter, stuff about the band, throw in the CD, tracks to look forward to, and just send it off. We actually got two labels that were kind of interested in us, the one from London and actually Shuteye Records from Atlanta, Georgia.

CP:

And then Shuteye Records is the one that happened?

SS:

Yeah, Shuteye—we were going to go with one in England, but I think at the time it just kind of didn't pan out. I think they wanted, like, quite a bit up-front cost from us just to help promote us, and at the time being poor college students, we didn't have that, so—I mean, it probably would've been a better deal for us to have done, but I mean, for us, we were just happy to get to acceptance—desires to be on the labels. But we went with the Shuteye Records, and I think—

they went ahead, they said they liked our stuff, they wanted to put us on the roster, and asked if we wanted to be on a compilation CD as well.

CP:

Okay. So—I guess, did you have to sign a contract with them or something like that for the record company to get the compilation—what were they giving you or what were you having to give them, what was sort of the details of the agreement?

SS:

Basically just—I guess for me, the main part was just to get on a label. I didn't really care. I never saw a cent when I was on. It was just to know that I had something out there.

CP:

Did they produce CDs for you? Like, actual copies—

SS:

We had a chance to, but we never went through with that.

CP:

The manufacturing of the CDs?

SS:

Yeah. Yeah.

CP:

Okay. So you were able to get it on to their compilation CD, though. Do you remember any of the artists that were on the compilation CD?

SS:

I don't remember on that one, at the time. But they did send us ten copies. I got five, gave them to all my friends. I should've kept one for myself, which I didn't at the time. But yeah, just that one—I mean, that one was kind of just a rushed one. I don't know—I was kind of questioning even the song that we put on to that compilation CD, because they asked what song would you like out of your album to put on?

CP:

And how did you decide which album—I mean, which song to put on the album?

SS:

I think it was one that we found on our EP, and I went back with my friend Jeremy, and I was like, “look these are the songs that people really gravitated to. You listen to it, I'll listen to it, we'll find the best one out of this.” We both came up with one song, it was called Pies are not Square, so—but—

CP:

And so after it went to the compilation album—I've noticed that compilations really started getting popular then, and I see a lot of opportunities to be on compilations these days, and I get a lot from like this Texas country thing where I see a lot of these compilations, so—was it able to—you said it didn't really generate any sales or anything like that—

SS:

Well I mean, if it did, we did not see any profit. But like I said, that wasn't our—like, my main concern. I just wanted—I always wanted to be in a band. I was in one and—

CP:

Did the record label offer to do any recording for you in any studios or anything like that?

SS:

I think a couple of times they did offer to like pull us up to Atlanta just to like meet everyone, and if we wanted to, we could do stuff there. But I think most of the time, like we were on the label, but I think most of the bands there had to send their stuff to them, then they'd try to mass—send it out to bigger labels, get it on TV, whatever they could

CP:

So did you and Jeremy ever go out and play the music, I guess—I mean, it's recorded music, but like, live? Did you ever do anything like shows or anything?

SS:

We did not do any shows. Our music was played at a few dances, stuff like that. I guess, since it was all like on a computer—I guess we could've brought that out there, now that I've seen like people with laptops—

CP:

DJs and all that—

SS:

DJs, yeah, going out there. But I guess we just never got around to it.

CP:

So with the label, you get on the compilation and everything. How long did that relationship last before you guys decided to, I guess, part with the label and not do anything?

SS:

Well, that—probably about a year or two. They were really pushing for us to like start up a website, stuff like that. I started grad school, my friend Jeremy went down to do some work at—missionary work, and so, you know, it's like we already started parting ways, you know. Life started catching up with us, so you know, we didn't have time to set up the label—or the website. So the label just kind of slowly moved us off the roster. Not until about 2005 I got the urge to start back up Death by Vinyl, making more music. This was all me on this one. Came back, came out with a small EP, enough just to listen to it on my car, just to see if that still had the feel to it,

where it felt good enough where I could make more music. Felt pretty positive with that, then after that, went, sat down, made about fifteen or sixteen total songs, you know, using pretty much everything from the EP, and made an LP, sent it back out to Shuteye. They were pretty impressed, once again, they asked us to be on the roster, be on the compilation CD. And, like, the president of the record labels—like you know, remembered us. He said he really liked our stuff. So we were on that, got the opportunity again, and at that time, I kind of knew things weren't going to go much further than that. So I went ahead and talked to Jeremy to try to add in my other roommate from college, Joe Cabezuela, and just to help with some artwork at the time. I know he really wasn't going to have much of a part, but just to be an honorary member of the band. He was, and once again, we had compilation CDs out. This was a—Buzzlighter, I think that was the name of it. It had twenty or twenty-one tracks on the compilation—

CP:

Where would these compilation CDs go from the record company? What do they do to distribute those?

SS:

They went out to a lot of college radio stations, independent record stores, they would try to push it on to like TV shows. Like I know there for a while, Shuteye had a deal on MTV, Sorority Life, back in early 2000s. Just also try to push us out to major record labels. Because I guess at the time, I don't know how it is now, before you could get on to a major record label, you had to have someone try to help you out, like the smaller label to back you, showing that you had some talent. Then what they were always telling me is like, that's when they would start looking at you a little bit more closely, the bigger labels would.

CP:

So did you get any air play on college radios that you know of?

SS:

Not that I know of. I know that they did sell our CDs quite a bit, the compilation CD. I mean, I think if we did, we don't know. Like, they did not—

CP:

They didn't report back to you if anything was going on?

SS:

I mean, we never saw any royalty fees. I think a lot came down with some of the stuff. I wish I would've kept more of the stuff that we had from the band. But I know that we did sign some paperwork at times, so I'm sure we probably just signed away our songs and any royalties to it at the time.

CP:

Yeah, they'll do that to you sometimes, for some reason. I'm going to forward this e-mail real quick, just had something pop up. So you've got your second compilation CD going on, and it's still you and Jeremy and—say his last name again?

SS:

Joe Cabezuela.

CP:

Cabezuela, Cabezuela. So this was sort of the end of the group right then for this particular thing?

SS:

Yeah. Because like I said, after we went on, we got on the label, we did better than what we ever thought, and you know, I just kind of still had the urge—I had some more music in me that I just needed to get out.

CP:

Right.

SS:

I went through, made the new LP, sent it off, it got back on the label, on a compilation CD, but then I was like, okay, I think this is the final chapter for our band because of the simple fact is: we did better than what we thought, we were on the label, we had some people that liked us, some people that were proud to wear our T-shirts at times, or put our stickers up on their cars.

CP:

Right. What did your parents think about your music? Or family members back in Plainview?

SS:

I know my sister liked it. My mom and dad—well, I know my dad listened to a lot of old country, so he did not understand the electronic sound and like how things loop around a lot. He always thought something was broken every time we'd listen to it, there was a skip. So—I mean, he was proud of it, but I mean, that wasn't his style. My mom was, I think, proud that I was able to have music out. And I think she liked it, but it wasn't her cup of tea. She was more The Mommas and the Papas, stuff like that. Totally different spectrums.

CP:

So I guess the band's kind of over.

SS:

Yeah.

CP:

Do you stay in contact with any of the guys still?

SS:

Yeah, yeah. I really stay in contact a lot with Jeremy Butler. I was best man at his wedding just not that long ago. We keep up every so often. Every once in a while we sit back and joke about, like, starting something up again, but I kind of know it's not going to happen. He's in Altos, Oklahoma, I'm in Dallas. He's married, busy with life, so now it's just something we talk about.

CP:

Do you still mess around with music or doing anything?

SS:

Not really.

CP:

No?

SS:

I mean, I like to listen to a lot of it. I mean, every once in a while, I do get the urge to try to, but I don't know. I think for me, it's just—I guess I look back to what I did, and I was like—I was proud of it, because I actually was able to get on—to an indie label, same one twice and got on to the compilation CD twice. So for that reason alone, I was very proud. I mean, it does come back, but at times, I'm like—I try to think about the work that—the time it takes. But also, with my job and how life is now, it's just kind of hard to work it in. But I don't know, maybe one of these days, I'll try to get back into it.

CP:

Sure. I know it takes a lot of time writing and recording. I've been working on this album that I've been working on for well over a year now. And some of these songs are seven, eight, nine years old. They've just been kind of hanging around and then I'm just now developing—I know exactly where you're coming from, so. Well, is there anything you'd like to add for the interview? Do you think we've covered—anything you think we missed?

SS:

I think—I think we covered everything pretty well.

CP:

All right Seth, I appreciate it. Thank you so much.

End of interview.