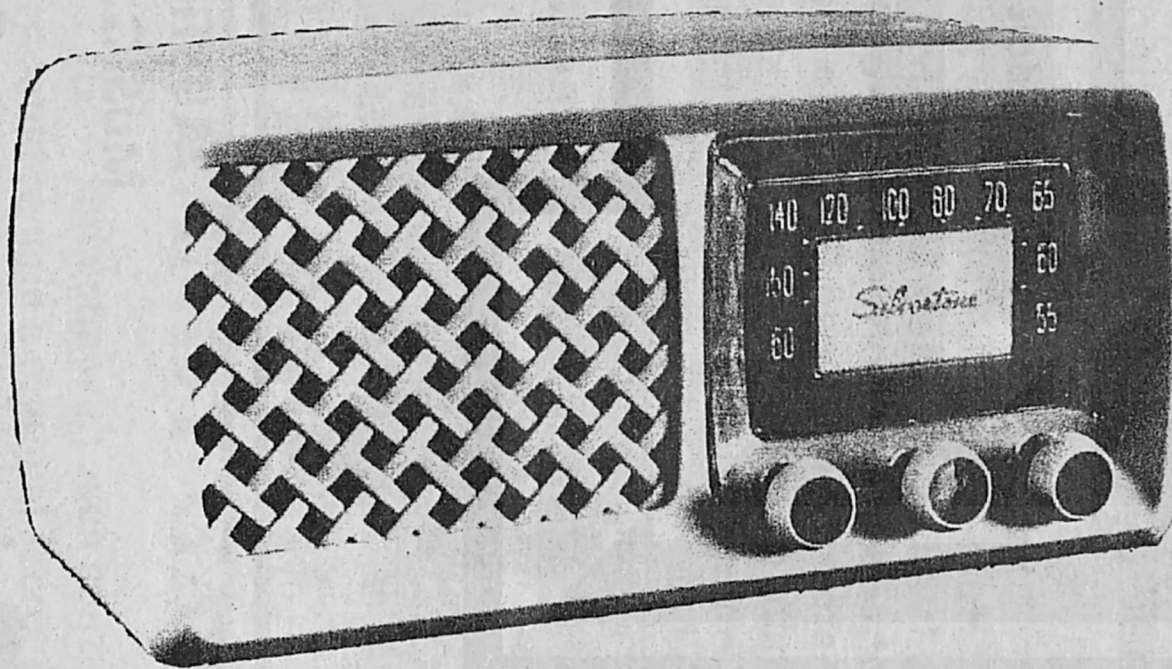


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#29/118 JUNE 1999

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COWBOY SONGS,
BALLADS & CATTLE
CALLS FROM TEXAS

LINK DAVIS Sr

DARCIE DEAVILLE

ROBERT DOUGLAS'
HAPPY TRAILS

FRED EAGLESMITH

FREDDY FENDER

GERALD HASLAM
Workin' Man Blues

TERRI HENDRIX

ROY ROGERS

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TOWNES VAN ZANDT

pardon me, I've got someone to review

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DARCIE DEAVILLE • TORNADO IN SLO MO

(Redwing Music)

Back then, I detailed the doubledealing and broken promises that followed Rounder's acquisition of Flying Fish, so first off, I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome FF's Jim Netter back to these pages with his new label. Redwing is very much in the Fish mold (sorry), and Deaville, as half of Gillman Deaville, was a Fish artist, so former patrons of that fine acoustic music label will have some idea what to expect. A recent letter in the *American-Statesman* made the reasonable point that just because you have hot Austin pickers on your album doesn't mean you're any good (though I'd qualify this by saying it does at least show you have good taste), but Deaville is herself one of those hot Austin pickers, a multi-instrumental (fiddle, acoustic guitar and mandolin) associate of The Troubadours. So people like Marvin Dykhus, who coproduced with her at Flashpoint, Paul Percy, Dave Heath, Glen Kawamoto, David Carroll, Casper Rawls, Merel Bregante and Chip Dolan are not, in this context, her hired guns but her peers. It should, therefore, come as little surprise that her Troubadour-style porch music is absolutely first rate. Less predictable is the raw honesty of her twelve originals, searing in the case of *Icy Barrel Of A Loaded Gun*, an unflinching look at her experience of abuse, sexual as a child, spousal as a young adult. Quoting press releases, other than to make fun of them, is an unusual experience, but it really is hard to improve on Netter's "A survivor's narrative . . . its songs resonate with hard won hope and resilience." JC

COWBOY SONGS, BALLADS

AND CATTLE CALLS FROM TEXAS

HAPPY TRAILS: THE ROY ROGERS COLLECTION (1937-1990)

(Rounder/Rhino [3 CD box set])

Despite or because, depending on how you look at it, being field recordings of veteran Texas cowhands, made by John A Lomax in 1942 for the Library of Congress, *Cowboy Songs, Ballads And Cattle Calls From Texas* is absolutely gripping. Cowboying was such a miserable occupation, anybody who could do anything else did that instead, so 'Singing Cowboy' is an oxymoron because the great thing about being able to sing, or play an instrument, was that it meant you didn't have to be a cowboy. From Carl T Sprague on, it was fairly common for cowboy music stars to have been raised on a ranch, but virtually none of them put in much time working cattle. In fact, the first many of the best known ever had to do with a ranch was when they bought one with the money they'd made singing Tin Pan Alley songs in Westerns. However, singing mostly unaccompanied, as they did when these songs helped to lighten the monotony of their work—indeed, one of them is *The Cowboy's Life Is A Very Dreary Life*—these musically untrained ranchhands, from Dalhart, Alpine, Fort Davis, Kermit and Denison, have a naturalness and immediacy that the most talented and dedicated folksinger or revivalist, let alone horse opera star, is powerless to capture. Opening with an illustration, the Maine lumberjack origins of *The Buffalo Skinners*, of the way songs were adapted as they moved West, the album closes with *The Night Herding Song*, collected by Lomax for his 1910 *Cowboy Songs & Other Frontier Ballads* from its author, Harry Stephens, whom he also recorded singing it in 1946, "a very rare and unusual occurrence in the field of folk song," as the liner notes remark.

◆ A greater contrast between Lomax's real cowboys and 'The King of the Cowboys' would be hard to imagine. Born in Cincinnati, raised on a farm, then migrating with his family to the Los Angeles area, Leonard Slye was reinvented through a series of lucky breaks. A talent show appearance brought an offer from The Rocky Mountaineers, an *LA Examiner* ad for a second vocalist produced Bob Nolan, with whom he formed The Sons Of The Pioneers and, most fortunate of all, Gene Autry fell out with Republic Pictures so the studio auditioned for a backup singing cowboy and signed up Slye, renaming him Roy Rogers. But if his persona was as totally fabricated as The West which he portrayed and sang about (a friend who once interviewed him told me he was perfectly open, and rather apologetic, about not knowing any genuine cowboy songs), Roy Rogers was a terrific singer, even if some of his material was hokey to the extreme. The 94 tracks, superbly packaged, include the classics, *Cool Water*, *Tumbling Tumbleweeds*, *Home On the Range*, *Happy Trails* et al, but also much previously unreleased material discovered in Rogers' archives, with The Sons Of The Pioneers, Dale Evans and Foy Willing & The Riders Of The Purple Sage. Kitsch don't get much better than this. JC

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GERALD W HASLAM

WORKIN' MAN'S BLUES:

COUNTRY MUSIC IN CALIFORNIA

(Razor & Tie/University of California Press)

With a great concept and sensational material backed by Rich Kienzle's knowledge and good taste, *Swing West!* is a model of its kind. The concept, of course, is showcasing classic West Coast country, which operated completely independently of Nashville, setting its own fashions and standards. California country owes its existence first to the Great Depression, when entire families from country music's already marginal heartlands abandoned the struggle and emigrated to the Promised Land, bringing with them their musical aesthetic. Then to WW2, and the postwar boom, when wellpaid production jobs brought unprecedented affluence to the Okies. Suddenly, there was an audience not just eager for country music, but with money to spend on defending their much maligned cultural identity.

◆ The migrants produced a good deal of heavyweight talent from within their own ranks, Merle Haggard, Jean Shepard and Spade Cooley (Oklahoma), Wynn Stewart (Kentucky), Rose Maddox (Alabama) and Buck Owens (Texas), but the sheer wealth of the California audience was a magnet for country and Western Swing singers, pickers and entire bands from all over America. Among those, already more or less successful elsewhere, who relocated were Ferlin Husky, Tommy Collins, Joe & Rose Lee Maphis, Jimmy Bryant, Speedy West, Merle Travis, Hank Thompson, James Burton, Ralph Mooney, Tex Williams, even the great Bob Wills.

◆ Easing his task, Hollywood-based Capitol Records dominated California country, so, while there's no Buck Owens, and nothing to represent the multitude of local indies, now virtually untraceable and a copyright nightmare, Kienzle had little trouble assembling 60 great and convincing tracks from the label's archives. Volume 1, showcasing artists based in the Okie capital of California, in the period 1951 to 1966, is illuminated by the enormous talents of Husky, Shepard, the Maphises, Stewart, Jan Howard, Red Simpson and, most especially, Rose Maddox. Volume 3, mainly from the late 40-early 50s, illustrates the sophistication (oboes! harps!) of Western Swing's West Coast variety and is most notable for the steel guitars of Joaquin Murphey, Noel Boggs and Speedy West.

◆ The real monster in the trio, however, is Volume 2. Parallel to the electrified sound favored by urbanized Okies, major pioneers of electric guitars, steel guitars and amps, Les Paul, Paul Bigsby, Leo Fender, Semie Mosley, were developing their prototypes and it was West Coast players like Jimmy Bryant, Speedy West, Merle Travis, Joe Maphis and Roy Nichols who were the first to explore the possibilities of instruments, like Fender's Telecaster, that still rule the world to this day. This stuff is way more than just historic documentation, mindblowers like Jimmy Bryant's *Little Rock Getaway*, Joe Maphis' *Fire On The Strings*, Maphis & Merle Travis's *Blast Off*, James Burton & Ralph Mooney's *Corn Pickin'* and Bryant & Speedy West's *Lover* will make you rethink your contemporary guitar heroes.

◆ Gerald Haslam, a retired California State University English professor, spreads a much wider net than Kienzle, opening with The Crockett Family, Fresno-based West Virginians who enjoyed considerable success in the late 20s and early 30s with their "old familiar tunes," and closing with Dwight Yoakam. I have to admit that I'd been tipped off in advance by someone who knows far more about this subject than I ever will, that Haslam is shaky on facts. I tested this out with one episode I'm reasonably familiar with, the career and fate of Billy Jack Wills' Western Swing Band, and Haslam certainly fails to deliver. However, for me, his reliability, or lack of it, turns out to be less of a problem than his very odd perspectives. He seems to be the only person in the world who thinks Kate Wolf was a country singer, devoting many pages, with several pictures, to her (he's very big on U Utah Phillips too). He profiles The Eagles but not the enormously influential #1 and #2 Flying Burrito Brothers and whips past Commander Cody & His Lost Planet Airmen very quickly. Rosie Flores gets much laudatory ink, but there's a simple name check for Chris Gaffney, not even that for James Intveld, both far more substantial artists, if rather less skilled at self-promotion. Iris DeMent, who left California when she was 17, gets a profile and a picture, while the great Jimmie Rivers, who held court at Brisbane's 23 Club for decades, only rates a passing mention. OK, I can't expect him to share my tastes and priorities, or demand more space for them, but you still gotta admit that Kate Wolf thing is a bit of a worry. JC

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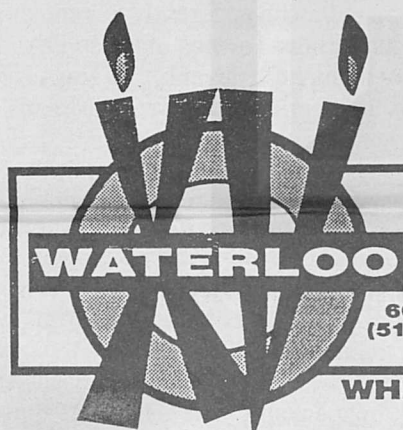
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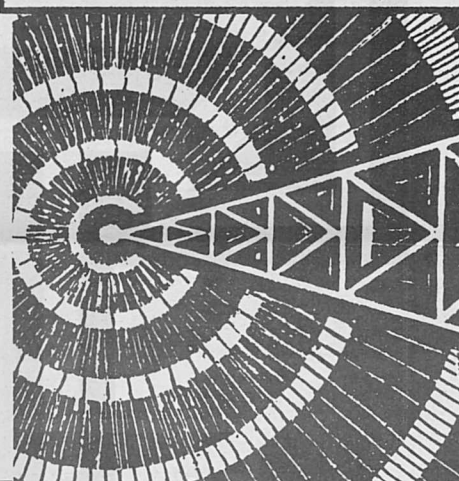
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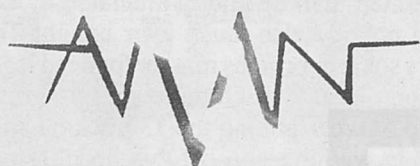


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PAPA LINK DAVIS • BIG MAMOU BOOGIE FREDDY FENDER • THE VOICE: FREDDY FENDER'S GREATEST HITS

(Edsel [UK])

Been trying to lay hands on the Demon subsidiary's Crazy Cajun reissues for a while, mainly as a platform for a birthday salute to the genius of Huey P Meaux, one of the three greatest pairs of ears in Texas music, along with Armando Marroquin (Discos Ideal) and Don Robey (Duke/Peacock), who turned 70 last March. Well, that didn't work out, but I finally knocked on the right door, so, better late than never, happy birthday, Huey, hope they let you out soon. Edsel have some 4000 Crazy Cajun masters, so these two albums, which I hope are just my first installment, only hint at the scope and depth of Meaux's achievements, but they're as good a place to start as any.

♦ Link Davis Sr, from Van Zandt Country, was one of the most remarkable Texas musicians of his day. Starting out as a Western Swing fiddler, hired as a teenager by Milton Brown and later playing with Moon Mullican and Cliff Bruner, he got heavily involved in Cajun music and culture, scoring a hit with *Big Mamou*, then taught himself tenor sax, playing on George Jones' Starday singles, Johnny Preston's *Running Bear* and The Big Bopper's *Chantilly Lace*. Though the bulk of the eleven tracks from his last recording session, in 1971, are Cajun, he demonstrates his versatility with honkytonkers (*I Played That Song For You* and *Face In the Glass*), a 12 bar blues (*Blues For Louisiana*), an R&B shuffle (*Sugar Bee*) and organ-driven rock & roll (*Albuquerque*), all with a Gulf Coast flavor. Though you'd never guess it from the power and passion of his playing and singing, Davis was confined to a wheelchair and had less than a year to live.

♦ Country music doesn't give out many second chances and in 1971 nobody much wanted to know about an ex-convict in his 40s. Perhaps Meaux's most remarkable accomplishment was making Freddy Fender an even bigger star than before. Of course, he did have That Voice to work with and it took four years of market research, putting out endless singles until one clicked, but I doubt either he or Fender dared dream of four #1 hits, or Artist of the Year awards from *Billboard* and the jukebox industry. Though the 24 tracks here include the remake of Fender's *Wasted Days And Wasted Nights* and his version of Ivory Joe Hunter's *Since I Met You Baby*, Edsel neatly sidestep Greatest Hits familiarity by using Spanish versions of *Before The Next Teardrop Falls*, *Secret Love* and *Living It Down*. As for the rest, well let's just say that Fender could sing the telephone book and make you cry. JC

BILL & AUDREY • LOOKING BACK TO SEE

(Reckless [Australia])

Jim Ed Brown & Helen Cornelius' title track can be taken as a mission statement for these Australians who, almost miraculously, revive what seemed lost beyond all prayer of recovery, the art of country duets. I've heard a lot of good lead and a lot of good harmony, but though I could reel off a long list of male and female singers, names you'd recognize, whom I've heard making a miserable mess of it, I can't remember when I last heard a really well done country duet. Can it really have been Parsons & Harris? Bill Chambers, lead guitarist and harmony singer in the Sydney-based Dead Ringer Band, and Audrey Auld, originally from Tasmania, fill this aching void with a very nifty mix, a classic, Carl & Pearl Butler's *We'll Sweep Out The Ashes In The Morning*, well thought out duet adaptations of Kitty Wells' *Searching*, *It Was The Whiskey Talking (Not Me)*, Patsy Cline's *Honky Tonk Merry Go Round* and Jimmie Davis' *You Are My Sunshine*, a Gram & Emmylou homage, Rik Grech's *Kiss The Children*, and seven originals, notably *Road Of Regret* and *Losing Side Of Love*, which stand up very well in this company. As a vocalist, Auld, who really has that spinetingling 40s/50s hillbillyette sound, brings rather more to the partnership than Chambers, and I sure wouldn't mind a solo album from her, but they mesh together very nicely indeed. Bill & Audrey looked back and saw something they could do that nobody else was doing, but even though they obviously had to study on it and the album, down to the cool styling in the artwork, clearly falls under the heading of retro, they do it with an utterly disarming simplicity and lack of selfconsciousness. In short, they sound like they've been timewarped from the golden age of country duets. JC

ROBERT DOUGLAS' HAPPY TRAILS VOLUME ONE

(Bleached Blonde)

Recorded live on Douglas and Jana Pendragon's KXLU radio shows, these 21 tracks by 17 bands offer an overview of Los Angeles roots music. Not up to KUT *Live Set* technical standards, and with a few groups from whom one track will do very nicely, thank you, there's still a lot of crackling energy and some fine work, particularly from rockabilies Russell Scott & His Red Hots (who have an album due out soon) and Cadillac Angels. JC

TERRI HENDRIX — LIVE

(Tycoon Cowgirl)

Naming no names, there's a performer in Austin who always seems so miserable on stage that she acts like a black hole, draining all the life out of a room. Contrariwise, Terri Hendrix glows in the dark, putting out so much positive energy that it's hard to imagine anyone not being caught up by her sheer joy in performing. Her formidable talents as a singer and songwriter are better attested by the fact that Lloyd Maines has thrown in his lot with her than by anything the music press can say, but impressive as her studio albums were (at least after Maines worked over the first one), her third—which may come as a surprise to the *Chronicle* readers who recently voted her Best 'New' Act—captures her doing what she does best, working a crowd. Very much on her home ground, packing Cibolo Creek Country Club with hardcore fans, its hard to tell who's having more fun, the band, Hendrix (acoustic guitar, mandolin and harmonica), Maines (mandolin, acoustic and steel guitars and dobro), Glenn Fukunaga (bass) and Paul Percy (drums/percussion), or the audience. Though she revisits a few previously recorded originals, *Two Dollar Shoes*, *Wallet*, *Sister's Song*, *Gravity* and, best of all, *Wind Me Up* (the frigging singalong chorus on the studio version was a very unusual lapse of artistic judgement), the bulk of the 15 numbers are live show standards, originals and covers, mostly by Hill Country colleagues, which she's unlikely to record otherwise. So we get Ike Eichenberg's *Le Mazet* and *Take Me Places*, Mike Scott & Steve Wickham's *Fisherman's Blues*, Don Metz's *You Mangled My Dog*, Darcie Deaville's *Who Needs You* (very different from Deaville's own version, see *Tornado In Slo Mo*), John Hadley's *Blue Eyed Cowboy* and a very effective treatment of Michelle Shocked's *If Love Was A Train*. If you seen Hendrix perform, this makes a great souvenir, if you haven't, well, this is what you've missed. JC

TOWNES VAN ZANDT A FAR CRY FROM DEAD

(Arista Austin)

How's this for fucked up? An engineer/producer, who apparently has something to do with Willie Nelson, hears some recordings Townes made to DAT at a neighbor's home studio and is knocked out by them, he'd never heard Townes play or sing so well. So what does he do? Rounds up a bunch of session musicians and overdubs backings on the bastards. And when I say session musicians, Arista's press release boasts, fucking *boasts*, that their various credits include Faith Hill, Fake Hank Williams, Bread, Alabama, Rod Stewart, Cher and Stevie Nicks. Eric Paul may, for all I know, be a great guy, good to his mother, kind to children and small animals, but in my book he has to go down as one the century's great musical shitheads. It's a rather frightful tragedy that Van Zandt's legacy is in the hands of an ex-wife (though the "ex" is tactfully dropped in the publicity material) who, even if, to be fair, she has Townes' children to raise, seems heedless of the cost of her schemes to make money out of his work. That Jonelle Mosser nonsense was misguided enough, but this thing really is unspeakably vile—the fact that it's Townes' major label debut sets a new standard in heavyhanded irony. I really do have to wonder what the label thinks it's playing at. Zandtistas, who'd've been happy with the original tapes, unadulterated, will be utterly alienated by the very concept, even before hearing this, and nobody else much ever bought Townes' albums when he was alive. Maybe there's some enormous market for dead legendary singer-songwriters of which I'm unaware. Even though there are two previously unreleased songs, *Sanitarium Blues* and *Squash*, among the 13 tracks, I still have absolutely no reservations whatsoever in warning you off this horrible piece of opportunistic crap. Even if you have everything Townes ever recorded, in every format it was ever released in, this is an album you'll be proud not to own. JC

FRED EAGLESMITH • 50-0DD DOLLARS

(Razor & Tie)

Even knowing it's unrealistic and overdemanding, one does somehow expect each album from an artist of Eaglesmith's stature to be better than the one before. The reality, of course, is that one should be happy if it's at least as good, but this still somewhat disappointing mainly because the emphasis seems to be on the sound rather than the content. While the Canadian singer-songwriter offers more of his characteristic brand of Agricultural & Mechanical lyrics, comparing a vintage Cadillac's headlights to Mason jars (*Mighty Big Car*), having a mother who knows the trouble with his pickup, "might be the alternator, could be the core" (*Alternator*) and deploying his favored metaphors, cars, trains and bullets, the material isn't much more than adequate. At the same time, he pushes another stage further in his evolution from country-folk to a kind of folk rock & roll which uses the same instrumentation—how often do you see a mandolin player with a rack of effects pedals? The underlying problem with Eaglesmith's albums is that one of the most powerful performers I've ever seen, who I guarantee gets a whole lot of repeat business on the road, seems unable to infuse his studio work with more than a pale shadow of the bravura energy which makes him so compelling in person. I'm not necessarily saying a live album is the answer, but if people could hear songs like *Little Buffalo*, *Wilder Than Her* or *Water In The Fuel* played anything like the way he does them in clubs, well, those clubs would get a lot fuller. JC



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JOHN THE REVELATOR

Seems I didn't get the full story on Rosie Flores' 'live' album (reviewed last issue). All I'd heard was that Rounder wouldn't put out the first version she gave them, but, according to a feature in the current *No Depression*, it was label boss Ken Irwin who insisted on having the audience edited out and the copious studio recorded overdubs put in. However, this doesn't let Flores off the hook because, as noted in the editorial feature, her ad hoc all star group simply wasn't ready to play, let alone record, in front of an audience. In the *ND* feature, Ray Kennedy of Steve Earle's Twangtrust complains, "[Irwin] should have stayed out of the way... Rosie's been in the business a long time; she deserves to have a lot of creative freedom," which rather conflicts with what I've been told by many people who've worked with her, including three who've produced seriously good albums, that Flores' besetting, and career stalling, problem is she simply won't accept advice from anyone. You'd think after so many dud albums, she might ought to reconsider this policy.

◆ And apropos my remark about recording sessions, Jim Beal Jr, of the *San Antonio Express-News*, Third Coast Music Network and Ear Food, commented, "They say there are two things you never want to see being made, politics and sausages. I'd say records fit right in there."

◆ Jim Ellinger quite rightly pulled me up for sloppiness in last month's note about the future of KOOP, of which he was the founding father. KVRX, which uses the same frequency during night hours, is indeed a student-run station, but KOOP is an experiment in democratically operated community radio. A failed experiment, unfortunately, as it fell into the hands of a gang whose methods would have been considered extreme at Tammany Hall. Anyway, I went off on the wrong track there, though the main point, that nobody much will object on principal to KOOP being taken over by KUT, stands.

◆ Don't feel I lost any points for not including Eddy Arnold among Americana's Oldest Inhabitants last month. To be honest, I had no idea he was still working, but he finally retired last month, playing his last show on May 16th in Las Vegas. However, if you think classic country should fall under the Americana rubric, which, for my money, is a perfectly valid point of view, Eddy Arnold would have romped it with a good seven years seniority over Doc Watson. He was born May 15th, 1918, you do the math. It's been calculated, as I noted a few months back, that Arnold is the second biggest moneymaker in country music, behind Dolly Parton but way ahead of Garth Vader.

◆ Think I should come clean and admit that the portion of last month's editorial that referred to Americana dinosaurs started life as a review of *Wild Cat Tamer*, the first album in 30 some years from Dale Hawkins, of *Suzie Q* fame. Trouble here was that there didn't seem any way out of avoiding a cliché which I try never to use in any case, and certainly didn't want to use about Hawkins, "I really wanted to like this album, but..."

◆ Bit of a catchup thing here, but back in April, while quoting Michael Corcoran, I queried whether people really used the expression 'Chi-town.' It sounds rather like 'San Fran,' a term which I'm told would never cross the lips of any self-respecting Bay Area resident. Anyway, while renewing, God love him, a Chicago subscriber noted, "Regarding the use of 'Chi-town,' you are correct. When used at all, it's by tourists and uninformed suburbanites, which are basically the same creature." Corcoran used to work for a Chicago paper, but I gather from various sources that the locals have got over him leaving.

◆ Though I can't imagine many of you needed it, Michael Corcoran provided pretty conclusive proof of just how fucked his musical taste really is, though I was little surprised to see the *Dallas Observer's* Robert Wilonsky, who I'd thought was more or less right-thinking, going along with him. I've thrown out the issue of *XLent* in which their joint feature appeared, and I'm buggered if I'm going to pay to access the *American-Statesman's* archives, but the gist of the giveaway line, the smoking gun as it were, is that Joe Ely, Butch Hancock and Jimmie Dale Gilmore are out, and never coming back. News to me. Well, so much for 3CM being cutting edge, because, while I reserve the right to give them a hard time whenever necessary, those guys will always be core artists here.

◆ As you may know, I'm not a big fan of Teye and I really wish Joe Ely would let him go. In this, I am far from alone, in fact I'm told Ely's audiences have been dropping off alarmingly, which I take to mean, at last in part, that there more people like the 3CM subscriber who was thinking of going to see Ely, but called me first to check if "he still has that goddamned flamingo guitar player with him."

◆ You may have noticed over the last few months that the good folks at Dowling Press have been running ads for the 2nd edition of *Modern Twang*, an even more epic version of David Goodman's *Alternative Country Music Guide & Directory*. In fact, Maryglenn even gave me a line which, if I was properly organized, would be the centerpiece of my nonexistent media kit, "We get a better response from 3rd Coast Music than anywhere else, including *No Depression*, and you can quote me on that." Unfortunately, as those of you who've responded to those ads may already know, Dowling ran into a series of production problems, "it's been one disaster after another," which have held up publication. However, as of just about to go to press, the book is finally ready to ship and should be in stores, or on your doorstep, by mid-June.

◆ Be warned, my spies are everywhere. A 3CM subscriber in the Cleveland area sent me a clipping of a Jimmy LaFave concert preview in *The Plain Dealer* which focused on LaFave as Professional Sooner. What moved the 3CMer to mail this to me was the following: "LaFave... can talk your ear off about Oklahoma's contribution to America's musical landscape. It starts with folk legend Woody Guthrie... but it doesn't stop there. 'Jimmy Webb, Roger Miller, Wanda Jackson, Leo Kottke, Vince Gill, Garth Brooks, Reba McEntire—they all came from Oklahoma,' he boasted." There are a couple of minor problems here, Miller, like LaFave himself, was born in Texas but raised in Oklahoma, and Kottke's from Athens, Georgia, but, of course, these are overshadowed by the rather staggering notion that LaFave seems to think, or, rather, is quoted in such a way that you get the impression he thinks, Brooks and McEntire are a credit to Oklahoma, rather than dragging the entire state into disrepute. And, come to that, Gill, who a lot of people try to pretend is OK, but really he isn't. Anyway, Jimmy, next time you're boosting Oklahoma, here's some suggestions: Floyd Tillman, Albert Brumley, Bob Dunn, Jean Shepard, Tommy Collins, The Collins Kids, Cowboy Copas, Stoney Edwards, Lowell Fulson, Johnny Bond, Chet Baker, Ray Wylie Hubbard and even Spade Cooley (far as I'm concerned, a murderer is still preferable to Brooks or McEntire), but you do get to keep Wanda Jackson. And as long as it's OK not to actually be born in OK as long as you think of yourself as an Okie, let's not forget Eddie Cochran and Kevin Welch.

◆ Watching Lucinda Williams on *Saturday Night Live* the other day, I got to thinking of how she's popping up as Special Guest Star on national albums the same way she used to be featured on every other Austin album a little while ago. Meanwhile, her local role seems to have been taken over by Patti Griffin, who's getting to be pretty ubiquitous, not that I'm complaining, far from it. I still can't abide Lucinda's band, but I do feel rather sorry for Jim Lauderdale, shaking pointless little percussion things, who might as well have a sign round his neck saying, "My own career is in the toilet." However, I've been told his main function is to provide Lucinda with moral, rather than musical, support (ie his own career is in the toilet).

◆ There are some people in the music world who irritate the hell out of me, for obscure and possibly unfair reasons, mainly that they seem to take themselves way too seriously. Peter Rowan is the principal one, but Tom Russell is very close behind. I passed on reviewing his recent *The Man From God Knows Where* because a limitation of my format is that it doesn't allow for two word reviews, and once I'd said "Pretentious bullshit," the rest was just details. Still, if I thought Russell was pompous, I didn't suspect him of being a dumbass until I got an album of cowboy poetry by Paul Zarzyski. Plugs may not be the most demanding literary form, but, touting him as a great American poet, Russell concluded, "Roll over TS Eliot—Zarzyski's taking the stage," which wins this month's Bag Of Nickels Award. The album, by the way, is pretty dreadful, even if, rather weirdly, it features Duane Eddy, but then my taste for cowboy poetry begins and ends with Buck Ramsey.

◆ Couple of cool stories in Rich Kienzle's liner notes to *Swing West!* (see Reviews). Of Jimmy Bryant's *Little Rock Getaway*, he notes, "Imperial Records' A&R man Scotty Turner... later recalled certain disc jockeys (clearly unaware of Bryant's earlier work with Speedy West), suggesting the tapes had been sped up since they assumed no guitarist could possibly pick that fast. That talk ceased after the producer brought Bryant to Nashville's annual Disc Jockey convention for a live performance." The other, more, of an interesting factoid, is that when Semie Mosley, creator of Mosrite guitars, the axe of choice for California surf bands, built a doubleneck for Joe Maphis, he was still a teenager.

◆ Trouble with my line of work is that it becomes a mindset you can't turn off, I mean, I'd critique children singing nursery rhymes. Over the last few weeks, there have been three or maybe four occasions when I've watched talking heads on TV looking sad and solemn after listening to yet another song about the Columbine High School shootings and saying, "That's so beautiful," "That's so moving," and I'm screaming at them, "No, it isn't, it's fucking crap!" I think of this as *Candle In the Wind Syndrome*, in the aftermath of a tragedy, you put out any old tosh and everybody has to pretend it's wonderful. Course, this goes back way before Elton John, you should hear some of the garbage that came out after Hank Williams' death, for instance, but I think *Candle* not only lowered the bar, it got people to think that stuff like that was part and parcel of events like Di's death or Columbine. Far as I'm concerned, it only makes them worse.

◆ As a footnote to the cover story, the original concept for the *Austin Music Band* album was to format it like a radio show, but this turned out to be impracticable. "It could be done on vinyl, but not on CD, because you have to leave a registration space between tracks, and even Jerry [Tubb, Terra Nova] couldn't figure a way round that." Jim Stringer discovered. "The irony is that what prevented us using a radio show format was that it meant the album couldn't be played on the radio!"

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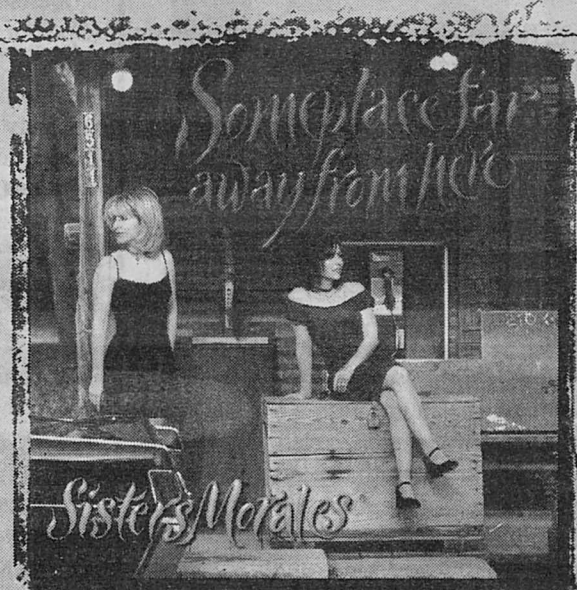
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DOWN BY THE CREEK

Many years ago, Alvin Crow remarked to me, "In Texas, we figure if you don't make it live, you don't make it at all," which stuck in my mind because it so exactly echoed my own sentiments about music making, and gave me yet another motive for moving to Texas. Building from this premise, one of my more enduring fantasies has been to run a record label which would only release live albums, its motto: Fish or cut bait. Mind you, when I say "fantasy," I found out recently that Ernie Young was 60 when he founded Excello, so who knows, it could still happen.

◆ Anyway, my label's first order of business would be to find suitable locations for recording, and here we run into a major problem—most Texas venues suck. The vast majority are acoustically hopeless, very few have even halfway decent equipment and even fewer have a house sound engineer who isn't legally deaf. The upshot is that my mobile studio would spend a lot of time parked outside Cibolo Creek Country Club, north of San Antonio, one of my alltime favorite rooms which, in the person of Tim Holt, has an outstanding soundman.

◆ I am not, of course, the only person hip to Cibolo Creek's virtues as a place to record, in the last few months, three albums have been cut there. However, they have very little else in common (though Lloyd Maines and Paul Percy are on two of them). Taking very different approaches, one tries to capture a typical show, one is an optimized special event, one is a fuckup.

◆ By her own admission, she did toy with the idea of adding a piano player, but Lloyd Maines nixed this, so **Terri Hendrix—Live** (see Reviews) is the real deal, the lineup you'll see at any full band show. While they did have a few false starts, did do a couple of songs over, and did get to pick the best 50 minutes out of four hours, there was no overdubbing, so essentially this is an undiluted What You Hear Is What You Get slice of the Terri Hendrix experience. She and Maines can send this to any booking agent in the world and promise they'll get the same, only more of it, and if you hear a cut on the radio, that's what you'll hear in a club, near as makes no difference.

◆ For **Live At Cibolo Creek Country Club**, Ray Wylie Hubbard put together an elite band specifically for the occasion. Hubbard is such a tremendous performer, so much in his element before an audience, that he effortlessly dominates the album, but it's still a little busy and, more to the point, atypical. Not to say it isn't a good 'un, but he can't promise booking agents that's what they'd get (unless the money's really amazing), and if you hear a cut on the radio, that's not how it's going to sound in a club, though if you ask me it might sound somewhat better, but then I'm real fond of Ray solo, or just with Terry Ware.

◆ When I dropped off last month's issue at Cibolo Creek, one of the staff put his finger on my review of Rosie Flores' **Dance Hall Dreams** and said, "Exactly the right word. 'Tedious.'" In the studio, you're free to waste time and money stopping and starting over, again and again, until you get it right, but doing it in front of a paying audience just isn't on. Flores' approach, going in not with a bedded-down touring band but an unrehearsed, or anyway under-rehearsed, group of all-stars, was fatuous. If she sent this, slathered with overdubs and with the audience edited out, to booking agents, they'd say "So what?" and if you heard a cut on the radio, you'd have absolutely no idea you were listening to a live performance.

◆ Two keepers, even if one is, from a rather specialized viewpoint, somewhat deceptive, and one bucket of worms. Not a bad track record. Of course, the big winner in all this is Cibolo Creek's Denny Johnson. He can claim credit for the ones that worked out and disavow any responsibility for the one that didn't. **JC**

JIM STRINGER & THE AUSTIN MUSIC BAND Swang!

(The Music Room)

Reason the cover is the band's logo rather than a picture of them is that Jim Stringer doesn't want to jinx the group he's so painstakingly assembled. "In my experience, as soon as you get publicity pictures taken of a band, somebody always leaves." When I suggested using the radio, which, by the way, will be making a featured appearance at the CD release party, he said, "That's fine. Nobody cares what we look like anyway. We're not a pretty boy band."

◆ Pretty or not, the Austin Music Band is the closest thing Austin has to a supergroup. Musicians' musicians is an expression that carries the unfortunate, but unavoidable, sub-text, "you've never heard of them," and certainly Jim Stringer and Boomer Norman guitars, T Jarrod Bonta piano, Carl Keese bass, Lee Potter drums and Alan Barnet vocals, are not names with which, say, the *Chronicle's* Austin Music Awards will have made you familiar. However, their collective resume includes over 60 album credits and God knows how many gigs with how many different bands. This, you might say, is not an outfit that has to worry much about weak links.

◆ The AM Band evolved out of **Travis County Pickin'**, the all star country-jazz instrumental album Stringer supervised for HighTone. Wanting to put together a promotional tour for the album, Stringer immediately ran into the difficulty that every track featured a different rhythm section, so he envisaged a roadshow in which featured pickers would be backed by a house band, but though he assembled the basic trio in late 1997, the tour never got off the ground. At the same time, Sharon Ward, Git Gone's bassplayer/vocalist, began having to be out of town a lot on business, curtailing the rockabilly trio's activities, so Stringer needed another outlet. "I deliberately set out to differentiate from Git Gone and keep away from rockabilly. Sharon's such a great singer, also the group's visual identity, and I didn't want people to think this was a cutrate substitute for the real Git Gone."

◆ The name came from a joking remark by Lisa Pankratz, "There's only one Austin band and everyone plays in it." Slowly the trio began to expand, first adding T Jarrod Bonta. "He sat in with us one night, his 18th birthday, and opened my eyes to what the sound could be. Then we asked Boomer (Norman) to join us. You know how Boomer is, he likes to keep his options open, but after a while he started turning down other gigs to play with us. Finally, I heard Alan Barnet, who was with a group called Psychic Cowboys, sing and he just knocked me out, great stylist and very soulful. He's a better singer than I am, but we use him as a featured vocalist, doing maybe five songs an hour, so people will pay attention, not start tuning him out."

◆ The album title is a composite of swing and twang, "Swang sounds better than 'twing.'" At first, there was some confusion in the repertoire because we weren't trying to be just a swing or Western Swing or country band, but we weren't trying to stretch any of those genres too far either. Artie Shaw's *Special Delivery Stomp* is a perfect example of what works for us, swing with a hillbilly attitude. Lee's drumming is the key, he makes it all come together. Now we gauge everything by how it fits in."

◆ The nine covers among the 16 tracks embrace classic swing, country, blues, R&B and rock & roll, juxtaposing Louis Jordan (*Texas & Pacific* and *Jack, You're Dead*), Big Boy Arthur Crudup (*My Baby Left Me*), Wynn Stewart (*Long Black Limousine*), Chuck Berry (*Thirty Days*), Hank Snow (Dan Robertson's *Ninety Miles Per Hour [Down A Dead End Street]*), Artie Shaw (*Special Delivery Stomp*), Johnny Bond (*Sick, Sober And Sorry*), Bobby Bland (*36-22-36*) and Mel Tillis (*No Love Have I*). But the swang thing sure works well in the hands of this powerhouse outfit, which brings a convincing sense of unity to this diverse material. Interspersed among the covers are seven equally diverse Stringer originals, from the blistering country-jazz instrumental *Onward*, *Charlie Christian's Soldiers* to a *Don't Be Cruel* inspired rock & roll ballad replete with Jordanaires style doo-wopping. The AM Band is rather the best of both worlds. Austin picking at its finest but not the usual raggedyass jamming, and tight as a drum ensemble playing with Austin flair and style.

◆ Like a latterday, and smaller scale, Duke Ellington, Stringer has, until the last few months, financed the group out of his own pocket. "We've never had a bad night and there's never been any friction. For all of us, I sincerely believe, this is our favorite thing to do and if I have to spend my own money to keep a band this good together, I'll do it." Recently things have been picking up, but what pleases Stringer most isn't the size of the crowd but it's makeup, "Not a single hipster, just real people who love the music. Maybe that ought to be our motto: Real Music For Real People."

◆ Stringer dreams of the AM Band hosting a Hayride or Hometown Jamboree kind of show, with featured vocalists, guest pickers and a series of albums. In the meantime, a follow-up, showcasing T Jarrod Bonta (just guessing, but I imagine there'll be at least one Jerry Lee number), is in the works. **JC**



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Michael Point, *Down Beat* (from "Chicano Blues Man" CD liner notes)

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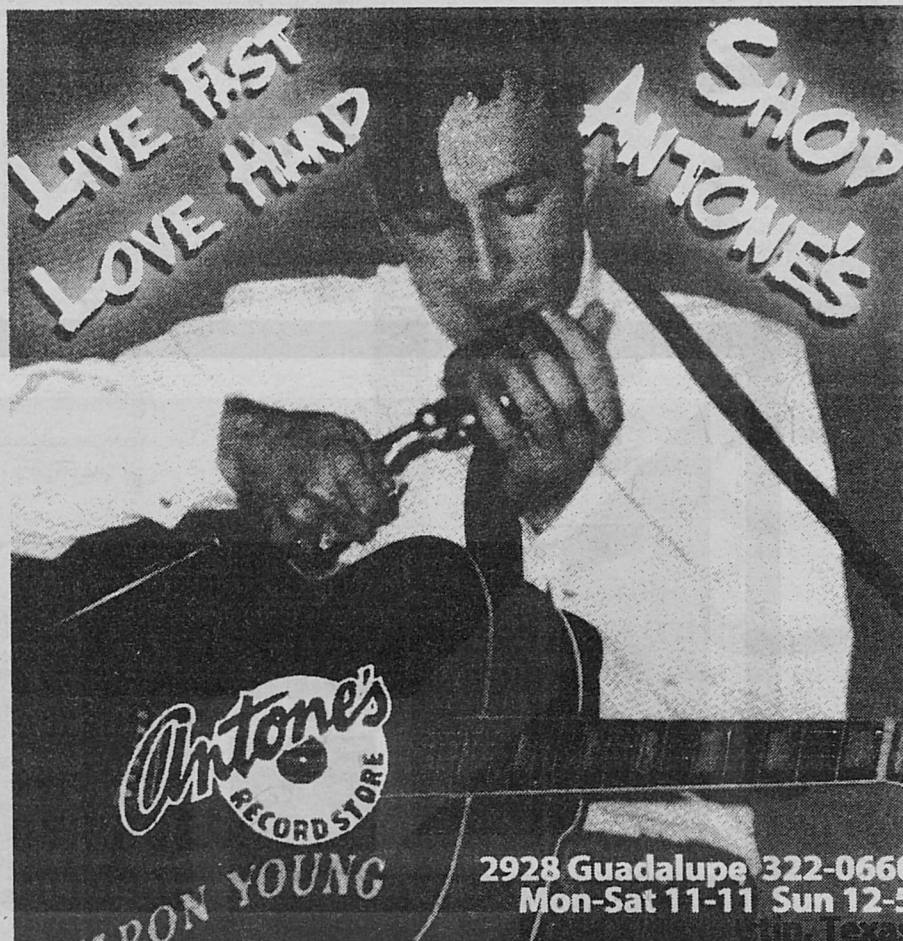
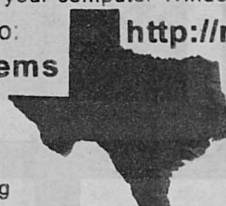
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"music for those of us who never joined up"

Raging Smolder Music Review #19

"All the music we think is cool!" at rsmr@avmcyber.com

Edge City: Outsiders

Outsiders is a 14-song introduction to Edge City and the stellar songwriting of Jim Patton, a fusion of 1960s-era folk rock with 1990s new-music intensity, producing a rock-n-roll landscape where complex characters attempt to deal with their lives. Patton's songs capture and articulate the key problems of human existence: loneliness, alienation, and the difficult task of finding oneself and one's place in the world. Jim Patton writes about ordinary events and transforms them into important landmarks on one's journey thru life. His music deals with universals — those aspects of life which are common to all of us.

New Lloyd Maines produced "Mystery Ride" CD available this fall
Edge City, P.O. Box 93081, Austin, TX 78709-3081
edgecitytx@aol.com, (512)280-8455



American Good Southern Style

JUNE ARRIVALS & DEPARTURES

- 1st Johnny Bond • 1915 • Enville, OK
Shelly Lee Alley † 1964
- 2nd Carl Butler • 1927 • Knoxville, TN
- 3rd Memphis Minnie • 1897 • Algiers, LA
Buster Pickens • 1916 • Hempstead, TX
Joe Bonsall • 1921 • Lake Arthur, LA
Boots Randolph • 1927 • Paducah, KY
- 4th Texas Ruby • 1908 • Wise County, TX
Freddy Fender • 1936 • San Benito, TX
Rabon Delmore † 1952
- 5th Narciso Martinez † 1992
- 6th Gary US Bonds • 1939 • Jacksonville, FL
Joe Stampley • 1943 • Springhill, LA
Clarence White • 1944 • Lewiston, ME
Steve Riley • 1969 • Mamou, LA
- 7th Wynn Stewart • 1934 • Morrisville, MO
- 8th Adolph Hofner • 1916 • Lavaca Co, TX
Steve Fromholz • 1945 • Temple, TX
Alton Delmore † 1964
- 9th Les Paul • 1915 • Waukesha, WI
Jackie Wilson • 1934 • Detroit, MI
- 10th Howlin' Wolf • 1910 • West Point, MS
- 11th John Inmon • 1949 • San Antonio, TX
Bruce Robison • 1966 • Houston, TX
- 12th Charlie Feathers • 1932 • Holly Springs, MS
Junior Brown • 1952 • Cottonwood, AZ
JE Mainer † 1971
Angelais Lejeune † 1974
Johnny Bond † 1978
- 13th Clyde McPhatter † 1972
- 14th Wynonie Harris † 1969
- 15th Tex Owens • 1892 • Kileen, TX
Leon Payne • 1917 • Alba, TX
Waylon Jennings • 1937 • Littlefield, TX
Art Pepper † 1982
- 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 Martí Brom • 1961 • St Louis, MO
- 20th T Texas Tyler • 1916 • Mena, AR
Brian Wilson • 1942 • Hawthorne, CA
Ira Louvin † 1965
Louise Massey † 1983
Boudleaux Bryant † 1987
- 21st Clifford Scott • 1928 • San Antonio, TX
OC Smith • 1932 • Mansfield, LA
Danny Brown • 1936 • Warren, TX
Paulino Bernal • 1939 • Raymondville, TX
- 22nd Kris Kristofferson • 1936 • Brownsville, TX
- 23rd Elton Britt † 1972
Wade Frugé † 1992

- 24th Gene Austin • 1900 • Gainesville, TX
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
Paul Percy • 1954 • Temple, 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
Clay Blaker • 1950 • Houston, TX
- 28th Lester Flatt • 1914 • Overton County, TN
Groovy Joe Poovey • 1938 • Dallas, TX
Lloyd Maines • 1951 • Lubbock, TX
- 29th Johnny Ace • 1929 • Memphis, TN
Billy Guy • 1936 • Attasca, TX
Bill Kirchen • 1948 • Bridgeport, CT
Juke Boy Bonner † 1978
Lowell George † 1979

**Wednesday Summer Residents
 at Old #1, 6416 N Lamar Blvd**
 1st (6/2) • Rod Moag
 2nd (6/9) • Loy Sisters
 3rd (6/16) • Area Code 512
 4th (6/23) • Michael Fracasso

**Music in The Saloon
 at Threadgill's World HQ,
 301 West Riverside Drive
 EVERY MONDAY, 7.30pm**
The Panhandlers
EVERY WEDNESDAY, 7.30pm
Dale Watson (x 16th)
EVERY THURSDAY, 7.30pm
Don Walser's Pure Texas Band
WEEKENDS, 9.30pm
 4th, Red Dirt Rangers
 5th, Hosea Hargrove
 + Gary & Eve
 11th, Troy Campbell
 12th, Mclemore Avenue
 + The Privateers
 16th, Chris Wall
 18th, Gary Primich
 19th, Cornell Hurd Band
 25th, Justin Treviño
 + Susanna Van Tassel