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ERIC WESTBURY

#83/172 DECEMBER 2003



CHARLES EARLE's B-Sides
JOHN THE REVEALATOR
Songwriter Tells All!
† SPEEDY WEST
FREEFORM AMERICAN ROOTS #52
REVIEWS (*** (or not))**

Clifton Chenier

Freddy Fender

Handbook Of Texas Music

Michael Hurwitz & The Aimless Drifters

William James IV

Chris Stuart & Backcountry

Eric Westbury

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Saturday 13 Toni Price
Sunday 14 Ruthie Foster
Monday 15 Austin Lounge Lizards
Tuesday 16 South Austin Jug Band
Wednesday 17 Hot Club of Cowtown
Thursday 18 Jimmy LaFave
Friday 19 Albert & Gage
Saturday 20 Van Wilks
Sunday 21 Slaid Cleaves
Monday 22 Eliza Gilkyson
Tuesday 23 W. C. Clark
Wednesday 24 ... Texana Dames

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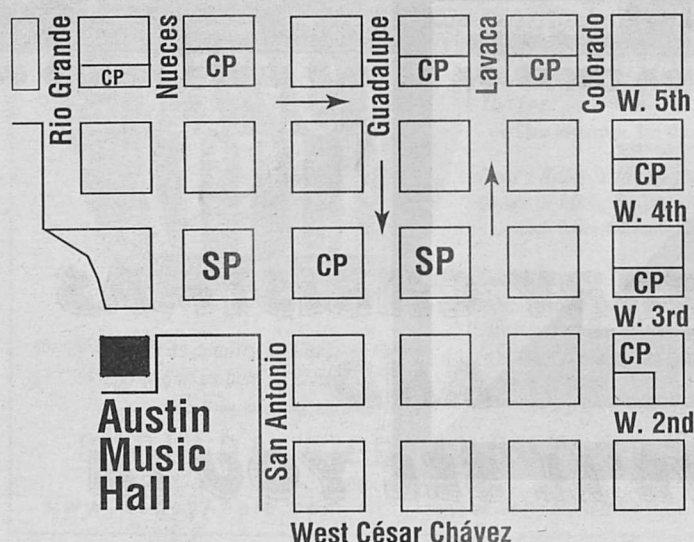
Saturday 13 Resentments
Sunday 14 Carolyn Wonderland
Saturday 20 Greezy Wheels
Sunday 21 Derailers

Weekends 3:30 pm to 6 pm

Saturday 13 Sara Hickman
Sunday 14 Marcia Ball & Sarah Elizabeth Campbell
Saturday 20 Shelley King Band
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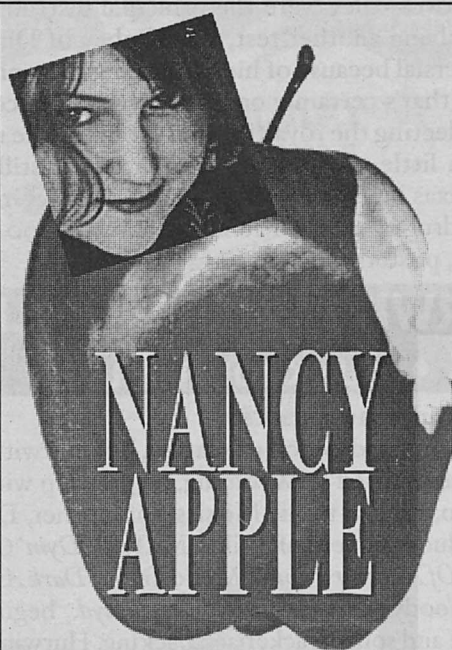
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FREEFORM AMERICAN ROOTS #52

REAL MUSIC PLAYED FOR REAL PEOPLE BY REAL DJs DURING NOVEMBER 2003

#1 RICK SHEA & PATTY BOOKER: OUR SHANGRI-LA

- Tres Pescadores) *BR/*BW/*CP/*DN/*EW/*FS/*JM/*KC/*KF/*MP/*RR/*RT/*S&D/*SJ
 Paul Burch: Fool For Love (Bloodshot) *DF/*HG/*JE/*JP/*JZ/*KL/*SF/*T&L/*TW
 The Sundowners: Chicago Country Legends (Bloodshot Revival) *JF/*RH/*SH
 John Lilly: Last Chance To Dance (self) *DB/*EB/*FW
 Marti Brom: Wise To You (Goofin') *LB/*RMS/*RW
 = Bottle Rockets: Blue Sky (Sanctuary) *B&C/*BP/*SG/*3RC
 Thad Cockrell: Warmth & Beauty (Yep Roc) *FM/*MA/*MM
 Chris Stuart & Backcountry: Saints & Strangers (Backcountry) *CD/*GS
 Robert Earl Keen: Farm Fresh Onions (Koch) *AG/*TT
 Darrell Scott: Theatre Of The Unheard (Full Light) *DO/*JB/*SB
 0 Leona Williams: Honorary Texan *DWB/*KD
 1 Chip Taylor & Carrie Rodriguez: The Trouble With Humans (Trainwreck/TMG) *TA/*TJ
 2 Albert Lee: Heartbreak Hill (Sugar Hill) *MT/*PP
 3 Billy Lee Riley: Hillbilly Rockin' Man (Reba) *BL/*NA/*RJ
 4 Hot Club Of Cowtown: Continental Stomp (Hightone) *JH
 5 Graham Lindsey: Famous Anonymous Wilderness (Catamount) *RC/*TH
 6 Ruthie & The Wranglers: Someday (Lasso) *TS
 7 David Childers & The Modern Don Juans: Room #23 (Silver Meteor) *KR/*ND
 8 Rodney Crowell: Fate's Right Hand (DMZ/Columbia) *SKG
 9 The Dixie Hummingbirds: Diamond Jubilation (Rounder) *DL/*OR
 0 Rosie Flores: Single Rose (Durango Rose) *R&H
 1 Anna Fermin's Trigger Gospel: Oh, The Stories We Hold (Undertow) *JS
 2 Merle Haggard: Like Never Before (Hag)
 3 Wayne Hancock: Swing Time (Bloodshot) *RR
 4 Lyle Lovett: My Baby Don't Tolerate (Lost Highway) *AA
 5 Lauren Sheehan: Some Old Lonesome Day (self) *LG
 6 = Karl Shiflett & Big Country Show: Worries Of A Man (Rebel) *AR
 7 Eric Westbury: Burnt Tongues & Blue Truths (Barreltown)
 8 VA: Just Because I Am A Woman; Songs of Dolly Parton (Sugar Hill)
 9 = The Handsome Family: Singing Bones (Carrot Top) *ST
 0 Oh Susanna (Nettwerk) *MDT
 1 = Geoff Muldaur's Futuristic Ensemble: Private Astronomy (Edge Music) *MR
 2 VA: Livin' Lovin' Losin'; Songs Of The Louvin Brothers (Universal) *CL
 3 Amelia Blake: Old Horses (self) *JCS
 4 = The Damn Lovelys: Trouble Creek (Dren) *DY
 5 Bobby Flores: Just For The Record (Yellow Rose)
 6 Toni Price: Born To Be Blue (Antone's) *KM
 7 = Cactus Hunters (Rustic) *JT
 8 Ben Atkins: Maybelle (Hightone) *DP
 9 Cracker: Countrysides (Cooking Vinyl) *BF
 0 Richard Dobson: A River Will Do (Brambus) *DJ
 1 Jean Synodinos: Lucky (Fortunate) *SM
 2 = Blackie & The Rodeo Kings (Bark/True North) *AB
 3 Greg Brown: If I Had Known (Red House) *LW
 4 Johnny Cash: UnEarthed (American/Lost Highway) *UV
 5 Paul Curreri: Songs For Devon Sproule (City Salvage) *JQB
 6 Kris Delmhurst: Songs For A Hurricane (Signature Sounds) *RB
 7 Deke Dickerson: Mr Entertainment (Rock & Roll Inc) *DC
 8 Evangeline: Big Choice (Squatch On The Rocks) *TO
 9 Richard Lee: These Wheels (Richard Lee Music) *MF/*MT
 0 Leela & Ellie Grace (self) *SMJ
 1 The Kinfolk: Memories (Greenbrier) *DA
 2 Li'l Bit & The Customatics: Short & Sweet (self) *BC
 3 Los Lonely Boys (OR) *CM
 4 Los Pacaminos (Tornado) *TF
 5 Big Dave McLean: Blues From The Middle (Stony Plain) *EGN
 6 Jay McShann: Goin' to Kansas City (Stony Plain) *DT
 7 Muddy Waters: Muddy 'Mississippi' Waters Live (Epic Legacy) *RCS
 8 Tom Rigney & Flambeau: Happy to Be Here (Parhelion) *SC
 9 Jerry Sires Band: You're Gonna Be Cold (self) *TG
 0 Tweed Shade: Try (self) *RP
 1 The Very Girls: Elsewhere Bound (Recovery) *MD



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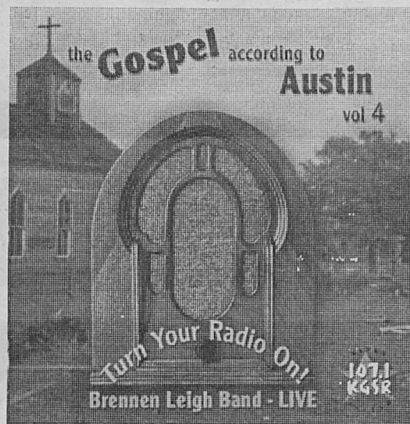
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WILLIAM JAMES IV • POSITIVELY W JAMES ST

(WJK ****)

From 1993 to 1997, William Kolb, aka William James IV, a Corpus Christi lawyer, averaged two albums a year, making him easily the most prolific recording artist in Texas. In itself, this, of course, is by no means a compliment, but while a small but devoted cult could (and does) argue the relative merits of his albums (I personally am particularly fond of young whores & old hippies and On the Road To The Sun), the truly astonishing thing about James' prodigious output was its consistency. Every album was a fresh challenge and the few people who bought one album almost invariably ended up buying all of them. However, after an eleventh album in 1999, he not only fell silent, he seemed to disappear off the face of the earth. Let's just say he got off to a bad start on the millennium, but now he's back in business. Well, sort of. Only six of the 16 tracks are new songs, the other ten being mastered versions of ones that appeared on earlier CDs (James found out about mastering late in the game), chosen, as far as I can see, from personal preference rather than with any 'Greatest Hits' intent. Many singer-songwriters doubtless pride themselves on their honesty, integrity, literacy, skepticism, nonconformity, ability to wrestle inner demons in public and willingness to give offence, but James rachets all these qualities up to levels that make most of his peers look like poorly educated, bourgeois milquetoasts, and his new material takes up where he left off. Trouble with James, from a critic's point of view, is that he's sui generis, there's no "if you like X, you'll probably like Y" equation available, but if you like your songwriting hard edged and razor sharp, check him out.

JC

FREDDY FENDER Rock 'N Roll As Eddie Con Los Shades Interpreta El Rock!

(Arhoolie *****/*****)

Before he became Freddy Fender, Baldemar Huerta was recording under his own name for Discos Falcon, so he used the alias Eddie Medina with Discos Ideal of Alice, TX. So successful were both his original rock & roll singles—*Holy One/Que Mala* (Mean Woman) sold 280,000 copies, with the A side #1 in San Antonio and New Orleans, the flip #1 in Dallas/Fort Worth, while *Acapulco Rock* was a big hit in Mexico—and his translations into Spanish that Ideal showcased them both in two of their rare LPs (Paco Bettancourt, one of the owners, was a jukebox operator, so Ideal was geared to singles). Reproducing both the albums and their original artwork, the **Eddie Con Los Shades** ("whoever played with me, I just put sunglasses on them") CD, from 1961, has ten originals and two covers, **Interpreta**, no date given but early 60s, has the same ratio in reverse. For those familiar with Fender's rock & roll days from Arhoolie's 1993 **Canciones De Mi Barrio**, only six cuts overlap that fab collection of Ideal 45s, for those unfamiliar with Fender's rock & roll days, this is some cool shit. Fender, whose guitar playing was obviously influenced by Carl Perkins, was equal parts rockabilly and R&B, with, naturally, a strong Latin flavor, and if not the father of garage rock, he certainly anticipated it by several years. I thought of matching the uncredited translations to their Anglo originals, but, hell, that would just spoil the fun.

JC

CHRIS STUART & BACKCOUNTRY SAINTS AND STRANGERS

(Backcountry *****)

You've all heard the 'too rock for country/too country for rock' dichotomy, but Stuart and his Del Mar, CA, based trio, Janet Beazley banjo/vocals, Ivan Rosenberg resonator guitar/vocals and Dean Knight upright bass/vocals, may well run into another one, 'too Americana for bluegrass/too bluegrass for Americana.' I make no secret of my antipathy for most bluegrass, and I recently stumbled across a possible reason why it annoys me so much. In, as I recall, a Del McCoury review, a writer commented that you can gauge a bluegrass band's confidence from its willingness to play at something less than full tilt, in which case Backcountry, some of whose songs are positively languid, must be supremely confident. With multiple strengths in Stuart's songwriting, Beazley's beautiful lead and harmony singing, and tremendous individual and ensemble playing, this is lovely stuff and whatever they want to call it (Amerigrass?), it sure works for me.

JC

CLIFTON CHENIER • THE KING OF ZYDECO

(Arhoolie DVD ****.5)

Released in 1987 on VHS as a companion to Les Blank's documentary **Hot Pepper**, focussing on the music rather than the man, the bulk of the 58 minutes of footage came from the 1982 San Francisco Blues Festival (*Party Down, I'm The Zydeco Man, Let The Good Times Roll, Cher Catin, Calinda, Clifton's Zydeco, Louisiana Two-Step* and *Black Gal*), supplemented by some from the 1978 New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival (*I'm A Hog For You, Caledonia*) and a Lafayette TV station (*It's Christmas Time, J'Aime Pain De Mais*). Visually, the film is marvellous, Blank was a master at shooting concerts, and if the TV work is wooden, the sight of Chenier and his band wearing non-matching crowns more than compensates. However, the sound, though clearer than on the video, is, at best, barely adequate. In uncharacteristically terse liner notes, Chris Strachwitz notes that the San Francisco audio came from two microphones 125 feet from the stage, that Chenier had endless trouble with his PA in New Orleans and that KLFY recycled their tapes (finding two Chenier clips that hadn't been taped over was pure luck). However, even under considerably less than ideal conditions, Chenier was such a dominant figure in the genre he defined that he's still compelling. I wouldn't go as far as to say that it's worth the price of the DVD, but among the interview clips between the music is an hilarious one, rescued by Michael Doucet, of Chenier being interviewed by an utterly clueless French woman on a program sponsored by the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana.

JC

THE HANDBOOK OF TEXAS MUSIC

(Texas State Historical Association, paperback *****)

Historical is the operative word here. The main entries in this 400 page, large format encyclopedia are restricted to the dead, whether natives or having strong Texas associations (eg Woody Guthrie), with the living only referenced in articles on topics such the Armadillo World HQ, Big D Jamboree, Kerrville Folk Festival, Tejana Singers and so on. This, very sensibly, avoids opening a hideous, not to say enormous, can of worms. To test the range, I looked up the most marginal Texan I could think of, Phil Ochs, an Army brat born in El Paso, and sure enough, a comprehensive bio. However, with my Births & Deaths database at my fingertips, I have an unusual if not unique advantage, and cross checking threw up a few significant omissions; Papa Link Davis (Starday, Okeh, Columbia), Johnny Dollar (Columbia, Dot), Jimmy Heap (Imperial, notably the original version of *Wild Side Of Life*, and Capitol), Monette Moore (Paramount, Vocalion, Columbia and RCA Victor) and Dave Stogner (Decca). Some sidemen, Al Stricklan and Bob Dunn for instance, made the cut but not Fred 'Papa' Calhoun or Hugh and Karl Marx Farr, who, described as "the most important fiddle and guitar duo in country & western history," played on an album or two—they were the principal instrumentalists of The Sons Of The Pioneers. Applying another test, Don Robey of Duke/Peacock Records is described as "controversial because of his shrewd business practices and dealings with artists." Well, yes, that's certainly one way to describe copyrighting their songs under an alias and collecting the royalties, and probably the nicest thing said about Robey in years. So, a little spotty and overpolite, but still a valuable resource, covering all kinds of Texas music, from bagpipes (John McGregor, at the Alamo 3/6/1836) to rap (DJ Screw, drug overdose 11/16/2000). And the 100 odd visuals, photographs, sheet music covers, posters, etc, are simply sensational.

JC

MICHAEL HURWITZ & THE AIMLESS DRIFTERS • BUNKHOUSE BLUES

(Meadowlark *****)

One sheets tend to be high on fluff and low on revelation, but Hurwitz's contains the key to his music. Born and raised in Wyoming, he grew up with Western Swing and cowboy music but also, thanks to his Mississippi mother, Delta Blues. Given this, his album, which includes covers of Willie McTell's *Dyin' Crapshooter's Blues*, Gordon Lightfoot's *Mother Of A Miner's Child*, Merle Travis' *Dark As A Dungeon* and an outstanding version of Woody Guthrie's *Pretty Boy Floyd*, begins to make sense. With his big, warm baritone and some crackerjack backing, Hurwitz's originals convincingly range from Southern women to broncbusting, the death of a Cajun mother to the end of a cattle drive. Wearing it like an old coat, much of the charm of his possibly unique style is that Hurwitz doesn't make a big thing out of it.

JC



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FAMILY VALUES? FUN TOPICS & FINE PERFORMANCES AT CMA AWARDS

There is Music Row story that has been passed around over the last decade. It involves the song *Straight Tequila Night*, which was a huge hit for John Anderson during the 90s. The story says it sat and gathered dust in a Nashville publishing house for many years, even though most who heard it acknowledged that was a well-written piece of material.

The reason for this? Country music was in a period of touchy-feely love songs and family values material. In an era when Vince Gill was having a huge hit with a song like *Look At Us*, an ode to a long and happy marriage, nobody wanted their artist to have anything to do with one about a barfly chick who shoots tequila. Of course, John Anderson turned the song into a huge hit and Vince dumped his wife so he could bang Amy Grant, proving that appearances can't be trusted on the Row. But I digress...

I actually bring this story up because it came to mind last month while I was watching the CMA Awards telecast. You see, the show began with the Alan Jackson and Jimmy Buffet duet *It's Five O'Clock Somewhere*. Next up was Toby Keith singing *I Love This Bar*. Willie Nelson was mentioned as a nominee in the Vocal Event category for the song *Beer For My Horses*. Brooks & Dunn and George Strait both referenced honky-tonks in their performances. And for good measure, Tim McGraw offered up *Red Ragtop*, the controversial cut about a young couple that ends and unwanted pregnancy with an abortion.

Was there a trend here, I found myself wondering. Is country music getting back the edge it used to have when a song like *The Pill* rocked people's worlds? Will Music Row be beating a path to Steve Earle's door for addiction songs? Okay, maybe I'm writing too much into what is probably just a minor trend in the industry, but it sure did seem a little different up there on the Opry House stage that evening. And by different, I mean better. For the most part, anyway.

All in all, CMA night for 2003 was a very unpredictable event. Here are some thoughts and observations:

Johnny Cash I fully expected the late Cash to win in the Music Video category, and I wasn't going to be too surprised by a win for Single of the Year, but winning in the Album of the Year category was a shocker. I didn't expect the Music Row establishment to vote in this category for an artist who wasn't from their inner circle, but apparently the sentimental aspect of one last chance to vote for the great Cash was too strong, and

CHARLES EARLE's B-Sides

it has to be admitted that these were sentimental votes. Cash hasn't won a CMA Award since 1969, and suddenly he has a posthumous handful? I'm not saying that this was wrong. Cash's material was stronger than that of the other nominees, but such things don't always mean much at the CMA Awards. Had he not died, I still think Cash would have won for his haunting video, but in death, I hope that the exposure gained from his CMA wins exposes many new fans to his greatness.

The Cash Tribute The musical salute to Cash would have been very nice had the sound guys not butchered it on the broadcast. I was happy to see the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band up there and Kris Kristofferson was excellent, but here is a note for producers to remember since Sheryl Crow is moving to Nashville and seems to be showing in country music circles with great frequency lately: don't have her sing with Travis Tritt. It just doesn't work.

Toby Keith The biggest shock of the night involved Keith. After receiving a whopping seven nominations, Keith went home empty-handed. Nothing. Nada. Shut out. Keith clearly had the biggest year of any Music Row artist, so one has to wonder exactly what caused him to lose to Alan Jackson in the coveted Male Vocalist and Entertainer categories. I would speculate that some folks in Nashville have developed resentment for Keith. He lives in Oklahoma and has talked about being a 'Nashville outsider.' Plus, he seems to be talking about anything but music in most of his interviews, and Music Row is not fond of artist-pontificators. His feud with the Dixie Chicks may have also hurt him. I'm guessing that folks on the Row think he has gotten too big for his britches. That's fine with me. Though I think his current drinking song is tolerable, he has acted like a jackass way too often for my tastes.

Wynona Judd When she came on to the stage that night, I commented that she looked like what would happen if actress Julianne Moore swallowed that Reuben 205 guy from *American Idol*. A week or so later, she was the subject of quite possibly the funniest mug shot in history after a night of drinking in Nashville caused her to end up in the pokey. Check it out on www.thesmokinggun.com to see what I mean. It is hilarious. And since her mom is a major supporter of MADD, there is some beautiful irony.

Brad Paisley I have defended this guy for the most part, as a number of his songs do have a little more of a traditionalist feel, but his nominated song *Celebrity* is nothing more than a gimmick ditty that tries to work in a bunch of dopey pop culture references. I do applaud him for bringing Little Jimmy Dickens out with him. I suppose I should apologize for this, but I can't help but laugh whenever I see that teeny dude up there in cowboy duds. It's just funny.

Brooks & Dunn These guys came out and proved to the world what crucial element country music has been so desperately lacking—saxophone solos.

Shania Twain After putting out another mega-pop album that masquerades as country last year, Twain was

not nominated in the Female Vocalist category. So she shows up to perform and cheapens the night anyway. Wearing hair extensions and a shirt that looked like the Partridge Family bus, Twain adopted a stage pose throughout her number that made it look like she had to pee. To make matters worse, her cheesy hired-gun band was all dressed up like Kentucky moonshiners. It couldn't have looked any more fake and stupid. Hell, the closest Shania gets to moonshine is if her and Mutt run out of Cristal in Europe and are forced to drink Moet instead.

Tim McGraw I applaud him for performing *Red Ragtop*. It was a nice stab at the radio morons who removed it from playlists due to its content. But is it just me, or is Tim starting to look an awful lot like Queer Eye For The Country Guy. Trot him through your local leather bar and he would have looked right at home.

Rebecca Lynn Howard This lovely but hardly-known young singer got the Best Headlights award for the evening. I frankly had no idea that the Opry House was that cold during the telecast.

William Shatner as a presenter Uhm...what the hell was that about?

Norah Jones & Dolly Parton When it was announced that these two would perform with each other, I found myself wondering if the two voices would work together. It turns out that the duet couldn't have gone better. These two pros were smooth, elegant and downright wonderful while pairing their timeless voices.

Joe Nichols I like this guy and I was happy to see him pick up the Horizon Award. His material is good and I'm crossing my fingers that he isn't just a brief presence in the industry, as Horizon winners sometimes are.

So that about wraps it up for CMA 2003. Here's hoping that the drinking songs are here to stay.

DON GIBSON DEAD AT 75

He was a Country Music Hall of Famer who wrote some of the great songs of the genre's golden era. Don Gibson, who penned classics such as *Sweet Dreams*, *I Can't Stop Loving You* and *Oh Lonesome Me*, died last month in Nashville of natural causes at the age of 75.

Gibson enjoyed a successful recording career of his own that began in 1957 and spanned ten years. He became a member of the Grand Ole Opry and had a handful of chart hits. However, as he would later admit, drugs and alcohol ended his successes. He dropped out of public life afterwards, making only an occasional appearance. But his election the Hall of Fame in 2001 brought the spotlight back to this talented lyricist.

AND FINALLY...

I've probably said all there is to say about **Johnny Cash** over the last couple of months. However, it is worth mentioning that the biopic of Johnny and June Carter Cash has been cast. Joaquin Phoenix and Reese Witherspoon will play the lead roles.

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ERIC WESTBURY

BURNT TONGUES & BLUE TRUTHS

(Barreltown ****.5)

While I'm not much for prayer, there have been times, many, many times, when I've wished the Big Guy (or Gal) would break out that cosmic size can of Songwriter-B-Gone, give it a good shake and zap this sorry planet, or at any rate the highly contaminated North American continent. To quote John Prine, "Over the years, I have received many tapes, cassettes, MP3s and CDs . . . Most of them are awful or, even worse, mediocre."

When I first came to Austin, then and still a particularly noxious pesthole, there were two basic types of songwriter, the ones, aka Austin Songwriters Group, who, more interested in royalties than rhyme, mechanicals than meter, just wanted to write a hit, and those who were on what was then a fairly well defined dues-paying 'career' ladder, of which the first rung was Open Mikes, where the weak were, if not killed and eaten, at least subjected to the first of Honest John's Ten Commandments: Thou shalt not claim to write, sing and play an instrument unless thou canst do at least *one* of them reasonably well. It is no coincidence that the decline of these invaluable filters directly parallels the diminishing costs of making an album. Singer-songwriters could go straight from their living rooms to the record stores, and back again every week to check their consignments, in case someone had actually bought one of the bloody things.

However, there is an upside to Sturgeon's Law, which is that if you wade through nine no hoper songwriter CDs, the tenth should be like Eric Westbury's. OK, it's never as neat as that, personally I think ol' Theodore gave crud plenty of the best of it, I'd shade the odds to more like 95%, but the point is that nuggets like this make the sifting process worthwhile and remind one that all the good songs have not already been written.

Westbury gets off to a real good start. All I knew about him is that he's Canadian (he lives on a farm outside Victoria, British Columbia), and while I was thinking, 'Man, this sounds *really* good,' I flipped the CD over to check the credits and went, 'O—okay, that explains it.' Thing about this notoriously picky producer is you get more than great sound, you get the Gurf Morlix Seal of Approval, and for many that will be all they need to know right there.

Apart from *Churchill's Black Dog* (referencing Winston Churchill's sobriquet for deep depression), Westbury is not a confessional writer but a social observer, and he's not real happy, which is a bit worrying when you come to think about it, after all he lives in a country that's considerably less regressive than the US of A. However, what distinguishes him from other sociopolitical songwriters is that, inveighing against propaganda and alienation, he's never self-righteous and doesn't claim to have any answers, veering between David & Goliath optimism, "somehow someday we're gonna knock the big man down," and You Can't Fight City Hall pessimism, "I'm tired of fighting all day. The hours are bad and I can't stand the pay."

I've often wondered what makes songwriters tick, what makes them so sure they have anything to offer, and while there are quite a few equally gifted writers I could have asked, Catamount's Graham Lindsey for instance, the obviously articulate Westbury, with his manifest integrity and minimal narcissism, seemed like the ideal candidate to put in the hot seat. However, he came back at me with more than I expected. As I loathe and despise the Q&A format (3CM: You had a band called The Hooligan Preachers, what happened to that? EW: That's an interesting story . . .), I'll leave you to work out my questions from his answers. **JC**

SINGER-SONGWRITER TELLS ALL!

Hopefully good singer-songwriters (and maybe some bad ones) persist because they can't stop. I tried to quit a few years ago, but then I wrote more songs than ever, so instead I went the other way and started releasing CDs. Now and then I tell myself I'm going to retire and forget the music biz because the fake, arrogant and corrupt nature of the business is at odds with the simple art of writing songs and letting people hear them—but I've been saying that now for years.

Quite a few of the songs on my record were written when I truly thought nobody would hear them, which is a songwriting technique actually. You have to be doing it for the right reasons. Fame and wealth are bad, bad reasons, but they drive a lot of people. That and getting chicks. Too many people are out there writing songs for other people. I'll write songs even if I'm the only one hearing them. I'd rather people heard them, but it's not a requirement. People should be trying to write songs that have never been written before. Instead, a lot of people are trying to write songs that have been written before, and some of them make a lot of money doing that, which only makes matters worse.

I'm certainly no authority on being a successful songwriter in the commercial sense, so my opinion on how a songwriter sinks or swims won't count for much. I guess everyone has their own definition of success. I aim to make enough money to keep writing and recording songs. The more I make, the more I'll spend in the studio and the more I can afford to tour. If this CD does well, then the next one might have fiddles on it, if it doesn't, maybe it'll just be me and my Simon & Patrick guitar.

I tried to make it clear from the title that this isn't your long weekend summer BBQ album. I was going to put a warning sticker on the CD, 'this album contains material which might be offensive to the terminally optimistic.' I've written some happier tunes, but they're not on this record. In fact, I cut one tune off the CD because it was too dark. I might put it on the next one.

After school, the guys I used to play with started acting as though it was all just juvenile fun and now it was time to grow up. I didn't realize that we were just goofing around. I took it seriously. About 1987, I wrote a song called *Between The Cradle And The Grave* and sent a cassette to the Calgary University radio station. In a week or two, this song by a band that didn't really exist was top ten on the campus charts. So I started in this business doing it backwards, and it seems I still sorta do things that way. By the time we were actually a performing band, we already had a small following from the radio. We were inspired by The Long Ryders, Rank N' File, The Blasters, Beat Farmers, even Dwight Yoakam, the first generation of alt.country. I liked the social and political type tunes. We did mostly originals about dying or getting killed, but we made sure to set these tunes of death and destruction to a catchy country melody so folks could sing 'em in the shower.

Then were the basement years, when I switched to acoustic guitar and apparently, became a folk singer. This is like the spot on a resume you hope people won't notice, what happened between 1995 and 1999? I wrote songs and moved around a lot. I never really planned to be a solo singer-songwriter. I prefer being in a band, but couldn't find people to play with so I kept writing songs and recording them occasionally. I'm a singer-songwriter by circumstance more than design.

I don't write a lot of love songs, and I play a five stringed guitar left-handed and upsidedown. I sing with a partially paralyzed vocal cord. This all seems normal to me, but people point out that nobody else does it exactly like that. Nobody else is dumb enough. Positive response to my first band started it. I was surprised people thought we were good. I thought we were pretty bad, but we were really sincere and that counts for something. It's been a slow progression over the years

which I'm thankful about. Every bit of progress gives me the incentive to get to the next stage. But I could also be comfortable as one of those guys who releases a bunch of obscure albums. I think I'd be good in that role. There's not much more to it than that.

When I recorded demos for *Walking Tracks*, I basically let people hear it and asked them to give it to me straight. 'Is this crap?' Nobody would tell me it was, but I was worried that they just didn't want to hurt my feelings. I decided to release it, because I thought then I'd get objective opinions. I was fully prepared to be beaten by the public response, but some people liked it. It got some great reviews, a feature article in a Canadian folk magazine, and it got me in to coffee houses and onstage locally and at a festival or two.

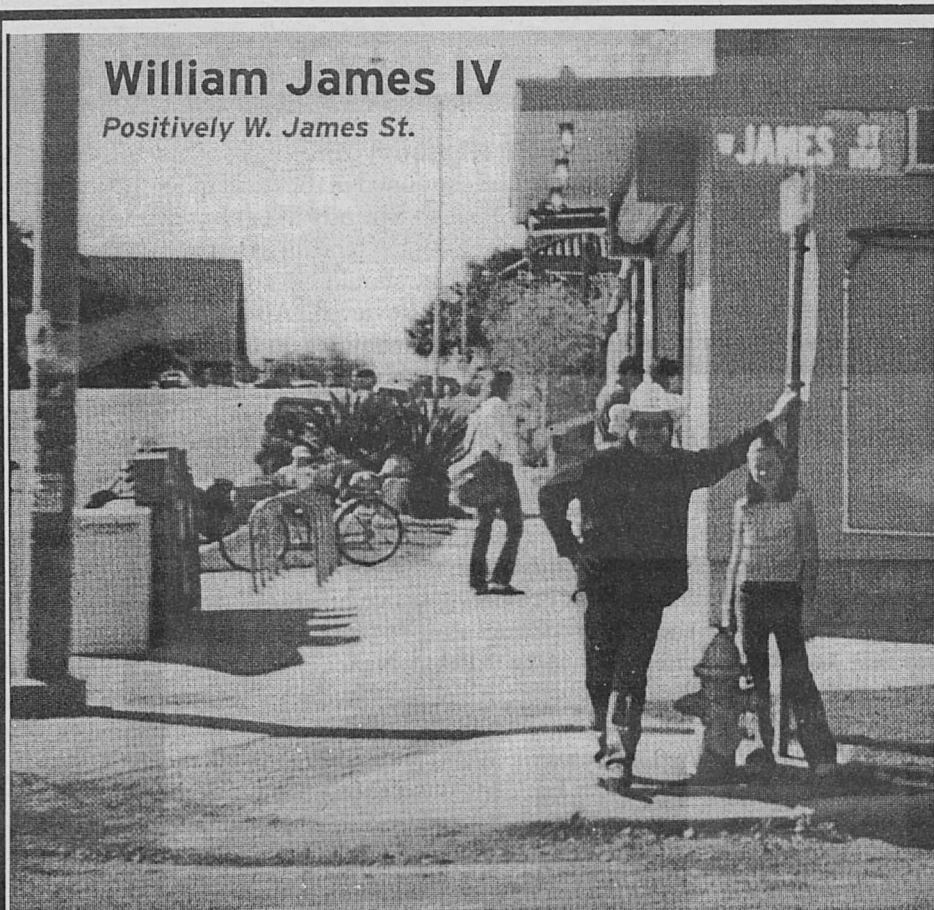
I'm lucky to live in a country that provides government funding for the arts. Canada has some faults, but it still amazes and impresses me that it will support a singer-songwriter with such an obvious distrust of authority and the establishment. There's a certain irony in a cynic like me getting financial support to record a song like *Knockin' The Big Man Down*.

After *Walking Tracks*, I was determined to get a real producer. I don't need to give people another excuse to ignore the music, it has to sound right. I went online and Gurf's name came up over and over again. Eventually I had a list of people I thought would be good to do it, and there was pretty much only one name on it. You'll have to ask Gurf why he agreed to do it. He's very selective about what he chooses to do. I think it was partly the songs he liked, and partly the attitude that the songs expressed.

The sort of music I play is not background music. It doesn't go over well while drunk people who have never heard of me shoot pool and play darts. A lot of time I might have wasted was been spent learning what works for me. I know people who have taken the 'play everywhere they'll let you' philosophy, and they do that for five years and then give up. I haven't taken that route. I prefer festivals and coffeehouse type venues, which I first found out about when I was in central BC four years ago or so. I had no idea that this folk club thing was going on, and that people were listening to great music in community halls and churches and stuff. I couldn't believe how attentive the audience was. That environment works for me. Now this home concert thing is getting bigger too. Things seem to be heading that way more, where music fans organize the shows themselves, without the label hype.

I don't believe that the best quality of songs are necessarily being played on the radio. It takes a whole different set of skills to market and promote yourself that have nothing to do with the ability to write a good song. Now it seems as though if you're not an expert at all elements of the music business, then you're bad or undeserving. People don't really like a lot of that top 40 crap, but if you hear a song 20 times a day, your brain becomes infected by it, and all of a sudden you're singing a Shania tune. I think it happens to an extent with every genre, including Alt. Country/Americana, a major following develops when a few people decide who's good and who's bad, and everyone gets in line.

As for self-confidence and self-delusion, I don't think the 'power of positive thinking' works that well. You're probably not going to get anywhere, it's going to be painful and humiliating and then one day you'll die. If you're prepared to continue anyway, maybe you're on the right track! I don't think you can just 'believe' in yourself. Some great songwriters have a hard time recording and playing, they're so nervous and unsure of themselves, but make great records, while some people overflowing with self confidence really suck. I won't say names, but you know the kind I'm talking about—they're really rich and they have lots of videos and appear on TV awards shows. **Eric Westbury**



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+ WESLEY 'SPEEDY' WEST

Born January 25, 1924 in Springfield, MO, Speedy West was given a \$12 Hawaiian guitar when he was nine years old. Not long after, his father sold his own guitar to buy him a \$125 National steel-bodied resonator. When he died on Saturday November 22nd, Speedy West was a true legend of the steel guitar, one of the great men of country music.

Initially inspired by Little Roy Wiggins, later by Joaquin Murphey and Noel Boggs, West moved his family to California in 1946 and in 1947 was auditioned to replace Murphey in Tex Williams' Western Caravan. He didn't get the job and by the time Williams made him a firm offer, he was too busy with other commitments. In 1948, Speedy was working at Murphy's in LA, where he met guitarist Jimmy Bryant, who was working down the street at the Fargo.

That year, Speedy was hired by Spade Cooley but after meeting Cliffie Stone, worked full time on Capitol recording sessions until, in early 1949, he joined Hank Penny, leaving later that year when he was hired by Stone for his daily radio, later also, as The Hometown Jamboree, TV program. In 1950, Speedy's career and reputation were given a major boost by a recording session with Tennessee Ernie Ford & Kay Starr. *I'll Never Be Free* and *Ain't Nobody's Business But My Own* were both country and pop hits and his style on them landed West an instrumentalist contract with Capitol, he and Bryant cutting their first session in January 1951.

This led to even more session work. Between 1950 and 1955, West, with and without Bryant, played on over 6,000 recordings with a total of 177 different artists, including Frankie Laine, Jo Stafford, Billy May's Orchestra, Betty Hutton, Wanda Jackson, Moon Mullican, Helen O'Connell, Doris Day, Johnnie Ray, Ella Mae Morse, Spike Jones, Jean Shepard, Bing Crosby, Frank Sinatra, Eddie Kirk, Gene O'Quinn, Monte Hale, Cliffie Stone, Skeets McDonald, Sheb Wooley, Johnny Horton, Wade Ray, Johnny Bond, Roy Rogers & Dale Evans, Doye O'Dell, Gene Autry and The Sons of the Pioneers, with Capitol A&R men Lee Gillette and Ken Nelson encouraging both men's innovative and creative styles. Columbia A&R man Mitch Miller was so impressed by West's playing on Frankie Laine's 1951 *Hey Good Lookin'* that he started paying him double.

West & Bryant's final recording session for Capitol was on October 9th, 1956, however West continued to record for the label, teaming with Roy Lanham, until 1962. With the onset of rock & roll, The Hometown Jamboree was cancelled in 1959 after which West and other Hometown musicians started working the Las Vegas/Reno/Lake Tahoe club circuit as Billy & The Kids, featuring Billy Strange, Merrill Moore and the Black Sisters.

With dwindling opportunities for country musicians in the LA area, West joined Fender Musical Instruments as manager of their warehouse in Tulsa, OK, moving there in September, 1960. He continued to play steel guitar part time and had his own band for several years, but after a 1981 stroke was unable to continue playing.

For all his stellar career as a sideman, West's true legacy lies in the amazing, futuristic work he did with Jimmy Bryant, creating effects that can't be duplicated in hi-tech studios 50 years later. Bear Family's 1997 box set, **Flamin' Guitars**, includes all their joint albums, West's later albums and a selection of their session work, but, if you can find them, Razor & Tie's **Stratosphere Boogie** and **Swingin' On the Strings** are excellent showcases of the genius of Speedy West. JC

JOHN THE REVEALATOR

Moving things around as **Eric Westbury's** responses to my questions (see review and feature) couldn't be contained in the usual space, no imaginable rant would trump paying tribute to **Speedy West** and a few people left booking ads to the last minute. This month's corrections are that Chris Stuart & Back County: Saints & Sinners, in FAR #51, should have been **Chris Stuart & Backcountry: Saints & Strangers** (see Reviews). Also, **David Brake** says, "While I realize the term 'piano bar' for many conjures up images of a guy in a tux, and you had no way of knowing otherwise, nothing could be further from the truth when it comes to what I do. When not playing with the band, I do an all acoustic show with a full drum kit and drummer, and switch between baby grand and acoustic guitar. Although there is the occasional 'off the beaten path' request, it is mostly a format of high energy classix rock, blues and country. This is how I've always made my living (though not always with drums), and yes, I do play my own songs and sell my CDs off the stage. In short, this is not 'your father's piano bar.'"

♦ As a footnote to the Eric Westbury review, I've been told it's pretty routine for sidemen not to know the words to songs they've played behind hundreds of times, they just knew their cues (I once heard that Nanci Griffith was livid when she found this out the hard way). However, it's pretty obvious that **Gurf Morlix** wasn't just picking, he was paying attention to Blaze Foley, Lucinda Williams (back when she was still good), Slaid Cleaves, Ray Wylie Hubbard et al.

♦ Elsewhere, you'll find Charles Earle's take on this year's CMA awards, but I also got this from **Tom Hughes & Liz Shpherd** of Voice Of Vashon, WA:

"Just when Tom and Liz thought Halloween was over ... we turned on the TV and there was the CMA Awards show. We hope, for your sake, you didn't watch it too. We hope you simply read next morning that Johnny Cash, Alan Jackson and Randy Travis won a bunch of awards, and that this signals a resurgence of traditional country music. Oh, how we wish it were true! But we cannot forget what we saw with our own eyes last night, what we heard with our own aching ears!

It was a ghastly musical nightmare of Manilowian proportions. Even the evening news that followed, which kicked off with the ghoulis and lurid confessions of Seattle's Green River killer, paled in comparison to the brutal axe murdering of country music that had just taken place. We are still writhing in horror. We keep asking ourselves, over and over and over:

- Why did Rascal Flatts thank the Lord for their award, when Satan is so clearly the one in charge of both their songwriting and hairstyles?
- Haven't Brooks & Dunn heard what happened to Siegfried & Roy? Why do they persist in their hellish attempt to be the country music equivalent?
- Why hasn't someone told the unwashed and slightly putrid looking Kid Rock that it takes more than sticking a feather in your hat to be a country singer? Never mind, we will. *Barstool Mountain* to Kid Rock: get some talent. Get an extreme makeover while you're at it! You need a chin!
- Is Music Row so steel-headedly fixated on Shania Twain's belly button that no one has noticed what she's singing is not country music?
- Is the game of golf so great that it was worth Vince Gill's soul?
- Didn't Johnny Cash deserve more than a *medley*?"

♦ Texans among you can now get **Enjoy Texas Music** license plates with a picture of Blind Lemon Jefferson (www.EnjoyTexasMusic.com). Funds raised by the plate will go towards financing musical instruments, textbooks, lessons or sheet music for students who couldn't otherwise afford them, and the Texas Music Office (music@governor.state.tx.us) would like to hear of other ideas for programs to benefit music-related educational and community efforts that can be sponsored by a nonprofit organization based in Texas. The plate has an annual fee of \$30 in addition to annual vehicle registration fees, and for another \$40 you can get a personalized one. Or you can pick up a 'What Would Ernest Tubb Have Done' bumper sticker for free at any Cornell Hurd Band gig, even if you're not a Texan.

♦ Many others, including Charles Earle, have addressed the sad passing of **Don Gibson**, but I'd like to add one small footnote to his more spectacular achievements. When he decided to retire, Gibson gave his band *two years* notice. Now that's class.

♦ Finally, in this holiday season, I invite you to ponder the age old question: what if the *Hokey Cokey* really is what it's all about?

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- 1st - Slim Willet • 1919 • Victor, TX
 ----- Sandy Nelson • 1938 • Santa Monica, CA
 ----- Magic Sam † 1969
 ----- Lee Dorsey † 1986
- 2nd - Charline Arthur • 1929 • Henrietta, TX
 ----- Mercy Dee Walton † 1962
- 3rd - Rabon Delmore • 1916 • Elkmont, AL
 ----- Randy Garibay • 1939 • San Antonio, TX
 ----- Jimmy Heap † 1977
 ----- Grady Martin † 2001
- 4th - Larry Davis • 1936 • Kansas City, MO
 ----- Freddy Cannon • 1940 • Lynn, MA
 ----- Ernie Durawa • 1942 • San Antonio, TX
 ----- Gary P Nunn • 1945 • Okmulgee, OK
- 5th - Sonny Boy Williamson • 1899 • Glendora, MS
 ----- Little Richard • 1935 • Macon, GA
 ----- Molly O'Day † 1987
- 6th - Hugh Farr • 1903 • Llano, TX
 ----- Leadbelly † 1949
 ----- Joe King Carrasco • 1953 • Dumas, TX
 ----- Tish Hinojosa • 1955 • San Antonio, TX
 ----- Anna Fermin • 1970 • Manila, The Philippines
 ----- Roy Orbison † 1988
- 7th - The Grey Ghost • 1903 • Bastrop, TX
 ----- Tom Waits • 1949 • Pomona, CA
 ----- Bill Boyd † 1977
- 8th - Floyd Tillman • 1914 • Ryan, OK
 ----- Johnny Otis • 1921 • Vallejo, CA
 ----- Big Walter Horton † 1981
 ----- Marty Robbins † 1982
- 9th - David Houston • 1938 • Bossier City, LA
- 10th Rich Minus • 1940 • San Antonio, TX
 ----- Johnny Rodriguez • 1951 • Sabinal, TX
 ----- Otis Redding † 1967
 ----- Faron Young † 1996
- 11th Big Mama Thornton • 1926 • Montgomery, AL
 ----- Tom Brumley • 1935 • Stella, MO
 ----- Brenda Lee • 1944 • Lithonia, GA
 ----- Troy Campbell • 1964 • Germantown, OH
 ----- Fiddlin' Johnny Carson † 1949
- 12th Kevin Smith • 1967 • Colorado Springs, CO
 ----- Clifton Chenier † 1987
- 13th Conni Hancock • 1957 • Lubbock, TX
- 14th Charlie Rich • 1932 • Colt, AR
- 15th AP Carter • 1891 • Mace Springs, VA
 ----- Rose Maddox • 1926 • Boaz, AL
 ----- Jesse Belvin • 1932 • San Antonio, TX
 ----- Betty Elders • 1949 • Raleigh, NC
 ----- Steve Forbert • 1954 • Meridian, MS
 ----- Fats Waller † 1943
 ----- Valerio Longoria † 2000
- 16th Shelby Singleton • 1931 • Waskom, TX
 ----- Kimberly M'Carver • 1957 • Mesquite, TX
- 17th Spade Cooley • 1910 • Pack Saddle Creek, OK
 ----- Eddie Cleanhead Vinson • 1917 • Houston, TX
 ----- Arthur Neville • 1937 • New Orleans, LA
 ----- Nat Stuckey • 1937 • Cass Co, TX

- 18th John Reed • 1945 • Charleston, SC
 ----- Jacky Ward • 1946 • Groveton, TX
 ----- Blaze Foley • 1949 • Marfa, TX
 ----- Don Santiago Jimenez † 1984
- 19th Professor Longhair • 1918 • Bogalusa, LA
 ----- Little Jimmy Dickens • 1925 • Bolt, WV
 ----- Bobby Page • 1938 • Rayne, LA
 ----- Phil Ochs • 1940 • El Paso, TX
- 20th Herman The German • 1952 • Germany
- 21st Albert Lee • 1943 • Leominster, UK
 ----- Lee Roy Parnell • 1956 • Abilene, TX
 ----- Danny Barnes • 1961 • Belton, TX
- 22nd Hawkshaw Hawkins • 1921 • Huntingdon, WV
 ----- King Karl • 1931 • Grand Coteau, LA
 ----- Red Steagall • 1937 • Gainesville, TX
 ----- Speedy Sparks • 1945 • Houston, TX
- 23rd Chet Baker • 1929 • Yale, OK
 ----- Esther Phillips • 1935 • Galveston, TX
 ----- Johnny Kidd • 1939 • London, UK
 ----- Tim Hardin • 1941 • Eugene, OR
- 24th Dave Bartholomew • 1920 • Edgard, LA
 ----- Stoney Edwards • 1929 • Seminole, OK
 ----- Lee Dorsey • 1924 • New Orleans, LA
 ----- Cornell Hurd • 1949 • Honolulu, HA
- 25th Cab Calloway • 1907 • Rochester, NY
 ----- Alton Delmore • 1908 • Elkmont, AL
 ----- Johnny Ace † 1954
- 26th Rattlesnake Annie • 1941 • Paris, TN
 ----- Peck Kelley † 1980
- 27th Scotty Moore • 1931 • Gadsden, TN
 ----- Will T Massey • 1968 • San Angelo, TX
 ----- Kristi Guillory • 1978 • New Orleans, LA
 ----- Bob Luman † 1978
- 28th Dorsey Burnette • 1932 • Memphis, TN
 ----- Charles Neville • 1938 • New Orleans, LA
 ----- Adam Landreneaux † 1973
 ----- Freddie King † 1976
 ----- Hoagy Carmichael † 1981
- 29th Rose Lee Maphis • 1922 • Baltimore, MD
 ----- Tim Hardin † 1980
- 30th Joaquin Murphy • 1923 • Hollywood, CA
 ----- Bo Diddley • 1928 • McComb, MS
 ----- Skeeter Davis • 1931 • Dry Ridge, KY
- 31st Rocky Morales • 1940 • San Antonio, TX
 ----- Robert Pete Williams † 1980
 ----- Rick Nelson † 1985
 ----- Floyd Cramer † 1997

Threadgill's World HQ, 301 West Riverside Dr STRING BAND THURSDAYS

7:30-10 pm. No Cover

4th, Pistol Love Family Band

11th, The South Austin Jug Band

18th, Nathan Hamilton

SUNDAY GOSPEL BRUNCH

11am-1.30pm

7th, The Durdens

Threadgill's North

6416 N Lamar

Wednesdays, 8-10pm. No Cover

3rd, T Jarrod Bonta

10th, Colin Gilmore