

Walter Hyatt – Bio

Walter Hyatt was born on 25th October 1949 in Spartanburg, South Carolina and was raised there. Growing up, the Hyatt home was always filled with music and his father's musical tastes ran to big bands and jazz, while his mother loved opera and symphonies. In addition there was church music – as a pre-teen Walter took piano lessons from the organist, plus there was the explosion of pop music on American AM radio during those [pre-teen years] and his teen years. Incapacitated following an accident, Hyatt began seriously learning to play the guitar around the age of thirteen, having casually picked up the instrument a few years earlier. Walter then formed The Lamplighter Minstrels with his older brother George, later while attending Wofford College there was The Floorboards and then the Walter Hyatt Consort from which Uncle Walt's Band emerged. Formed just as Walter turned twenty this trio was composed of two other Spartanburg musicians, the late Deschamp 'Champ' Hood [d. 2001] and David Ball. The trio moved to Nashville a few years later. Having met songwriter Willis Alan Ramsey, on the promise of free recording time he persuaded them to move to Austin, Texas where they helped him construct his studio Hound Dog Sound. **"Blame It On The Bossa Nova"** was recorded in Charlotte, North Carolina at Arthur Smith Studios during 1974 and released independently, but the band broke up the following year and Hyatt returned to Nashville followed by Hood.

Circa 1976 through the summer of 1978, Nashville based, The Contenders were composed of Hyatt and Hood, plus the late Steve Runkle [guitar] [+], Jimbeau Walsh [drums] and Tommy Goldsmith [guitar]. Now back in Raleigh, for many years Goldsmith worked in the offices of Nashville newspaper The Tennessean. Goldsmith and Runkle were childhood friends who hailed from Raleigh, North Carolina and circa 1971 they met Messrs. Hyatt & Co. who were performing in a Chapel Hill, North Carolina bar. The Contenders debut album was released during 1978 by Moonlight Records but when the band break up soon afterwards, Messrs Hyatt and Hood returned to Austin where they were joined by Ball in the reformed Uncle Walt's Band.

"An American In Texas" was recorded at John and Laurie Hill's Loma Ranch studio in Fredericksburg. The trio is fondly remembered in Austin for its residency at the Waterloo Ice House on 38th Street and they recorded a live album there during 1982. Uncle Walt's Band broke up again in 1983 and a few years later Hyatt moved to Nashville with his second wife Heidi. From time to time the trio would play reunion gigs. Proof that even in their absence the band remained popular, **"6-26-79"** recorded at Wink Tyler's Austin studio during 1979 was released on cassette almost a decade later. During 1991 Sugar Hill Records issued two CD compilations that brought together the trio's four releases. Uncle Walt Band's appeared on Austin City Limits during 1980 sharing a bill with Ralph Stanley & The Clinch Mountain Boys, while, on his own, Walter appeared on the 1991/Season 16 of the show [alongside the Cowboy Junkies]. Uncle Walt's Band reunited as backing vocalists on the song "Once Is Enough" which appeared on Lovett's 1989 album **"Lyle Lovett And His Large Band."** The disc subsequently scored a Grammy for Best Country Vocal Performance by a Male.

Signed by as a solo artist by Tony Brown of MCA Records, Walter's debut **"King Tears,"** co-produced by Billy Williams and Lyle Lovett, appeared on the imprint's Master Series. Texan Lovett was a longtime admirer of Uncle Walt's band. Walter subsequently toured as Lyle's opening act, a case of role reversal since, during his student days, Lovett would open for Walter & Co. Hyatt's sophomore effort **"Music Town"** appeared in 1993 and he co-produced the disc with Jim Hoke. Champ and David contributed to both of Walter's solo albums, and both leant heavily on material penned Hyatt. During 1995 Walter put together a band, King Tears, and they performed a Monday night residency at The Sutler in Nashville. The same year Hyatt's second daughter Rose Evelyn was born, his son Taylor having arrived a few years earlier. Meanwhile in Austin, Champ had replaced Jimmie Dale Gilmore as bandleader of the weekly Wednesday evening picking session at Threadgill's Restaurant in North Austin. Walter, celebrating his forty-sixth birthday, joined Champ on **"Threadgill's Supper Sessions: Second Helpings"** [1995] a recording subsequently released by the now defunct Austin label, Watermelon Records.

Hyatt perished on 11th May 1996 when Valujet Flight 592 crashed in the Florida everglades. At the time, Walter was on his way to daughter Haley's college graduation in Virginia. The following year Lyle Lovett organised an Austin City Limits special that celebrated Walter's music and included

appearances by Messrs. Hyatt and Ball, Willis Alan Ramsey, Jimmie Dale Gilmore, Marcia Ball, David Halley, Alison Moorer and others. When Lovett recorded the 2CD **“Step Inside This House”** [1998], a celebration of songwriters who were bred or plied their trade in Texas, he included the Hyatt compositions “Lonely In Love” and “I’ll Come Knockin’.” The latter pair also feature on **“Unfinished Business, Vol. 1”** the first of three proposed releases to feature material Hyatt recorded [with and without King Tears] just prior to his passing. **“Vol. 1”** was released by King Tears Records in late January 2008.

Note.

[+] – Runkle also passed during late 2001.

Discography :

with Uncle Walt’s Band – **“Blame It On The Bossa Nova”** aka **“Uncle Walt’s Band”** [1974/75] ; **“An American In Texas”** [1980] ; **“Uncle Walt’s Band Recorded Live”** [1982] ; **“6-26-79”** [1988] ; **“The Girl On The Sunny Shore”** compilation [1991] ; **“An American In Texas Revisited”** compilation [1991] :

with The Contenders - **“The Contenders”** issued on CD 2002 [1978] ; **“Light From Carolina, Vol. 1”** [2000] :

Solo - **“King Tears”** [1990] ; **“Music Town”** [1993] ; **“Unfinished Business, Vol. 1”** [2008] :

Arthur Wood

Kerrville Kronikles 01/08 & 02/08.

[895 words]