

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

KEITH FERGUSON

#63/152 APRIL 2002



Daniel J Schaefer

— photographs —

Kathy Murray

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**FREEFORM AMERICAN ROOTS #32**

**ROOTS BIRTHS & DEATHS**

**REVIEWS \* \* \* \* \*** (or not)

**LOS CHOFERES • LOS DOS EQUIS**

**RONNIE ELLIOTT • CHRISSY FLATT**

**COLIN GILMORE • CHARLENE CONDRAY HANCOCK**

**SCOTT McCLATCHY • NARCOCORRIDO**

**ED PETTERSEN**

**THIS ISSUE IS DEDICATED TO MARGARET FERGUSON  
IN MEMORY OF HER SON**





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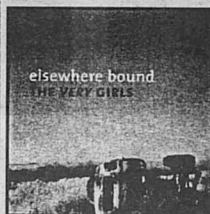
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# FREEFORM AMERICAN ROOTS #32

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## #1 NATHAN HAMILTON: ALL FOR LOVE AND WAGES

(Steppin' Stone) \*BF/\*BP/\*CM/\*MM/\*TC

- 2 Caitlin Cary: *While You Weren't Looking* (Yep Roc) \*DWB/\*DY/\*RC/\*RD/\*TA
- 3 Honky Tonk Confidential: *Your Trailer Or Mine?* (Too Many Dogs) \*LGr/\*MP
- 4 Lonesome Bob: *Things Change* (Leaps) \*AB/\*DF/\*KF
- 5 Star Room Boys: *This World Just Won't Leave You Alone* (Slewfoot) \*SG
- 6 Christy McWilson: *Bed Of Roses* (Hightone) \*DaN/\*SJ
- 7 James Talley: *Touchstones* (Cimarron) \*GS/\*RT
- 8 Cornell Hurd Band: *Song Of South Austin* (Behemoth) \*MT/\*RR/\*TG
- 9 VA: *The Guys Of The Big 'D' Jamboree* (Dragon Street) \*CP/\*JZ/\*LH
- 10 The Bottle Rockets: *Songs Of Sahm* (Bloodshot) \*PD/\*SC
- Ronnie Elliott: *Magneto* (Blue Heart) \*NA/\*ST
- 11 John Lilly: *Broken Moon* (self)
- 12 One Riot One Ranger: *Flat City Nights* (Hayden's Ferry) \*RB/\*TW
- 13 The Twangbangers: *26 Days On The Road* (Hightone) \*KD
- 14 Kasey Chambers: *Barricades & Brickwalls* (Warner Brothers) \*TO
- 15 Dugg Collins: *Sounds Like Texas* (Startex) \*DC/\*SH
- 16 The Pine Valley Cosmonauts: *The Executioners' Last Song* (Bloodshot) \*BR
- 17 Uncle Tupelo: *83-93: An Anthology* (Columbia/Legacy) \*HTR
- VA: *Caught In The Web; A Tribute To Webb Pierce* (Audium) \*MA
- 18 Robin & Linda Williams: *Visions Of Love* (Sugar Hill) \*AR/\*RJ
- 19 Peter Keane: *Milton Street* (Broken White) \*MDT
- 20 Tab Benoit: *Wetlands* (Telarc) \*DTh/\*PR
- 21 Hot Rize: *So Long Of A Journey* (Sugar Hill)
- Hank Williams III: *Broke, Lovesick & Driftin'* (Curb)
- 22 Chrissy Flatt: *Wings Of A Butterfly* (self) \*PP
- 23 The Damnations: *Where It Lands* (Joy-Ride) \*VP
- 24 The Essential Johnny Cash (Columbia/Legacy) \*BL
- Scott McClatchy: *Redemption* (LIB) \*JVB
- Alan Rhody: *Journey* (Kinajou) \*EB
- Don Walser: *Dare To Dream* (Lone Star) \*JH
- 25 Thad Cockrell & The Starlite Country Band: *Stack Of Dreams* (Miles Of Music)
- Hillbilly IDOL (Slewfoot) \*KC
- 26 Longview: *Lessons In Stone* (Rebel) \*CC
- 27 The Electric Rag Band: *Finest Ingredients* (ERB) \*DA
- Welcome To Porter Hall, TN (Slewfoot) \*TH
- Cary Swinney: *Martha* (Johnson Grass) \*DB
- VA: *Evangeline Made* (Vanguard)
- 29 David Olney: *Woman Across The River* (Strictly Music) \*DJ
- Jim Roll: *Inhabiting The Ball* (The Telegraph Company) \*CW
- Ian Tyson: *Live At Longview* (Stony Plain) \*KR
- Wishing Chair: *Crow* (Terrakin) \*SM
- 30 Gurf Morlix: *Fishin' In The Muddy* (Catamount)
- 31 Roger Clyne & The Peacemakers: *Sonoran Hope And Madness* (Emma Java) \*SB

Drag The River: *Closed* (Upland) \*JKS  
 Emsland Hillbillies . . . *With Friends* (Desert Kid) \*RH  
 Anna Fermin's Trigger Gospel: *Live Volume One* (sighlow) \*JSp  
 Danny Guinan & Red: *If I Was Wise* (self) \*ND  
 Rodney Hayden: *The Real Thing* (Rosetta) \*EW  
 Christine Kane: *Rain And Mud And Wild And Green* (Big Fat Music) \*LW  
 Paul Kelly: *Nothing But A Dream* (SpinArt) \*CZ  
 Kelly Kesler: *Salt Of Your Skin* (Melungeon) \*TJ  
 Dan Levenson: *Barenaked Banjos* (Buzzard) \*JW  
 Shannon Lyon: *Dharma* (Inbetween) \*RP  
 Wade Vincent Root: *Our Bed Of Roses* (WVR) \*H&H  
 Songs; Ohia: *Didn't It Rain?* (Secretly Canadian) \*AL  
 VA: *O Brother Where Art Thou* (Mercury) \*LGu  
 VA: *Philadelphia Folk Festival 40th Anniversary* (Sliced Bread) \*MR  
 VA: *Rockin' At The Barn Vol 3* (Dusty) \*DO  
 Dick Van Altena: *Lonely Hours* (Telstar) \*RW  
 Jim Watson: *Willie's Redemption* (Barker) \*DaT  
 Joe West: *The Lamp Sessions* (self) \*TF  
 Don Wise: *Genuine Snake* (Horn O'Copia) \*EGB

\*xx = DJ's Album of the Month — reporter details at [www.accd.edu/tcmn/far](http://www.accd.edu/tcmn/far)

## RONNIE ELLIOTT • MAGNETO

(Blue Heart \*\*\*\*.5)

Picasso, Hemingway, Sugar Ray Robinson, Leadbelly and Hank Williams get a verse each in Elliott's opening track, *Loser's Lullaby*, which is a compact introduction to his style, combining sardonic humor, inventive approach to classic themes (it's a song about drinking and drinkers), passionate commitment to roots music, bluecollar autodidact erudition and rock & roll. For all I know, Elliott is actually a Harvard graduate, but his cultural references—Degas, Wilde and Toulouse Lautrec show up in other songs—are always down to earth, never ostentatious. However his strength as a songwriter is best measured by his consistent ability to write songs about music, this time round *Halloween In Germany*, *Last One Standing* and *The Last Days Of Tampa Red*, which effortlessly transcend the limitations of what Steve Earle once described to me as "Writing songs about being stuck on a bus that cost more than most people's homes and who gives a shit?" Elliott, who was playing roots music when The Derailers were still a Ted Nugent cover band, and should be among the first to be inducted into an Americana Hall of Fame, is a remarkable, tremendously rewarding musician, whose keen intellect sets him apart as one of those rare artists, Ray Wylie Hubbard being an obvious peer, whose mind, heart and soul are all the same size—XXX.

JC

## THRILLAS @ THE DILLA

Joaquin Diaz was odd man out at Threadgill's during NotSXSW—his Arhoolie album won't be out until late this month, so he was the only act with no product on offer. I've already covered most of the albums put out by the various artists, no less than 12 of whom have been featured in 3CM cover stories, but there are a few that are either brand new or got by me for various reasons. I'll catch up with Diaz, and Stephanie Urbina Jones, who gave me a copy of her new CD but isn't releasing it yet (don't ask, it's a music biz thing I've never understood), down the line, but for now here are a few other albums you could, and should, have bought at the Thrilla.

♦ Normally, I believe, for better or worse, in what you see is what you get, but listening to **Chrissy Flatt: Wings Of A Butterfly** ([www.chrissyflatt.com](http://www.chrissyflatt.com) \*\*\*\*.5), I can't help thinking how much she'd benefit from voice lessons (not singing lessons, mark you). With just a little more power and projection, she'd justify the remark made by a mutual friend, "She reminds me of Lucinda before she started believing her press." The wimpy album title notwithstanding, Flatt is a tough cookie songwriter and if her delivery isn't as strong as her eleven originals warrent, she and Eric Hisaw, who produced and played the acoustic and electric lead guitars, are two of the most promising young musicians in Austin.

♦ As a general rule, second generation musicians merit little but well-deserved contempt and I guess part of the problem is that it's hard to tell your children they have no talent, so they don't find out until they run into people who don't give a shit about their self-esteem. Jimmie Dale Gilmore may be no more objective than any other father, but discovering that his son had no illusions about a career in music must have made it a lot easier to take justified pride in **Colin Gilmore: 4 Of No Kind** ([www.colingilmore.com](http://www.colingilmore.com) \*\*\*\*.5). As the title implies, this is an EP of four of Gilmore's originals, and, apart from suspicions about how he got hold of Rob Gjersoe guitar and steel and Rafael Gayol drums to back him, and the suggestion that, like Jimmie Dale, Colin may not be a prolific songwriter, you would be hard put to it to compare father and son. Still a singer-songwriter in development, Colin's influences, from Buddy Holly to Tom Petty, are obvious enough, but there's certainly enough here to make him well worth keeping an eye on. For inquiring minds, his mother was Jimmie's second wife, Debbie Fields, who sang in various Lubbock bands.

♦ Thanks to surface mail, foreign FARsters often lag a little behind their American counterparts but once in a while they pick up on something much faster, **Scott McClatchy: Redemption** (*Lightning In A Bottle* \*\*\*\*) being a prime example. One time frontman of Philadelphia roots rock heroes The Stand, currently playing guitar with Dion, who makes a guest appearance on a cracking version of Robbie Robertson's *The Weight*, McClatchy is very big with FAR's European contingent, and picking up support back home for his muscular combination of acutely observed country-tinged lyrics and bluecollar rock & roll bar band arrangements. Not perhaps an original concept but, as countless imitations of **Guitar Town** showed, the slightest hint of calculation curdles it. McClatchy, however, never strikes a false note. As a footnote, I asked Scott on whom *The Legend* was based, drop me a line if you really need to know the answer.

♦ Record stores have resisted setting up 'Americana' sections for the very good reason that most albums can just as easily be filed under older, better understood labels, but **Ed Pettersen: Desperate Times** (Split Rock \*\*\*\*) would hardly fit comfortably anywhere else. On paper, an album that juxtaposes reworkings of a traditional corrido, *La Tragedia De Heraclio Bernal*, and Blind Alfred Reed's Depression-era *How Can A Poor Man Stand Such Times And Live?* with songs about losing the family farm, Sarejevo, a cowboy ballad and an East Coast fantasy image of *Cheyenne*, might sound pretentious, but, with roughhewn acoustic production (mandolin, fiddle and banjo predominate), Pettersen unifies his ten disparate themes with his honesty of purpose.

JC



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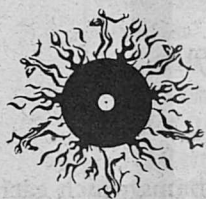
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## CHARLENE CONDRAY HANCOCK

### 50 YEARS FROM THERE TO HERE

### LOS DOS EQUIS • AUSTIN TEA PARTY

(Akashic \*\*\*\*\*/\*\*\*\*\*)

**K**eith Connection: Tommy X & Charlene's daughter Conni was an item with Keith for many years. Conni says, "We never stopped being together, we just stopped living together." Also, Keith and Charlene were both left-handed bass players, and as Conni says, "How many people have that in common with their mother-in-law?"

♦ She would have been 13 or 14 in 1952 when a neighbor in Morton, TX, cut *Shanty In An Old Shanty Town*, *If You Want Some Lovin'* and *Make Love To Me* on wax, and 50 years later Charlene Condray Hancock is still singing. Already well known in West Texas from a regular TV show, she made her first professional recordings, at Norman Petty's studio, in 1958 as featured vocalist with Tommy Hancock & The Roadside Playboys, whose leader she eventually married. However, by 1970 (*You Ain't Goin' Nowhere*), she was singing in a very different outfit, The Supernatural Family Band, which featured her and Tommy's children, and, on various tracks, John Reed and Jimmie Dale Gilmore. Since the late 80s, Charlene has been part of Texana Dames with her daughters Conni and Traci Lamar. Though the most recent cut is from 1998, this 25 track retrospective covers all these aspects of her career, and if her finest moment is a stellar 1977 version of Butch 'No Relation' Hancock's *Don't Let The Mountains Down*, it's all enchanting, downhome music.

♦ 'No Relation' also supplies one of the best numbers for Los XX, *Wishin' For You*. Produced by John Reed, who also plays—superbly, of course—all acoustic, electric, baritone and bass guitars, plus Telecaster banjo on two tracks, the album has a neat at a glance grid that shows you which members of a cast that includes Ponty Bone, East Side Flash, Joel Guzman, Charlene, Conni & Traci Lamar Hancock, Erik Hokkanen and Paul Percy, play on which of the 20 tracks. It also has rather eccentric song credits which seem to refer to Tommy X's sources rather than the actual writers, but there are four Tommy X originals, including a reprise to his classic *Lost In North Austin*. Now, thanks to the Ben White etc. construction, he's *Lost In South Austin* too. Other songs are Conni Hancock's *Party Of One*, Jimmy Davis' *I Dreamed Of An Old Love Affair*, Fred Rose's *Blues In My Mind* and *Rose Of Old Pawnee*, Hank Williams' *My Sweet Love Ain't Around* and a bunch of other more or less obscure old country and Tin Pan Alley toons. An album that combines Tommy X's trademark warmth of personality and John X's virtuoso musicianship (and painstaking production) is pretty much of a can't lose proposition.

JC

## ELIJAH WALD • NARCOCORRIDO

### A JOURNEY INTO THE MUSIC OF DRUGS, GUNS AND GUERRILLAS

(Rayo hardback \*\*\*\*\*)

**K**eith Connection: I'd have taken this straight to him, he was far better qualified to review it.

♦ Mexican-Americans far outnumber all other Hispanic groups in America put together but play almost no part in a so-called Latin boom dominated and controlled by Cubans and Puerto Ricans. Few outside their own community are familiar with the San Jose based Norteño superstars Los Tigres Del Norte, which, founded 30 years ago, still routinely outsells and outdraws the likes of Jennifer Lopez by a quite staggering order of magnitude. However, though the group has sold 32 million albums (and endowed a \$1 million scholarship fund at UCLA), you won't see them on the Latin Grammys, which, like most Mexican acts they boycott, because they're mainly famous for popularizing narcocorridos, story songs about the drug traffic, and if they broke into one of their monster hits, such as *Jefe De Jefes*, Emilio Estefan wouldn't know whether to shit or go blind. Though they've been around much longer—Los Tigres latched on to them back in 1972 when they heard and recorded *Contraband y Traicion* (Contraband And Betrayal)—narcocorridos have been compared to gangsta rap, but a rather radical difference is that narcocorridos are set to the waltzes and polkas of traditional Norteño and the groups are invariably accomplished musicians. This is the music, enormously popular but virtually unknown to Anglos, that Wald set out to explore, hitchhiking across Mexico to interview narcocorridistas, though, as he notes, in Sinaloa, the heart of Mexico's drug traffic where narcolords commission songs that detail the tons of drugs they've smuggled and the number of American and Mexican agents they've killed, 'narco' is redundant, because there are no other corridos. With sidelights on narcoart, of which the themes are the rooster (marijuana), the parakeet (cocaine), the goat (heroin), cuernos de chivo (AK-47s) and troconas del año (late model SUVs), the unofficial narco saint Jesus Malverde, for whom Sinaloa state officials donated land for a chapel, and regional and political differences, Wald clearly establishes that the drug traffic only exists because Americans buy drugs, and if billions of dollars cross the border as a result, most Mexicans don't see that as a problem. Narcocorridos reflect their disgust at American hypocrisy. I've read many books about music that were more immediately useful to my work, but none as downright fascinating as this.

JC

## KEITH FERGUSON DISCOGRAPHY

with THE FABULOUS THUNDERBIRDS

- 1979 **Fabulous Thunderbirds** (UK: **Girls Go Wild**)
- 1980 **What's The Word**
- 1981 **Butt Rockin'**
- 1982 **T-Bird Rhythm**
- 1983 **VA: Austin Rhythm & Blues Christmas**  
(*Merry Christmas Darling* and *Rockin' Winter Wonderland*)
- 1987 **Portfolio** (best from the first four albums)
- 1990 **VA: Blues Masters Vol 3; Texas Blues** (*C-Boy's Blues*)
- 1990 *Lightin' Hopkins: Texas Blues* (details unknown, even Arhoolie didn't know)
- 1991 **Essential** (compilation of early albums)
- 1992 **VA: Blues Masters Vol 4; Harmonica Classics**  
(*Cherry Pink And Apple Blossom White*)
- 1993 **VA: Blues Masters Vol 9; Postmodern Blues** (*She's Tuff*)
- 1996 **Different Tacos** (outtakes from the first four albums)
- 1998 **VA: House Rent Party** (*Tip On In*)
- 1998 **VA: Takoma Eclectic Sampler Vol 2** (*She's Tuff*)
- 2000 Benchmark issued remastered CDs of the first four albums which each included bonus tracks taken from **Different Tacos**

with THE TAILGATORS

- 1985 **Swamp Rock**
- 1986 **Mumbo Jumbo**
- 1987 **Tore Up** (outtakes from the above albums)
- 1988 **OK Let's Go**
- 1990 **Hide Your Eyes**

with THE SOLID SENDERS

- 1994 **Everything's Gonna Be Alright**
- 1997 **Dig My Wheels** (Keith's last recordings)

SESSION WORK

- 1983 LeRoi Brothers: **Check This Action**
- 1983 Carlos Santana: **Havana Moon**
- 1985 Four Big Guitars From Texas: **Trash, Twang & Thunder**  
(in US as **Big Guitars From Texas**, 1988)
- 1989 Walter T Higgs & The Pee Wee Blues Review: **May I Rock You**
- 1990 **VA: Austin Music Scene Vol 2** (with Walter T Higgs)
- 1992 **The Many Moods Of Teisco Del Rey**
- 1992 Lewis Cowdrey: **Lewis Cowdrey**
- 1994 Lewis Cowdrey: **It's Lewis**
- 1994 Mike Morgan: **Let The Dogs Run**
- 1995 Carlos Santana: **Dance Of The Rainbow Serpent**

This discography was prepared by Keith's friend **Paul Williams** from his own collection and additional research. It is not guaranteed to be 100% complete or accurate, so any additions, corrections or clarifications would be very welcome.

## KEITH FERGUSON MEMORIAL FUND

**U**nder the slogan 'Helping Hand with the Last Call,' this subsidiary of the SIMS Foundation was set up with the specific purpose of assisting the families of musicians, who hardly ever have any insurance coverage, in the event of unexpected death. Funds are raised through annual benefits held round the time of Keith's birthday (July 23rd) and by donations which can be made through the SIMS Foundation, PO Box 1622, Austin, TX 78767 (512/494-1007).

## LOS CHOFERES

### YA ESTUFAS . . . Y MAS EGGS Y TOAST

(Discos Taxi \*\*\*\*\*)

**K**eith connection: Los Choferes leader and noted photographer Daniel J Schaefer took one of the cover pictures of his old friend; one of the songs, *Como Te Quiero*, was cowritten by Keith and Dan Del Santo; and Keith gets 'Special Thanks' in the liner notes. That enough?

♦ When he released **Corre La Meter** (Discos Taxi, 1999), Schaefer said of his late life career as a Conjunto and corrido singer-songwriter, "Keith [Ferguson] and Bradley [Jaye Williams] were Dr Frankenstein. I'm the monster." Like his 'creators,' Schaefer, reversing the assimilation norm, is what can best be described as an 'American-Mexican,' so steeped in the culture that having a German name but writing and singing in Spanish never seems incongruous. Though there's no equivalent of *Los Profesionales*, his vicious, though supremely justified, attack on the *Austin Chronicle*, Schaefer's second album sticks to much the same format as the first—some songs in English, including another by Scott Young of Red Meat (*Lolita*), some in Spanish, some bilingual and some in Spanglish. Backed by a crack team, including JJ Barrera bass/tololoche, Jesse Botello sax, Alfredo Romayor accordion, Bradley Jaye Williams bajo sexto, Max Baca bajo sexto/bass and Joe Guzman drums/percussion, Schaefer, waging a semi-private war of cultural subversion, is a wonderful anomaly.

JC



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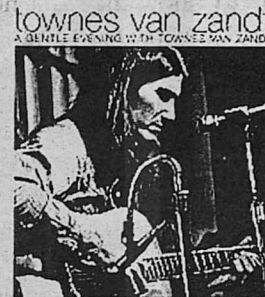
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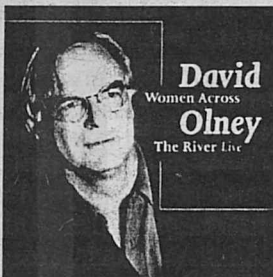
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# CHARLES EARLE'S B-Sides

## REMEMBERING HARLAN

### LEGENDARY SONGWRITER

## HARLAN HOWARD DEAD AT 74

The 'greatness' of many who have made their living from the country music industry over the years is often debatable. The darling of the general public is often the scourge of the real musical community in Nashville. So when I tell you that Harlan Howard, the classic country songsmith who died in early March, was universally adored in this town, you can bet that he was the exception to the rule.

A member of the Country Music Hall of Fame and Songwriters Hall of Fame, Howard had chart success associated with him that few writers in history can claim. Over 100 of his compositions reached the Billboard country singles chart top 10, and a few others charted in pop. At one point in 1961, Howard had 15 songs on the country charts at the same time. This is still a Nashville record and will most likely never be broken. All told, Howard wrote more than 4,000 songs in his career. The most famous of Howard's compositions were classics from yesteryear such as *I Fall to Pieces* and *I've Got A Tiger By The Tail*. However, he remained successful over the years, writing hits for Patty Loveless, Pam Tillis, The Judds and Rodney Crowell.

But to many of us in Nashville, the thing that stands out about Howard was his honest, candid way of talking to anyone and everyone about music. One of the greatest quotes to ever come out of Nashville can be attributed to him. When asked how he would describe country music, Howard was succinct and accurate. "Country music is nothing but three chords and the truth," he stated.

Author Lawrence Leamer stole a little of Harlan's thunder when he named his tell all country music book **Three Chords and the Truth**, but the quote is still the most effective way to summarize Nashville's best music in years past.

My personal experience with the wit and wisdom of Harlan Howard came some years back when I had first moved to Nashville. I was tending bar in a country club and hustling any work I could get on Music Row in those days. One morning, just as we were set to open, Howard wandered in at around 10:30 in the morning to meet a friend from the music business who happened to be a member of the club. Those who knew him will tell you that Harlan experienced all of the heartbreak and hard living that was detailed in his songs. Plenty of the folks I've spoken with in recent months suggested that Howard's habits were hastening his own demise. I always told folks that I would rather live 74 Harlan Howard years than 110 Tim McGraw years, but that's just me.

Anyway, the point I was making before I digressed was that Howard was a drinker. He started in that morning on the vodka and tomato juice and had knocked back four by the time he finished his sandwich. Knowing who he was, and figuring that he would be talkative after four stiff drinks, I engaged him a little bit of conversation. After a pleasant chat, I finally I asked him what advice he would have me give any of my friends who were songwriters.

"Tell them to quit writing altogether," Howard said.

I must have looked astounded, and Howard felt the need to elaborate.

"This is a hard life. Tell them to quit writing. If they can do that, they were not meant to be songwriters in the first place."

But, Howard reasoned, if these folks just didn't have it in them to stop writing and the songs continued to flow out of them, then they needed to commit to it and make it their life's work.

It seemed wildly profound at the time, though I have since heard that Howard gave the same advice to many people. But it was that sort of hard truth that made Howard such a memorable figure. His songs were full of that kind of truth, and a cast of stars bigger than you'll see at any country awards show attended Howard's funeral to pay respects to this brutally honest and gifted songwriter. Harlan Howard will truly be missed.

## ALSO OF NOTE...

Songwriter Tommy Hill passed away last month. Best known as the author of the Webb Pierce hit *Slowly* and the Red Sovine nugget *Teddy Bear*, Hill was also an accomplished musician and producer. He was 72.

## NEW BLOOD

As you may have read in recent months, MCA Nashville head Tony Brown left his post to start a new label with former Arista Nashville bigshot Tim DuBois. That left MCA, the most successful Music Row label in recent years, looking for a new person to lead the way. Mark Wright, a producer of note who has scored huge hits with Lee Ann Womack and Brooks & Dunn, has been tapped for that position.

On the surface, this seems like a good move for MCA. Wright achieved enormous success with Womack's *I Hope You Dance*, which was atop the country and adult contemporary chart simultaneously in 2001. He's also credited with helping to guide Brooks & Dunn in a direction that rejuvenated their career. This is the kind of resume with which one would expect MCA to be impressed, so Wright's ascendance is no big surprise. But the bigger concern is whether or not Wright's presence at MCA is a good thing for country music. Personally, I think the jury will be out for a while on that one.

You see, one of the big problems we've had in the industry here in Nashville is a plethora of producers who end up in charge of record labels. Knowing your way around a recording studio and running a multi-million dollar company from a position that makes you the arbiter of taste for many people are two different things. We've seen a handful of producers running the show at labels here in Nashville over the last nine years, and we've seen the industry go down in flames during that time. You do the math.

But beyond the fact that Wright is a producer, I tend to judge him based on what he has produced. Womack's *I Hope You Dance*, for example, is the sort of song that seems like a perfect feather in the cap. It got some critical praise and helped Womack achieve the success many had predicted for her. But regardless of what it sold, it's just not that great a song. Sure, the message sounds sweet and everything, and the fact that Womack's daughter danced in the video made folks get all mushy. But underneath all of this is a lame power ballad that has nothing, musically speaking, to do with Nashville. Likewise, the new Brooks & Dunn album may have sold a respectable number of copies, but it's disposable crap (the fact that Music Row magazine named Wright Producer of the Year for 2001 largely based on these two albums is a sign of where we are these days).

There are a handful of producers in Nashville who could have done the same things with these artists, so I just don't see Wright as anything other than business as usual. And this appointment has come at a time where business as usual spells trouble in Nashville. Just about every body in town acknowledges that the industry needs to be headed in different directions from where it has been going in order to reverse the trend of lagging sales. Here is one man's opinion that Wright is not the guy to take MCA down a new path.

## SHOWN THE DOOR...

Once again, a handful of employees at a Nashville major label have been sent packing. Capitol Nashville announced last month that six employees had been laid off. Those canned included the coordinator of business affairs, the directors of marketing and promotions, the sales manager and the mailroom supervisor.

What's so big about six people losing their jobs in this economy, you ask. Granted, it doesn't seem like earth-shattering news. But think about this for a second... how do you run a label without the heads of your marketing, promotions and business affairs departments? The answer to that question is simple; there isn't much to run right now. Capitol is in a pretty bad place these days in terms of the label's share of the industry's sales totals, so why keep a big staff around to count small numbers.

The biggest name artists at Capitol are Garth Brooks, Keith Urban and Trace Adkins. Brooks put out what he claims is his last commercial album this past year. Though he's normally money in the bank, the turbulent divorce from wife Sandy has Brooks staying off the road. With little promotion, Brooks' **Scarecrow** album has not sold at the huge levels of previous releases. Urban may have won the Horizon Award at the CMA's, but it took months upon months to push his album to respectable sales numbers, and not much profit was left. Adkins is a mid-level act and will likely never reach any greater heights.

It seems kind of amazing that the label that experienced enormous success with Garth and Deana Carter only a handful of years ago is sucking wind so badly. But I suppose that is simply the modern country music industry at work.

## OUT IN THE OPEN

Speaking of Garth, he and Trisha Yearwood sat together at the Harlan Howard memorial service a few weeks back and have told a number of people in town that they are dating. At last the cat is finally and completely out of the bag about the worst kept secret in Nashville since the Vince Gill and Amy Grant affair.

## AND FINALLY...

Craig Havigurst, music critic for *The Tennessean*, wrote a column last month where he offered a list of 12 songs that he felt offered a roots country direction that radio could embrace. It was his assertion that these songs would work at country radio and ultimately lead to better things. I think this was excellent work on Havigurst's part. Here is his list:

1. *Shine* - Dolly Parton
2. *Love Letters From Old Mexico* - Leslie Satcher
3. *Slowly I'm Falling to Pieces* - Paul Brewster
4. *More of Your Love* - The Derailers
5. *Sometimes* - Danni Leigh
6. *Three Days* - Pat Green
7. *The Lighthouse's Tale* - Nickel Creek
8. *Bluer Than That* - Irene Kelly
9. *Country Comfort* - Elton John and Earl Scruggs
10. *She Always Talked About Mexico* - David Ball
11. *The Lucky One* - Alison Krauss
12. *What's On My Mind* - Jim Lauderdale



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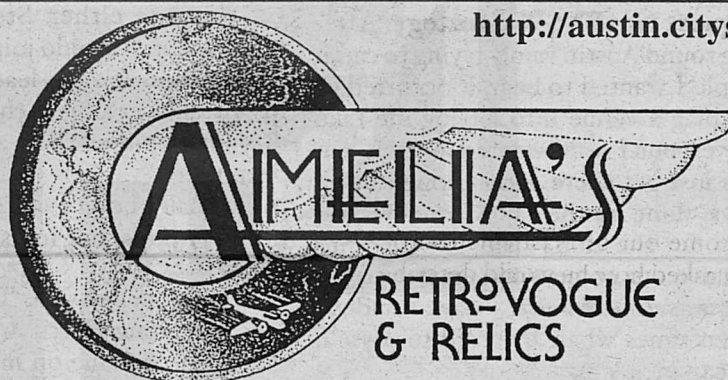
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534 E Oltorf 1pm-2:30pm

Sat 13th THE SALOON (442-8885)

1502 W Ben White 9pm-1am

Sun 14th HOLE IN THE WALL (472-559)

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Fri 19th CHAPPARAL LOUNGE (441-9008)

5500 S Congress 9pm-1am

Sun 21st EGO'S (474-7091) 510 S Congress 11pm-2am

Tue 23rd DOWNTOWN NOON CONCERT

Frost Bank Plaza 12pm-1pm



# JOHN THE REVEALATOR

Seems I was only half right about Shel Silverstein's *Hard On The Living* last month. **Waylon Jennings** didn't put it on any of his own albums but Len Brown advises me that he did sing it on the 1998 Jennings/Bobby Bare/Mel Tillis/Jerry Reed double CD of Silverstein songs, **Old Dogs**. An informal poll of FAR reporters made **Honky Tonk Heroes** the clear winner among Jennings' albums, followed by **Dreaming My Dreams**, with nine others that were personal favorites.

♦ For the record, though he never recorded with him, **John X Reed** did play with Joe Ely, in fact was his very first guitarist when Ely started playing at Stubb's.

♦ Another giant whose passing you could hardly avoid hearing about was **Harlan Howard**, though I hope any coverage you read mentioned the staggering fact that at one point in time, 15 of the songs in the Country Top 40 had been written by him. As with Jennings, there's a song that I can't resist quoting. This is a verse from Billy Joe Shaver's *You're As Young As The Woman You Feel*:

"Big Harlan likes his women young  
Says it helps him write good country songs  
When they divorce him he doesn't fight  
He just keeps all those great copyrights."

♦ I might as well come upfront about it because it seems like every year somebody else tumbles to the secret of the **Conquest NotSXSXW Strategy**. After a few years of racing round Austin vainly trying to catch up with all the people I wanted to hear, it occurred to me that if I could blag a venue into letting me take over, I could book everyone I really wanted to see. Then all I had to do was just get there early enough to be able to park and I was done for the day. Marvellous. Of course, the flip side, for the club's sake, is that other people should be moved to come along, preferably in droves, to see what was on offer and I have to admit that there have been times when I've said to myself, "Old son, you sure can pick 'em."

♦ The way the strategy works is that at any given time slot, I'm already exactly where I want to be, and this year, apart from missing out on James Intveld, it went like clockwork. Benjamin Serrato and I did a pretty cool job with the **Thrilla @ The Dilla**, apart from the name, which was only meant to be a working title, but we didn't come up with anything better, though now we've got a year to work on it, so no excuses next time. Picking highlights would be invidious as it was pretty much all highlights, so it's the little unexpected things, like Jimmy LaFave closing out the singer-songwriter circle, Jimmie Dale Gilmore and Butch Hancock joining Jimmie's boy **Colin Gilmore** on stage and **Git's** minder, Sophie Best, handing someone a DIY kit when she was having to assemble CDs from their component parts, that stick in the mind.

♦ My only regret, given that there's nothing anyone can do about Texas weather, is that I let Saturday's singer-songwriter circle get a little out of control, so we ended up with Troy Campbell, Michael Fracasso, Slaid Cleaves, Stephanie Urbina Jones (dubbed by LaFave, "the rose among the thorns"), Thad Cockrell, Scott McClatchy and Ed Pettersen only having time for three songs each. But they were darned good ones.

♦ While most acts played more than once, in different places during NotSXSXW, our big coup, thanks to Pat Jasper, was offering the only opportunity to hear **Mingo Saldivar** and I don't even have to check the calendar to know that there was *nothing* going on that was worth passing that up for. If you could have been at Threadgill's for Mingo (and **Joaquin Diaz**) and weren't, you were in the wrong place, no two ways about it.

♦ Quote of NotSXSXW: when **Butch Hancock**, who's studiously avoided SXSXW all these years, often deliberately booking tours that would take him well out of the picture, passed through on his way to The Flatlanders' official showcase for New West Records, I asked him how it felt. "Well, it's OK. We're doing it because we have to, not because we *think* we have to."

♦ The runners-up are both sartorial. **Steve James** told me, "You know it's SXSXW time when you see groups of Italians on South Congress who think they're dressed like John Wayne but actually they're dressed like Dale Evans." Though he probably wouldn't care, the other quote had better remain anonymous as he runs a record store. Coming from a **Jim Lauderdale** appearance, he remarked, "They should just put his stage clothes on a mannequin and roll it on stage because that's the best part of his show."

♦ Ben Serrato says he'd give me good review for my emceeing, but I did fall flat on my face when introducing the Australian country/gospel group **Git**, one of the runaway successes of NotSXSXW. The three women wore matching outfits for their shows so I cracked that you could tell right there that they weren't from Austin, which I thought was good for at least a small laugh, but found myself looking down on a sea of blank faces. Guess they weren't from Austin either.

♦ If you didn't think that was funny, you probably won't get this one either. Steve Silbas of **Casbeers**, my favorite San Antonio joint, told me he was booking an Austin band and the leader said, "Oh, yeah, Casbeers. My bassplayer's been there a bunch of times and my drummer's played there and my guitarist, but I've never been there."

♦ Normally, I don't waste time on the *Austin Chronicle's* Music Awards, but folksinger and KUT *Folkways* host **Ed Miller** thrust a copy in front of me, pointed at the Folk category and said, "Do you know who these people are?" meaning Harris & Ryden, who had been 'voted' #1. Well, new one on me, and on Ed, who marvelled, "I've been a local folk DJ for how many years now? And I've never heard of them!" The big winner this year was the utterly useless **Bob Schneider**, who took Musician Of The Year, #1 Singer-Songwriter, #1 Songwriter and #1 Male Vocals, which proves that only cretins send in ballots, because while Austin music isn't what it used to be, it certainly isn't as fucking awful as the *Chronicle* Awards might lead you to believe.

♦ One drawback to the Strategy is that I can't bail on my acts, so I miss out on the parties, such as the Americana Music Association's, darn the luck. I haven't ragged on the AMA for a while, but I hear their big push now is to get NARAS to establish an **Americana Grammy**. Well, whoop-de-doo, one more category for Lucinda Williams to be nominated in, along with everybody else who realizes what a useful fallback position it'd be for country, bluegrass, blues and who knows what all else. Incidentally, I'm told that the reason there's no category for Cajun or Zydeco is that nobody in Louisiana can be bothered to join NARAS.

♦ While almost every music writer in the country was handicapping the Grammys, the best commentary I saw wasn't by a music writer at all but by whoever does the *San Antonio Express-News's* TV previews. "Remember last year's stink about Eminem's nomination? Remember Eminem? Of course you don't. That's because of all the major awards, the **Grammy Awards** have become the most instantly forgettable . . . The Grammys have the nefarious ability to make some of their biggest recipients vanish from memory. Sometimes winning a Grammy Award for new artist is like being sent to the witness protection program."

♦ Even so, I'd like to salute one Grammy Award, which you quite likely didn't register, **Arhoolie Records'** win for Best Album Notes, those which accompanied the label's 40th anniversary collection, **The Journey Of Chris Strachwitz**. By mildly odd coincidence, they were written by Elijah Wald (see Reviews).

♦ I lost track of the number of people who demanded to know where I was on March 11th, when **Pat Green** got beat up on South Padre Island, where he was scheduled to play for the Spring Break frats. Well, I have witnesses to prove I wasn't there but in order to clear myself, I guess I'll have to take up Steve Terrell's suggestion and vow to help find the *real* attackers, even if I have to visit every honkytonk in Texas. While I wouldn't actually want to cause Green physical pain—though if I ever had to listen to **Live At Billy Bob's** again, I think reprisal would be justified—I can't help feeling that the possibility of violence goes with his territory. Like gangsta rappers, 'Texas Music' artists are well advised to steer clear of their audience.

♦ For **3CM's** original core readership, the biggie of 2002 is, of course, **The Flatlanders'** second album, **Now Again**, due from New West Records on May 21st, and I imagine some of you must share my trepidation. If you caught them on the road, well, it was a great Butch, Jimmie & Joe show, but was it *really* The Flatlanders? Can they really reprise an album they made 30 years ago? Well, Jimmie Dale gave me an advance CD and while I'm not going to review or even preview the album on the strength of four cuts, I can at least report that original Flatlanders Steve Wesson (musical saw) and Tony Pearson are on the new album, though Pearson, who played mandolin first time round, is only credited for vocals. However, I'm deeply disturbed by "the musicians spent upwards of 3000 hours assembling the album tracks." That just don't sound right to me.

♦ While I was talking to Butch and Jimmie Dale during NotSXSXW, I had this promotional brainwave—buy a bunch of 8-track cartridges from junk shops, clean them up, slap **The Flatlanders: Now Again** labels on them and send them out with the promo CDs. Doesn't matter what's actually on the cartridges, who's going to be able to play them? Anyway, Joe Ely's supposed copy of the first album—you did know that it was originally released on 8-track? In fact, it's in the 8-Track Hall of Fame—is actually a mislabeled Bobbie Gentry album.

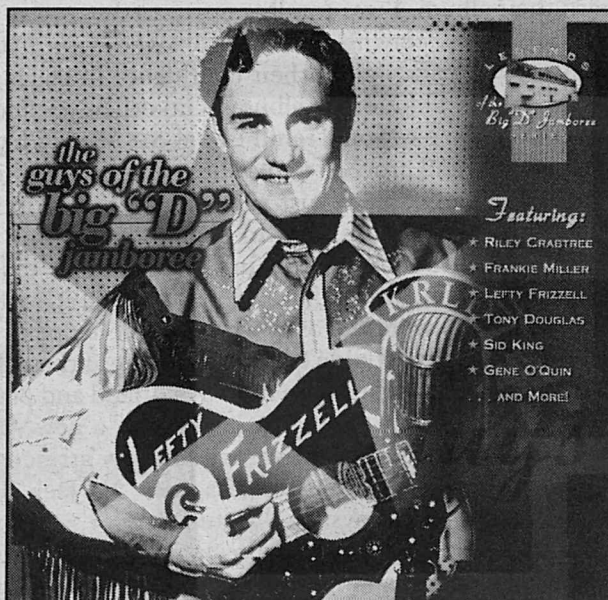
♦ In **3CM** #57/146, Charles Wolfe reported, that after the firing of editor Chris Dickinson, "Staffers feel that **The Journal of Country Music** will be stripped of any historical material and turned into a slick Garthian fan magazine full of eye candy." Sure enough, the cover story of the first post-Dickinson issue is a blow job feature on the **Dixie Chicks**. Otherwise the 'Texas Music Issue' contains a featherweight overview by Joe Nick Patoski, a solid roundup of Austin honkytonk CDs by Rob Patterson, a fawning interview with Guy & Susanna Clark and sundry odds and ends. I can't help feeling that new editor **Jeremy Tepper**, of Diesel Only Records, probably has as little use for the Chicks as I do, so I'm willing to withhold judgement until the next issue. Meanwhile, his presence is most obvious in the ads, which makes this *JCM* look like a cross between a 90s Hot Young Country fanzine and *No Depression*.

## FAR STUFF

So, last month I was bragging on FAR reaching 100 reporters and, naturally, discovered almost right away that it was actually 99 because one reporter's show had been cancelled. However, we surge back over the mark again by inducting **Eric G Black**, *Blue Country*, 101FM, Logan City, Queensland, Australia; **Linda Guebert**, *Denim Alley*, KPFZ, Lakeport, CA; **Al Riess**, *Rooting About*, WBNY, Buffalo, NY and **David W Besonen** and **Bruce Price**, both with *Texas Rebel Radio*, KNON, Dallas, TX.



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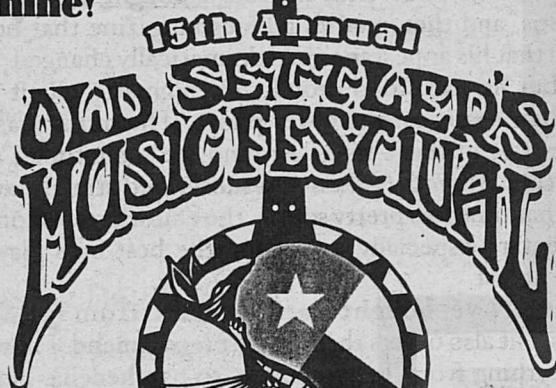
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REVIEWS CODE

\*\*\*\*\* Essential \*\*\*\*\* Damn good

\*\*\* Specialized or slightly flawed

\*\* Sub par \* Piss on this noise

**The 3rd Coast Music Commitment**

Any pretence at fairness, objectivity, balance  
or fact checking is explicitly disavowed.

However, every effort will be made to ensure that each issue  
contains a reference to Faron Young.

## THE EL GUERO WAY OF KNOWLEDGE

No groundwork, no build up, no exegesis, let's cut right to it: Keith Ferguson was the best bassplayer I ever heard, and the coolest man I ever met. It's conceivable that I may yet hear an even better bassplayer and meet an even cooler person, but I don't much fancy the odds. Keith set the bar real high.

♦ On the first point, while my grasp of the technical aspects of the instrument can only be described as rudimentary, I know a great player when I hear one. Bassplayers are like housekeepers, doing essential but unglamorous and underappreciated chores and while there are the usual levels of expertise, from the utterly incompetent to the outstanding, even the best don't get much recognition. Did you ever hear of anybody being called a bass god? Well, you're going to hear it right now—Keith Ferguson was a bass god. If you want an expert analysis of his technique and style, you've come to the wrong place, and frankly, as I believe he was touched by genius, I'm not sure those things can be adequately explained by anyone. However, this I do know—while there are other bassplayers I admire tremendously, Keith Ferguson was unique in that I would go to see bands he was in and still listen to albums he played on *for no other reason* than to hear those gorgeous bass lines.

♦ As to point two, I could fill several issues with Keith Ferguson stories from all the very different circles in which he was loved and admired, but these are a few of my favorites.

♦ From **Conni Hancock**: not only did Keith not own a car, he didn't even have a driver's licence, but when some East Austin enthusiasts decided to form a lowrider club, The Leisure Brothers, they made him President. It just doesn't get any cooler than that.

♦ From **Jesse Taylor**: In 1967 or 68, the bassplayer had decided to leave Sunnyland Special, and at his last show, in Houston, Jesse Taylor went outside for a smoke and when he came back, he told Angela Strehli and Lewis Cowdrey that he'd found Jimmie Dale Gilmore's replacement—and that's how Keith Ferguson came to move to Austin. "He was just so hip, I figured he *had* to be a good bassplayer."

♦ From **Bradley Jay Williams**: "I'd bought these new shoes I was real proud of, but I had them laced like sneakers. Keith showed me how to do it right, so now I think of him every morning when I put on my shoes."

♦ My fondest memories of Keith were the hours I spent at his home on 2nd Street learning about Chicano and Mexican music as he dug through his amazing record collection to illustrate salient points. I always thought Keith would have been an exemplary teacher, infinitely patient, never patronizing, he regarded his store of knowledge and wisdom as a resource to be freely shared, and he seemed to enjoy the process of initiating a complete novice almost as much as I benefited from it.

♦ I said it before, but I'll say it again—Keith Ferguson was the best bassplayer I ever heard, and the coolest man I ever met. There are times when I think what's happened to Austin in the last five years ago has nothing to do with dot.com boom and bust but is exactly the same as what happened to The Fabulous Thunderbirds when Keith was ousted. Like the band, the city lost its soul.

JO

## REMEMBERING KEITH

First of all, I would like to say that I am not a native of Austin, TX, but a proud Scot living 18 miles west of Aberdeen. I never met the late Keith Ferguson, however I was fortunate to have witnessed him playing with The Fabulous Thunderbirds on Sunday, 20 Feb 1980 while touring with my then favorite band, Rockpile. Although I'd heard their album, I was totally unprepared for what I saw. They were a supergroup of unknowns, playing the music I loved with a sincere honesty that took my breath away. I marvelled at their confidence in playing in a basic manner that took me back to my Slim Harpo albums, and other '50s and '60s pioneers. Other blues/rock bands of the day would reminisce about Muddy/Howlin' Wolf etc, and then turn up their amps and proceed to play heavy metal, but this was the real deal. No hippie or punk theatrics here, just sincere goodtime American roots music. They were the innovators for what was to come. Pick up any blues magazine today, 20 years later, and I bet you see a guy in a sharp suit or '50s style shirt with greased-back hair and Rayban shades. Sure, they'll tell you it's a fifties style, but Keith, Jimmie, Mike and Kim were the ones who made it happen.

♦ That concert changed my life musically. I couldn't forget the sight of these Texan guys who seemed to float in to this cold northeastern city in Scotland and play the blues so brilliantly, yet effortlessly, and then disappear again with a new day. As musicians they were faultless, but it was the bass player who mostly attracted my attention with his powerful persona and his beautiful bass lines. No Jack Bruce/John Entwistle/Jaco Pastorious 'look at me boys!' funky stuff here.

♦ I saved hard and bought myself a bass guitar the following year in an effort to play like my hero. I'm sure this will sound familiar to lots of people, but for me it was real. Most dreams never work out in reality as they were originally perceived in thought, and I never became that enigmatic bass player I dreamt about, touring the world big time, with endless interviews in *Rolling Stone*, *Bass Player* (to see what strings I used!), *Mojo*, *Spin*, *Q*, **3CM** and others. No, I'm still working in the same old job, on the same old oil platform in the North Sea, married with two children. However my love of Texas music has never ceased, in fact the spectrum has increased.

♦ I followed the T-Birds every move relentlessly through the pages of magazines and newspapers, which wasn't easy, living here in the UK, but I did my best with what was on offer. I remember Billy Gibbons being interviewed for the *NME* and saying the best band in Texas at the moment (1985) were the Tailgators with Keith Ferguson who he said was the best. I now knew I was not alone in my appraisal, but Keith was now not a member of the T-Birds! I eventually tracked down the **Swamp Rock** album and the 12" EP that followed, and marvelled yet again at his effortless playing. This band played even rawer than his previous, and the bass lines were even clearer to pick up. I was in seventh heaven. I bought all the albums religiously throughout the '80s, and then read in a blues magazine that he was now in The Solid Senders, and that his appearance had dramatically changed. True to the words, he had changed, but he still stood proud and enigmatic, albeit thinner and more gaunt, with long hair again, on the cover photo. The music was excellent, with a similar nod to the style of the T-Birds. Around the same time I saw an advert in a magazine for the then *Music City Texas* and subscribed straight away. Although the news on Keith at that time was pretty scarce, the editor's review on the Solid Senders gig was complimentary, especially regarding "the best bass player in Austin." I'd found a soul mate at last.

♦ Over the years I've bought various CDs from **3CM's** reviews and recommendations, but also others that it didn't recommend. I now have a collection that includes everything from Texas country to psychedelia. However I certainly wasn't prepared for my arrival home from a two week stint offshore to be greeted by the news in the May '97 issue that Keith was dead. The shock was immense. I would no longer be able to hear or witness my 'friend's' musical talent. Waterloo Records graciously sent me a copy of the *Austin Chronicle* with Keith on the cover, along with some CDs I'd ordered. I was saddened by the tone of their features, which seemed to dampen the spirit and memory of his passing, but heartened by the Postmark letters, which followed later, supporting and praising his life. Shortly after, I wrote to Keith's mother Margaret, a heartfelt letter telling her how much Keith had been an influence on my life. I had no idea if she would ever receive it, or for that matter even bother to reply. However not long after I received a letter thanking me for my kind words. The correspondence has continued, and now includes Keith's friends, Daniel J Schaefer, Bradley Jay Williams and Liz Henry. I'm indebted to all of them for their memories of Keith and for accepting me within their circle of friendship. Also, through their letters on Keith and discovering his deep love of Mexican music, I've developed an interest and passion for Conjunto music that I'd previously reserved only for Cajun.

♦ So, dear Keith, it may be five years since your sad demise, but rest assured that memory of 'El Guero' lives on in the minds of family and friends the world over. Thank you for turning me onto some of the best music I've ever listened to, but also for being the best damned bass player in the world!"

Sincere regards, **Neil Meldrum**, Banchory, Scotland



Lucky 13 announces The Lucky Club is moving!

Come help us say adios to the old location on **April 27.**

Lucky Club, 255 Hobart Street (corner of Acme Road and Hobart)

Partying with **Lucky 13** will be **THE BLAZERS** from Los Angeles, California

Door prizes will be given away all night. Barbecue while it lasts by Anthony 'Slim'

Doors open at 7:00 PM

Barbecue plate sales start - 7:30

**The Blazers** - 9:00

**Lucky 13** - 10:30

**Lucky 13** jam with surprise guests - 12:00

Cover Charge \$5

**Lucky Tomblin** and **The Lucky Club** family would like to take this opportunity to honor all of the San Antonio press and DJ's (past and present) who have done; and continue to do so much for all of the San Antonio music community.

We honor them and invite them to be our guests on April 27.

Some of the honorees include:

**Press:**

John Goodspeed

**DJ's:**

Jim Beal

Bruce Hathaway

Scratch Phillips

Lee Baby Simms

Brenda X.

Debbie Jecker

Tone Guerrero

Manuel Gonzales Davilla

Humberto Lozano Lopez 'El Capiucha'

Manuel Lopez 'El Relampago'

Raul Hernandez 'El Chapolin'

Carolina Villalongin 'Tia Catita'

Norberto Ruiz 'El Cartero Social'

Danny Casanova

Jim Beal

John Conquest

Charlie Walker

Lee Woods

Galloping Ghost

Joe Anthony

Iron John O'Roark

Joe Pareres

Velvet Jones

Sal Guajardo

Jose Pepe Barrios

Roy Davila 'El Guero Alegre'

Maria Alonzo

Carlos Valero

Placido Salazar

Raul Paniagua

Sam Kindrick

Ramiro Burr

Flip Forrest

Wild Bill Riley

Richard Davila 'El Guero Polkas'

Lou Roney

Joe X. Horn

Dave Ludwig

Joe Joe Jellyroll

Roy Paniagua

Ricky Weir

Woody Roberts

Oscar Davila

Roy Valdez

Fidel Cuellar

Raciel Gonzales 'Tio Lauriano'

Sincere regrets to anyone whose name was omitted.

To RSVP or add names to the above list contact Denise at 1-800-927-9210

Watch for more information on the new The Lucky Club coming soon.

