

# MUSIC CITY FREE TEXAS

#57 MAY 1994

**RONNIE DAWSON**



**MINGO SALDIVAR**



**HONEST JOHN • MAY PREVIEWS  
REVIEWS**

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Scott Hoyt • Cornell Hurd Band • Ingrid Karklins  
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## KURT WHO?

As one of the targets of the *Chronicle's* Muppets + Pearl Jam April Fool's prank, though getting sucked in (but hell, showbiz hucksters have come up with combinations every bit as unlikely as that), I did avoid the apparent ignominy of being categorized among those who "seemed not to have heard of Pearl Jam." Actually, though, this was a bit of an illusion, my awareness of them can only be called peripheral, a faint blip at extreme range. Later in April, I had to admire Don McCleese for cranking out a lengthy piece on Kurt Cobain at, presumably, ultra-short notice, though whether his topping himself was really front page news I leave to you, as I myself can think of absolutely nothing to say about Nirvana, other than general musing on the concept of 'success.'

- The question is, why are we supposed to know about, or have any interest in, these people? Samuel Taylor Coleridge is reputed to have read *every* book in every language extant in his time (late 18th/early 19th century), but now it's physically impossible to read every book, see every film or listen to every record, that's issued just in America. Throw in the global village and you're really up shit creek, paddling as hard as you can just to try and stay abreast.

- The result is that generalists, people, whether commentators or consumers, who make an effort to be culturally rounded, even if only in one field, music, literature, films, theater,

whatever, are doomed to superficiality. At the same time, specialists are getting ever more narrow. This dichotomy is clearly reflected in the media, divided between the lowest common denominator, saturation coverage of the flavor of the month, the nine day wonder, the hype of the week, the hero of the day, the sensation of the hour, and, on the other hand, the highest common factor, esoteric analysis of abstruse subjects aimed at tightly defined audiences. An example of the latter is a magazine exclusively catering to New York City Jewish lesbians.

- So what do you do if you have varied interests? You don't want to get fobbed off with the second-rate but you don't have time to keep up with everything that's happening in all the different fields. For myself, I dig the best in real country, rockabilly, acoustic, singer-songwriters, blues, R&B, jazz, rock & roll, gospel, pretty much any kind of music, and I'm not anal enough to focus on any one of them.

- An answer, if not The Answer, is Texas. My theory is that American culture went to hell when it stopped being regional, but Texas still has vestiges of the old strength. I sacrificed world music, but gained conjunto and Tejano country, which seems like a pretty good deal. The point is that in Texas we can be generalists and specialists at the same time. Fuck Nirvana, and the machine they rode in on, we've got Ronnie Dawson and Mingo Saldivar. **JC**

## RONNIE DAWSON • MINGO SALDIVAR

The Dancing Cowboy and The Blond Bomber are near contemporaries, Saldivar born in 1936, Dawson in 1939, they're both Texans, Saldivar born in Marion, outside San Antonio, Dawson in Dallas, they both made careers here, Saldivar on the Tejano dancehall circuit, Dawson in the Big D Jamboree and beyond, and they're both more famous abroad than anywhere in America outside Texas, Saldivar in Mexico, Dawson in England. Oh yes, and they're both smoking, red-hot, killer performers. The difference is that one of them is a master of conjunto and Tejano Country, the other a rockabilly legend.

- As this issue appears, Mingo Saldivar y Los Tremendos Cuatro Espadas and Ronnie Dawson with High Noon plus Lisa Pankratz will be appearing at Carnegie Hall in a doubleheader, long sold out, entitled 'Deep In The Heart of Texas,' which shows that somebody up there knows their business. Both men are more than a little vague about how it came about. Dawson tells of being in a Lincoln Center rockabilly revue and the promoter, "who knew zero about rockabilly, said 'I'm going to book you into Carnegie Hall.' Yeah, right." Saldivar recalls a booker, who'd heard them in DC, calling with the offer, "I thought he was joking, of course."

- The two, who have yet to meet but have struck up a bond on the phone (they're really great guys, by the way), are both tickled pink. Dawson remarks, "This is a first for rockabilly. I don't know anybody who's done anything like this. It kind of legitimizes a music that's always been looked down on," while Saldivar comments "Lots of stuff happens, like the Grammy nomination for instance, and I think if I die tomorrow, I'll die happy, but Carnegie Hall, that's the tops. A real achievement, not just for me but for the music."

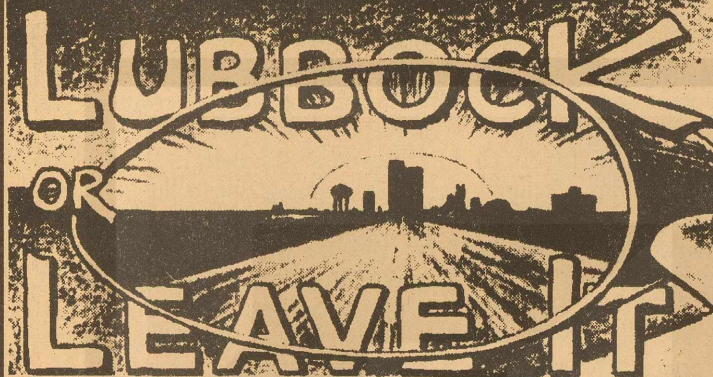
- Saldivar, who's been working in conjuntos since 1958, including a 60s stint running the only one in Alaska, is not simply a master of that art, but almost singlehandedly created a new genre, Tejano Country. Even as a teenager, he loved hillbilly and sang his own translations of 50s country hits in Minnesota work camps. A hitch in the 11th Airborne cemented this affinity but it wasn't until he formed his own group in 1975 that he was able to focus on his bilingual versions of songs like *Rueda De Fuego* (Ring Of Fire), *Marie* and *Streets Of Bakersfield*. "People really like it, especially in Mexico. Down there they even like that Rounder album, which is really weird, hard to believe."

- On stage, Saldivar is, unusually among older conjunto players, a mover, "I love this wireless, it gives me so much freedom," but isn't sure where The Dancing Cowboy tag came from. "Sometime, I'm gonna say late 70s, they started calling me that on the radio and it stuck." Dawson's The Blond Bomber was deliberate, coined to distinguish him from another artist with a similar name. A Big D Jamboree star, Dawson had a couple of regional hits but when rockabilly faded out, became a Dallas session singer and drummer, making a living mainly from jingles. It wasn't until the British label No Hit put out an album of his early work that Dawson returned to the stage in the early 90s.

- The resurgent Dawson had an instant impact, perhaps because he came back to the music fresh, rather than spending the intervening years on the rockabilly revival circuit. In Austin, he packs out The Continental Club, just as Saldivar does Club Carnaval. At Antone's on May 14, these two great Texas musicians will come together for the second time, and, as we all know, it's always better the second time. **JC**



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# HONEST JOHN'S SMOKING SECTION

Mistakes come in all shapes and sizes, some, well, I figure you knew what I meant anyway, some of them don't bother me enough to make them worth fixing, but once in a while I really mortify myself. Laying out last month's *Who's Who In Texas Country Roots*, I came up three lines short and threw in a little greeting to Bob Wills' daughter. Except that instead of **Rosetta Wills** it came out as Loretta. Sorry, Rosetta. Chinese Communists sabotaged my brain.

- Rather sadly, **Johnny Gimble** tells me he never played for Alabama, so that *If You're Going To Play In Texas* story can't be true, as far as he's concerned anyway, though it really ought to be. I heard it separately from two different Nashville sources, so I guess it's one of those rumors that's got a life of its own. Also I didn't so much make an error as compound one. Gimble was hired by the Shelton Brothers and Bob Wills to play fiddle. "I don't know where those stories come from," says Gimble. "They've even turned up in my liner notes."

- Right on going to press, all hell broke loose in Texas radio. **Ranger Rita** resigned from KNON, Dallas, following a policy decision to concentrate on African-American pop (Whitney Houston et al), the cancellation of all other programmes and the firing of most of the DJs. Immediately after, KGSR, Austin's Tofu Music station, fired it's sole redeeming feature, morning DJ **Kevin Connor**, for reasons unknown, least of all to Connor. More next month.

- When I read promising omens of doom into the fact that LaToya Jackson is making a country album in Nashville, I was operating on pure instinct, but it seems serious industry analysts have reached much the same conclusion—the writing's on the wall for Nash Vegas—from drier, more scientific evidence. The real ballcrusher is that, for the first time in over four years, there's not a single Nashville album in the Top 20 (I say Nashville because there hasn't been a country album in the charts for a lot longer than that). Some years ago, a music industry maven got himself into serious shit by remarking that Nashville is the used bus capital of America, but a friend there tells me that this time round so many acts will get dropped that they'll be lucky to unload their surplus tour buses at any price. "People thought 10 million sellers were going to be normal," he observed, "but that was a fluke even for Brooks. They've been spending money like crazy on new offices, everybody trying to

build something fancier than anybody else's. There have been monster advances, bonuses, promotion budgets, you name it. They've been pressing insane numbers of albums, hoping for the next big one, and now they've got millions of units out there that aren't selling and aren't ever going to sell. This is going to be worse than **Urban Cowboy**, it'll be Nashville's '79. A year from now people'll count themselves lucky if they've still got a job or are still signed to a label. There are 16 labels here where there used to be six and some of them aren't going to survive. Even the majors, when the guys in Tokyo and Berlin, London, Amsterdam, the corporate guys, find out, there's going to a bloodbath."

- Dire stuff, indeed. Of course, my first reaction, as you might expect, was "You're just saying that to make me feel good." Trouble is that even if Nashville does crash, there's no reason to suppose that the survivors will conceive of doing anything as radical as making country music. Well, maybe after they've thrashed around for a while, they might get desperate enough, someday some VP may say, "We've tried everything else, how about making a record people can shuffle to? Do we have any acts left that can do that?"

- There are plenty of signs of Nashville Rot spreading to Texas, but Lee Nichols' favorite is the **Country Music Association of Texas**, which, despite the name, is a private company based in Nichols' home town of Salado. He sent them a comp copy of his periodical *The Feedlot*; *The Journal of Real Country Music*, and was a little taken aback by their response, which was "We seem to be more into real country than you are," when the material they sent him included a flyer for their Billy Ray Cyrus T-shirt. Look guys, Cyrus isn't country, isn't Texas and what he does will never replace music, so you should maybe rethink your company name.

- During the *Texas Country Roots* symposium, Texas fiddle great **Cliff Bruner**, reminiscing about his early days as a musician in San Antonio, recalled that lunch was 15¢, so he and his colleagues ate Tex-Mex for a dime because they didn't have 15¢. "One night, this fellow asked us if we knew *Rain*, and we said sure and played it. Then he gave us a \$20 bill, which was a fortune to us, and said, 'Play it again.' This happened four times, the same song, before a waitress dragged him away." Well, that was 60 years ago, but, say what you like about inflation, there aren't many Austin bands that wouldn't cheerfully play the same song all night if you gave them \$20 a pop.

- One feature of the well-attended symposium was the number of faces present, and if this were another column I'd now launch into a list of them, but I'll hold it down to one, who particularly distinguished herself. When Bill Malone, who punctuated his presentation with songs, bogged down during Floyd Tillman's *Each Night At*

*Nine*, it was the voice of **Kimmie Rhodes** that supplied the cue. I have a fond memory of being backstage at one of Tillman's Picking In The Park deals in Marble Falls when he told Rhodes, "Kimmie, honey, you just play those classics and they'll always love you," to which she responded rather tartly, "That's all very well for you to say, Floyd, you wrote them all. I want my songs to be classics and that ain't going to happen if I don't at least sing them myself."

- There were a lot of great moments in the symposium, my favorite coming from cut-up **Johnny Gimble**. Talking about the Zen of fiddle playing, he recalled a Russian violinist coming up to him at the end of a set and asking "What were you thinking during that last solo?" "Well," replied Gimble, "I was thinking it was time to take a break and have a beer."

- One odd thing about Gimble's **Texas Playboys Reunion** concert, which drew 1300 people, was that **The Backyard** made absolutely no mention of it in their press releases and full page ads in the *Chronicle*. By them, nothing at all was happening that Saturday night. I feel sure there's a story there somewhere, and even surer that the only way I'll hear it is off the record.

- Despite 15 years of boring albums, I've always had a soft spot for Emmylou Harris based on her London debut in 1975. As GP's ex-old lady she brought out the cultists but clearly understood that she herself could never have sold out a major venue. Introducing the band, she climaxed with "And the man you've all really come to see—James Burton!" The ensuing standing ovation (it was the first time Burton had played in England) graphically demonstrated that she was right on the money. Recently **Don McCalister** landed a couple of very nice European gigs, Glasgow's Mayfest and Frutigen Festival in Switzerland, then added dates all over Europe, and, working on the same basic principle—if you're not a star, hire someone who is—asked **Jesse 'Guitar' Taylor** to join him. Taylor made it a condition that he got enough free time to be able to visit his mother's old country, now the Czech Republic, something he'd got close to doing many times but never been able to pull off. So McCalister came back with a counteroffer, two nights at Club Novo in Prague ("they don't pay much, but then you're not allowed to take the money out of the country anyway"), and Taylor was hooked.

- A three day **Best of Unsigned Austin Bands** horror show at Liberty Lunch in early May offers a golden opportunity for a competition, which I'm sorry I didn't get together. Still, if you're hanging out with friends and have the line-up to hand, you might try an informal version: Wittiest Name, Dumbest Name, Most Meaningless Name, Most Pretentious Name, Band Most Likely To Break Up Before/During/Immediately After. Most Consumer Unfriendly definitely goes to Zyzywuzsky.



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27th Alamo Jets + Stop The Truck  
28th Roy Heinrich & The Pickups + TBA



## MUSIC CITY TEXAS

# RECORD REVIEWS

### BAD LIVERS • HORSES IN THE MINES

(Quarterstick, CD)/(Green Linnet, CD)

On Willie Nelson's latest, he sings *You Just Can't Play Sad Songs On The Banjo*, which goes to show how much he knows. When you're Danny Barnes, you can play just about anything on the banjo, and on the Bad Livers' second Quarterstick album, some of the songs, notably the title track, whose main image alone—animals born wild, domesticated and spending their lives working underground, never seeing the sun or the horizon—is a chiller right there, go way beyond sad. One thing that tends to get lost in the reverence rightly given to the extraordinary musicianship of Barnes (banjo and acoustic guitar), Mark Rubin (upright and bowed bass and tuba) and Ralph White (fiddle and accordion), and their attention grabbing Monroe to Motorhead eclecticism in cover material ("we don't play requests, we play what we want"), is the sheer power of Barnes' songwriting. In this respect at least, he's one of the most underrated talents in Austin. Eleven of the album's 16 tracks are his, with White's *Chainsaw Massacre*, Ed Shelton's *Blue Ridge Express*, the goofy *New Bad Liver Singer*, featuring Judy The Wonder Dog, the incoherent *Puke Grub* and the instrumental *Steve James* making up the balance, and some of them are quite brilliant, notably the kickoff *Where They Do Not Know My Name*, *High*, *Lonesome*, *Dead And Gone* (hear that, Willie?), the gospel *He Didn't Say A Word* and *Yearning*. Barnes' production emphasizes the rich, intricate ensemble sound over his own vocals, and in this much at least I'd agree with Don McLeese (though, as Rubin points out, they could make two albums for what T-Bone Burnett would cost). Still, though I'd

### INGRID KARKLINS • ANIMA MUNDI

like the words to come across a little stronger, this is a magnificent piece of work, once again showing the stark clarity of Bad Livers' unique, uncompromising, resolutely uncommercial vision.

• Where Bad Livers are earth and water, Ingrid Karklins is fire and air. Karklins drives me crazy, she makes me use words that would freeze my blood if I saw them anywhere else. Words like 'challenging,' 'demanding' or 'difficult,' coupled with 'rewarding.' Trouble is that they're all appropriate, she's all those things. There's little doubt in my mind that she's the most abstruse, intellectual, cerebral musician in Austin (if she isn't, I'm not sure I want to know about it). Compared to her, modern jazzers are just noodling. Though her two Green Linnet albums are warmer than her earlier icy, detached, rather menacing tapes, they're still darkly brooding, as much haunted as haunting. With a variety of original or adapted material in English or Latvian, including a Hebridean piobaireachd (mouth music), Karklins does amazing things with her voice and on keyboards, whistles, kokles, rebec, Farfisa, violins, niliov (?), wine glasses and rattle—I'm not even going to start on all the things drummer/percussionist Chris Searles uses. With heavyweight support from the art mob, including Susan Voelz, as extraordinary as ever, Malford Milligan, John Hagen and Craig #7, Karklins is as out there as Bad Livers, if nothing like as accessible.

• It's a commonplace for Austin musicians talk about making it on their own terms. Bad Livers and Ingrid Karklins just do it. **JC**

### THE PANIC CHOIR SOUL AND LUNA

(Bayleaf/Crystal Clear Sound, CD)

What's in a name? Well, actually quite a lot. It often reveals much about a band's music, its general style and where it's coming from, its handle in fact. This group's monicker kind of put off me of seeing them, I mean it rather promises raucous and a certain shortfall of actual musicianship, don't you think? OK, maybe I misinterpreted, or again maybe they need a new name, because this quintet is talented, melodic and very much in control. The core, singer Carol Johnson and acoustic guitarist Kevin Johnson, plus Keith Knight who plays electric guitar and mandolin, came here from Venice Beach, picked up a rhythm section and set out to reinvent the past. On their debut, the name that comes irresistibly to mind is The Great Society, or early Jefferson Airplane, though without their tendency to excess. Sandy Denny-era Fairport Convention and 10,000 Maniacs also seem relevant, the point being, of course, that Carol Johnson is quite some singer. The main difference is that while Kevin Johnson's ten originals are rock solid set material, not a clunker among them, the band doesn't yet have a stone gobsmacking showstopper like *Somebody To Love* or even, God help us, *White Rabbit*. Give Carol Johnson something like that to work with and they could take off like a rocket. Even without that magic ingredient, they rather handily show how desperately mediocre the bands around them, notably Little Sister, really are. **JC**

### TOWNES VAN ZANDT ROAD SONGS

(Sugar Hill, CD)

Now here's a tricky one: 15 songs performed by one of the great songwriters and not one of them his own. 'Road songs' is sort of a euphemism for set fillers, not that Van Zandt is short of material, but I guess they make a change of pace for him and the audience, and if you've done enough Van Zandt gigs, you've probably heard him do a fair few of them. The question, of course, is how much does even a diehard fan really need a collection of covers? I mean, Van Zandt isn't exactly Tony Bennett, nu? Singing his own songs is one thing, singing other people's quite another. In fact, he does rather well at it, with material that's not too demanding on a limited vocal range; Lightning Hopkins' *Automobile Blues*, *Hello Central*, *My Starter Won't Start* and *Short-Haired Woman Blues*, Peter LaFarge's *Ira Hayes*, Jagger & Richards' *Dead Flowers*, TC Ashley's *Coo Coo*, Luther Williams' *Fraulein*, Joe Ely's *Indian Cowboy* (Van Zandt remarks "He's the only person I ever met who really did run away and join the circus. If I was from Lubbock, I would, too."), Springsteen's *Racing In The Streets*, AP Carter's *Wabash Cannonball*, Bob Dylan's footling *Man Gave Names To The Animals*, one I could have lived without, and *Little Willie The Gambler* and the traditional *Texas River Song* and *Cocaine Blues*. I can't see anybody but the people who think that Townes can do no wrong, apart from fall off the stage, buying it, but for them it's an interesting insight into the man and what turns him on. **JC**

### KIM SIMPSON DESTINATION

(SCP Records, CD)

There was a time when I faithfully did open mikes and actually knew what was happening down at the real grassroots level. Then Betty Elders and Jimmy LaFave quit running their deals at Chicago House which put a serious crimp in my willingness to endure. Thing about open mikes is that you have to kiss a lot of frogs before you meet a prince. Now I rely on a network of informers, a musical DEW line that alerts me to anything serious incoming over the horizon, and Simpson, a recent arrival from Utah, I owe to Elders. Her imprimatur may have put me in a receptive frame of mind, but with the first words on the album, "I come from a land where the rats run wild," Simpson took over. He's only 22, but he's not just promising, he's already there, with 11 very intense and intelligent songs (plus covers of Nick Drake's *Place To Be* and Cyril Tawny's *Sally Free And Easy*), terrific acoustic guitar picking and a light, smooth voice that's more than passable. In the middle passage, *Before My Kingdom Crumbles* and *When Her Morning Sun*, he reminds me of David Halley in both phrasing and subject matter, which is not to say that he's a younger version of Halley, but that's the kind of class he's in. **JC**



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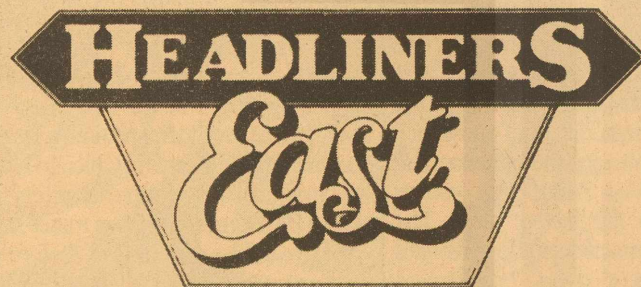
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## MUSIC CITY TEXAS

# RECORD REVIEWS

### CORNELL HURD BAND

#### HONKY-TONKY MAYHEM

(Behemoth, CD/cassette)

It's a measure of how far this migratory five piece, that's spent time in California and Florida, has come since arriving in Austin not just that they've landed one of the few, highly coveted regular weekend slots at The Broken Spoke, but that they usually wind up with twice their number on stage at any gig. This is a band that other musicians love to sit in with, partly because they're such fine musicians individually, notably guitarist Paul Skelton, partly because, thanks to so many years as a cohesive unit, they're one of the tightest units in town, and partly because they're just so much fun. In last year's MCT Poll, the imposing, cigar-chewing Hurd, a big-voiced, no frills vocalist, was voted #1 Stage Personality, but the whole band is pretty colorful. With this CD, which adds two bonus tracks, *I Dreamed Of An Old Love Affair* and *Seven Nights To Rock*, to last year's cassette release, they serve notice that they're here to stay, with Hurd's own anthemic *Home To Texas* and salutes to Bob Wills, Moon Mullican and Ernest Tubbs. However, it's Hurd's originals that set the tone. If you don't listen to the words, this, as crowded dance floor testify, is a superior honky tonk band, if you do, it's also wonderfully subversive of the very traditions it excels in. *It's Dark All Over The World*, co-written with Joe Dickens, is a latter day honky tonk classic, but numbers like *I Cry*, *Then I Drink*, *Then I Cry*, *Happy Hour In Hell* and *Put Your Make-Up On* ("your slipping round is showing") brilliantly parody honky tonk excess. With the band's growing popularity round Texas, this may be the first of Cornell's showbiz dreams not to be crushed like a little flower. **JC**

### RED STEAGALL

#### BORN TO THIS LAND

#### DON EDWARDS

#### GOIN' BACK TO TEXAS

(Warner Western, CDs/cassettes)

'To preserve and perpetuate the Western spirit.' I've been more than a tad dubious about the Warner Western series, partly because I figure, reasonably enough I think, that anything Michael Martin Murphey's involved in has to have an intolerable bullshit content. The choice of Murphey, even just as a figurehead, hell especially as a figurehead, carries a heavy symbolic load, fraught with pretentious menace. His own contribution, *Cowboy Songs*, which launched the series, was viciously overproduced and the whole project seemed headed for K-Tel hell. However, on these latest releases by Steagall and Edwards, who were in town for last month's Texas Country Roots show, the prevailing mood is reverence. Sort of. Working the cowboy trail, both men, Steagall from Gainesville, Edwards from New Jersey (though he now lives in Parker County), work with a string band—plus drums. Drums? Well, Murphey used synthesizers too, but it still shows that they don't really get it. That aside, the playing's fine, the production suitably spare and both artists are madly sincere and quite moving, especially Steagall on his cowboy poetry recitations, right up to the point where you gag on manly men doing manly things in manly ways. Of the two albums, Steagall's is much the better, with eight originals where Edwards has none, and his song *The Wagon Tongue* and poem *Comanche Moon* are both very fine indeed. **JC**

### WOODY PRICE

#### DIESEL & DESIRE

(independent cassette)

There's a splendid contradiction about this excellent country tape. Price came here from San Francisco and, while only two of the ten original songs still retain a specific West Coast connection in the form of the rhythm section, the titres à clef, as it were, are *Bakersfield Train* and *Ghosts Of Highway 66*. The feel, as even the album title strongly suggests, is very California, which is by no means a put-down, much of the best real country being made today (outside Texas, of course) is coming out of our fellow Republic. At the same time, one of the outstanding songs has 'Texas' in the title, something I've learned to be very leery of—the new ones are usually awful and the older ones aren't always gems neither. However, *Texas Daughters* is absolutely terrific, a really fine piece of work. While Price has kept a low profile since he came here (if you use Yellow Cabs, you may have encountered him in his day job persona), he knows his Austin musos and has put together a crackerjack unit, with Lorne Rall on bass, Ron Erwin drums, East Side Flash dobro, Ponty Bone accordion, Richard Bowden fiddle, some wonderfully atmospheric backing vocals by Craig Marshall, Tracy Conover, Johnny Benoit, Erik Moll, Cindy Symington and Stephanie Champagne (?), which he fronts on vocals, guitars and mandolin. There's no production credit, from which I assume that Price is responsible for the lovely sound. Low key and melodic, with sensational separations, it highlights some fine individual and ensemble work, particularly Price's very pretty and distinctive guitar riffs. It's far from slick, but it is smooth, going down nice and easy like a well-aged whiskey, leaving a warm afterglow. **JC**

### SCOTT HOYT

#### LAY YOUR LOVE ON ME

(Twitchy, CD)

As I understand it, Hoyt, an Austin based country singer-songwriter originally from Orange, has been hovering on the verge of breaking through in Nashville for several years, but never quite made it. I can't imagine why not, he's every bit as horrible as any of the current Nashville stars. His background is in rock & roll cover bands, he wears garish threads and a hat that's indefinably wrong, he writes featherweight songs, has a voice with absolutely no personality and, most important of all, he's a hunk. What's the problem? Well, he cites The Beatles instead of The Eagles as his main influence, so the dude must be practically senile, like over 30 if you can feature that. Usually I look for major label albums to be bad, indies to be better and self-releases to be best, but here's a self-released album with no redeeming features whatsoever. Even Johnny Gimble and Floyd Domino can do nothing for this dog. In a reverse masterpiece of sequencing, every song manages to be even worse than the one before. Maybe it doesn't matter what order you hear them in, the effect'll be the same, but the last three reach mind-numbing depths of inanity. The nicest thing you can say about the last song is just that, it's the last one, thank God. Yes, I sat through the whole thing—once. It's an experience I have no intention of ever repeating. **JC**

### JERRY JEFF WALKER

#### i VIVA LUCKENBACH!

(Rykodisc, CD)

Twenty years after Walker recorded *Viva Terlingua!* at Luckenbach Dancehall, an event this album celebrates, one thing that's emerged clearly about Austin's Cosmic Cowboys is that Ray Wylie Hubbard is the only one still worth hearing. I strongly suspect he was the only one worth hearing back then, but Walker's the one who cashed in, becoming a long term cottage industry, deftly milking a rabid following of lawyers and frat rats, who'll even splash out on JJW cruises—can you imagine that? Christ, I'd go over the side and take my chances with the sharks. I've always been baffled by the Walker phenomenon, to me he's something worse than bad, he's boring, but then I have a very low tolerance for showmanship. The best I can say about Walker is that he has about the finest band money can buy, Lloyd Maines on steel, John Inmon on electric guitar, Bob Livingston on bass and Freddie 'Steady' Krc on drums, all of them incidentally, about ten times more talented than their employer in every conceivable way, but even they can't polish this self-congratulatory turd. **JC**

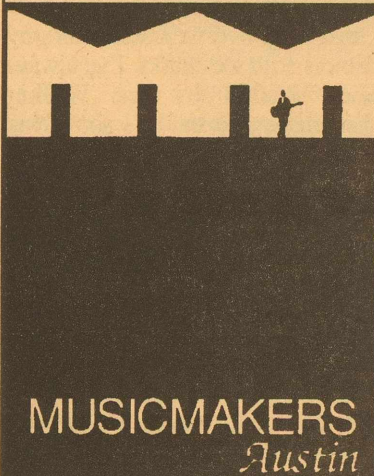




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## HOT RHYTHM & COOL BLUES ... TEXAS STYLE

### TEXAS BLUESMEN

#### CALVIN OWENS TRUE BLUE

(Topcat, CDs)

Nothing personal, but when the *Chronicle* poll makes Sue Foley Austin's #1 Blues Artist, the obvious conclusion must be that this is not a town to be taken seriously as a blues center. Austin's post-SRV rep is pure hype, the reality being that Austin is exactly the same as Anytown, USA, a couple three decent bar bands and that's it. If you need any proof of Austin's minor league rating, two of these three albums, which ascend from good to better to out of this world, graphically demonstrate that Dallas is where Texas blues is happening. The third, rather more subtly, shows that Topcat is the label that's on top of it.

• Opening with the late Zuzu Bollin's remake of his 50s hit *Why Don't You Eat Where You Slept Last Night?*, featuring Fort Worth guitar monster Sumter Bruton, a rather better player than, well never mind, **Hot Rhythms** showcases 17 active Metroplex units and also reveals what an extraordinary wealth of playing talent the blues scene there has. Not just guitarists, led by Bruton, Mighty Paul Young and Tone Sommer, but saxmen, keyboard players, bassists, notably Bobby Chitwood, and drummers, especially the fantastic Herb Schucher. Other notable tracks are Joe Jonas' *Blue Monday* (also on **Texas Bluesmen**), Cold Blue Steel's shonageto Arthur Alexander, *The Girl That Radiates*, Class Action's funky *Midnight Moon*, with sister vocalists Deborah & Michelle Armster, Terraplane Blues' roadhouse *She's A Long Tall Texan*, Bobby Chitwood's Blues Cats' upright bass, lap steel, sax and B-3 driven version of Ellington's *C Jam Blues*, guitar hero Bugs Henderson's sensational *She Feels Good*, with Delbert McClinton's shon section and Schucher, Cricket Taylor's storchy *Guitar Man*, Bert Wills' blues rumba *Time I Go*, Robin Skyler's take on Duane Eddy's *Ramrod* and, finally, Robert Ealey's acoustic *Dog Don't Bite*, with Tone Sommer providing beautiful slide guitar.

• Ealey segues us rather neatly into **Texas Bluesmen**, a tripleheader of veteran Texas blues singers, six songs by Ealey, seven by Curly 'Barefoot' Miller and four by Joe Jonas. The dapper Ealey is a formidable blues shouter and, with hot support by guitarists Sumter Bruton, Mike Morgan and Jim Suhler, all his contributions are remarkable, but two of his originals, *I Want Your Love*, with Tone Sommer on guitar, Johnny Reno on sax and Sharon Denton on bass, and *Love My Baby*, simply with Sommer on acoustic guitar, are absolutely staggering. Introduced as 'The oldest teenager in Dallas,' the 91 year old Curly Miller still sits in regularly with Cold Blue

Steel, who support him here in fine style, and his jazz-blues phrasing and showmanship are very engaging. With a background that includes the circus, medicine shows and African-American vaudeville, Miller has a tendency to pile it on a bit and rather fades in comparison with Ealey and Jonas. A powerhouse singer and harp player, Jonas storms through three of his four tracks like a hurricane, slowing down for *Blue Monday*. Backed by Mighty Paul Young on guitar and the slashing keyboard work of Rochester Sessions, the crackling energy of *Mojo Backfired* and *Chitlin Circuit* ("I drove forty miles down a country road and might not even make a dime") make you wish there was more.

• The essential thing about Ealey, Jonas and, to a lesser extent, Miller, is that they have had no truck with changing styles and fashions. They came up through post-war electric urban blues and that's what they do and will go on doing, take it or leave it. Too many of the form's greatest practitioners have become cartoon figures, parodies of themselves, by catering to a mass audience, hell, let's not piss about, a white audience, one, moreover, with a seemingly insatiable appetite for guitar wanking. With power transferred from the song to the guitar solo, the blues are, ultimately, as doomed as the dinosaur, but, for the time being anyway, there are still men like Ealey and Jonas around to keep the faith. The strength of their music isn't simply in purity, but in integrity.

• Another veteran is Calvin Owens, blues trumpet player, singer, writer and arranger from Houston. Though inspired by Harry James, Dizzy Gillespie, Cootie Williams and Louis Armstrong, Owens has spent his life in the blues, joining BB King in 1953 as soloist, band leader and arranger. Recorded mainly in Brussels, the Calvin Owens Blues Orchestra features Belgian, Dutch, Russian, Armenian, Polish and Chinese names in a monster line-up that includes three to four other trumpets and a string quartet. BB King himself plays guitar on three tracks, Johnny Copeland sings on three others, and David 'Fathead' Newman and Shelly Carroll play sax on two each.

• I am absolutely bananas about this album. It is just so damned cool. Owens is a great player and an even greater arranger and his solo debut is nothing short of brilliant throughout, so when it peaks, as on *Woke Up Screaming*, the solo trumpet intro to *Lick Or Split*, or when Cindy Barg takes the vocals on *Dreams Come True*, the effect is positively surreal. I can imagine **True Blue** being the kind of transcendental, life-altering experience for a young person that **Kind**

**Of Blue, I Was Walkin' Through The Woods** or **Soultrane** were for me, a revelation of what mere mortals are capable of doing through music. If you have any interest in blues, jazz or simply superlative music, I really urge you to check this album out. **JC**

### RHYTHM RATS

#### WILL WORK FOR CHEESE

(independent cassette)

Call me a naive, sentimental fool, but it always bothers me when I see the sacred words rock & roll used to describe a group whose ties, if any, to the 50s are third or fourth hand. Now we have bands influenced by bands that were influenced by The Beatles' milquetoast knockoff of the real thing. Rock & roll has been so stepped on that you're lucky if there's even a grain of hard stuff left in the baby laxative. Even some so-called roots rockers admit their primal influence is The Stray Cats! So anyway, rock & roll is a phrase that I personally dole out with some care and consideration; apart from anything else, it gets me out of using awful expressions like "blues rockin'." They're usually billed as a blues band, but, where that tag usually tells the whole story, it only suggests part of what the Rats are about, because they have a ton of R&B, rockabilly and country in them too. In short, they're a rock & roll band, and a damned good one too, powered along by pianist Wiley Cousins, who shares vocals with upright bassman Ivan Brown and guitarist Will Indian. Cousins still espouses the old-fashioned but effective notion of playing lead and rhythm at the same time, something most Austin 'keyboard' players seem to have 'progressed' beyond. Of the 12 tracks, two, the rock & roll anthem *Dangerous Situation* and jump blues *Bow-Legged Woman*, were written by Brown, one, *Old St Joe*, by Cousins, with the balance coming from sources as diverse as T-Bone Walker (*T-Bone Shuffle*), Webb Pierce (*If You Were Me*), Roy Orbison (a Jerry Lee style *Down The Line*), Roscoe Gordon (*Let's Get High*), Carl Perkins (*You Can Do No Wrong*, a very obscure B side) and Ronnie Holden, a Del-Fi label mate of Ritchie Valens (*My Babe*). Recorded live in Helsinki, at La Zona Rosa and, with Jon Blondell on trombone, on KUT (when Clifford Scott didn't show up for a Live Set), this, as Indian was able to assure a prospective buyer at the launch, is *exactly* what the Rats sound like. **JC**

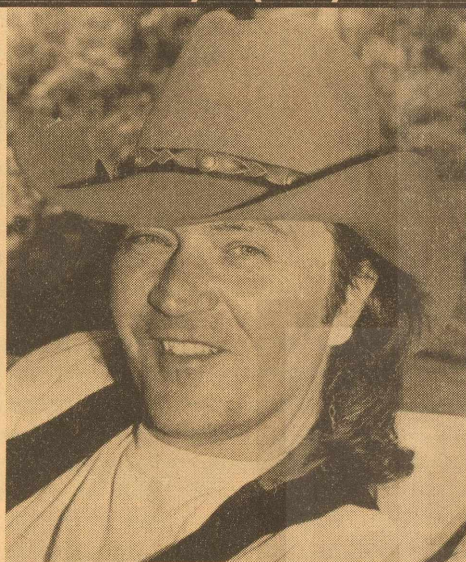


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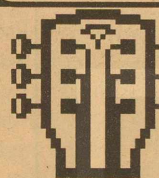
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## MUSIC CITY TEXAS

# PREVIEWS

BE THERE  
OR BE SOMEWHERE ELSE

**Sun 1st • KATY MOFFATT** (Chicago House). Seems like an awful long time since the Fort Worth born singer-songwriter graced us with her refulgent presence. Her live shows are always an enormous pleasure, lovely voice, beautiful songs and ineffable presence.

**Sun 1st • NOVELLAS** (Waterloo Ice House, 38th). Everywhere in the world except America, May Day is a working class festival—an inner London borough I once worked for flew the Red Flag over the Town Hall on May 1st. Gina Graziano, whose family has a long history of union activism, hosts a mini-celebration, with an evening of songs that, if not about the workers' struggle, must at least be about work. Guests include Kelly Willis, Mark Korpi, Kristin Dewitt and Craig Marshall.

**Mon 2nd/9th/16th/23rd • MUSIC BUSINESS 101** (Steamboat, 6.30pm). Doing something useful for a change, the Austin Chapter of the Texas Music Association reprises last year's successful series of free seminars for absolute beginners in the music business. May 2nd, expert panelists discuss *The Demo*; May 9th, *The Gig*; May 16th, personal management, booking agents, attorneys, publicists and accountants in *Your Team*; May 23rd, *Selling Your Product*. Info from the TMA: 441-7111 or Stuart Lodge: 474-5090.

**Tue 3rd • MATRACA BERG** (Antone's, 9pm). Mike Crowley (Jimmie Dale Gilmore, Butch Hancock), her new manager, has been putting Berg, who hasn't played during the last couple of years, through the Austin hoops, sitting in at every possible occasion, with this as her only formal gig. I rather imagine hosts saying "Well thanks for joining us, Matraca. When did you say you were leaving town?" A few years ago she put out a great "critically acclaimed" (see *Honest John's Music Dictionary*) album, *Lying To The Moon*, and has another beauty, *The Speed Of Grace*, just out. Hard to tell which is more impressive, her singing or her writing, though some of her songs do come across better on record than live, but either way she's a bit good.

**Thu 5th • SANTIAGO JIMENEZ Y SU CONJUNTO** (Austin Community College, Riverside). Mark Rubin of Bad Livers, who also plays with Jimenez, asserts that this is the definitive way to celebrate Cinco de Mayo, outdoors on ACC's Riverside campus patio, with two 40 minute sets, at 11.30am and 12.30pm, and no cover.

**Thu 5th/Fri 6th • JANIS JOPLIN SLEPT HERE** (Dobie Screen). Tara Veneruso's documentary starts off being about Joplin's time in Austin and gradually evolves into a potted history of Austin music. Her youth reveals itself in some pretty crass errors (Omar & The Howlers described as a leading Tejano act, La Zona Rosa credited as



"If you ain't herd **The Cow Pattys**, you ain't herd shit."

a mid-80s nurturing ground for singer-songwriters), a hit or miss selection of talking heads and, most of all, her coda on the Future of Austin Music (Ian Moore, Soul Hat and Michele Solberg!). Still, it's got many redeeming features, mainly Cleve Hattersley, of archetypal 70s Austin band Greezy Wheels, terrifically good value as a raconteur and commentator, while Jimmie Vaughan and Eddie Wilson get in some good licks, and there's some fascinating archive film footage.

**Sat 7th • SPRING BLUEGRASS FESTIVAL** (Zilker Park Hillside Theatre). Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments will sound about mine ears, and this sure is one of them. Starting with an Open Mike at 11am, the 7th annual free festival, offers 12 groups, including The Decibelles (1.10pm), Bad Livers (4.05pm) and Hays County Gals (5.15pm). Apart from sheer convenience, this is one of the most informal and laid back of local bluegrass bashes, most of which lay heavy stress on banning alcohol and drugs—I mean what do they think open air festivals are for?

**Thu 12th-Sat 28th • THE COW PATTYS** (Chicago House). Best known as actresses and comedienne, CK McFarland (Patty Cakes), Adrienne Braswell (Patty Addy), Joy Cunningham (Patty Duke) and Donna Stevens (Patty Lorraine LaWanda Louise), are also accomplished musicians and have combined their talents into a 90 minute show that one stunned observer of a rehearsal described as "Dale Evans joins Ro-Tel." The songs range from a reverential *Buffalo Gals*, to *The William Tell Overture* performed on cowbells, to a parody of *Stand By Your Man* to Jim Stafford's *Cow Patty* to ten originals that defy description, sung a cappella with voices providing fiddle, saw and washboard instrumentation. The Cow Pattys have made a couple of public appearances, notably at Emily Fest, but I gather their characters and repertoire have developed dramatically since. I don't want to give you a bum steer, but this could be utterly fantastic.

**Fri 13th • PETE & MAURA** (Chicago House). DC guitar wizard Pete Kennedy is a sensational acoustic player, radically pushing the limits of the instrument in ways that are both technically amazing and creative. Maura Boudreau has developed as a picker way beyond what would have seemed possible when she was a Delta Ray, and the duo has some distinctive and formidable material.

**Sat 14th • OWNPLUGGED** (La Zona Rosa). Like last year's *For The Sake Of The Song* tribute to Townes Van Zandt, this is a Texas Music Association (Austin) fundraiser that honors a Texas songwriter and the title should tip off the cognescent that the honoree is Butch

Hancock. Announced guests are Terry Allen, Joe Ely and David Rodriguez (regretably Jimmie Dale Gilmore and Jesse Taylor are both on the road) but, round Butch, who knows what will happen? Trouble is that what I'd normally regard as an essential show is happening on the same night as the ultracool-mustn't miss-once in a lifetime opportunity...

**Sat 14th • RONNIE DAWSON + MINGO SALDIVAR** (Antone's). Rather naively, I assumed that somebody would surely pick up on Dawson & Saldivar's Carnegie Hall show and book them for a Texas send off or welcome back, Austin seeming the perfect halfway location for these two legendary performers, one based in Dallas, the other in San Antonio. Silly me. Anyway, my debut as a promotor involved three phone calls, one each to Ronnie and Mingo, who gave me a mutually compatible date, and one to Steve Dean of Antone's who snapped them up on the spot. Good game this, I may try it more often. Apart from the fact that they're both incredible performers, they'll come from Carnegie Hall having gotten to know each other and with one finale jam, along with their bands Los Tremendos Cuatro Espadas and High Noon with Lisa Pankratz, behind them, so the Antone's show should really rock.

**Fri 15th • DON WALSER TRIO + WAYNE HANCOCK** (Dog Lounge). Seems like a perfect Master's menu, though his Watermen case, be heavily featured as an (6pm) he helps celebrat the Dog's anniversary, 'The Train' Hancock, 4pm and promises of very special guests.

**Sat 21st • BAD LIVERS** (Kismet Cafe, San Marcos). I rely utterly on the band for this recommendation of their only local May show. Danny Barnes and Mark Rubin are fulsome in their admiration for this new venue, a 150 seat restaurant with art everywhere and, well they get a bit incoherent when they talk about the food. I have no idea how you find it, but the number is 847-8898.



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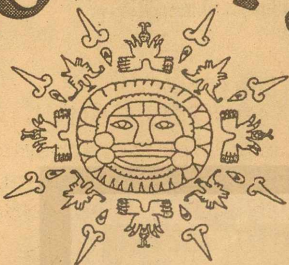
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# JOVITA'S



**RESTAURANTE  
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**NO COVER**  
8pm except as noted

EVERY TUESDAY Don Walser's Pure Texas Band  
with Jimmy Day

EVERY WEDNESDAY The Devil & The Dames

- 5th \_\_\_\_ Los Pinkys con Isidro Samilpa
- 6th \_\_\_\_ Dirk Hamilton
- 7th \_\_\_\_ Coyote Dreams
- 12th \_\_\_\_ Rich Minus & Friends
- 13th \_\_\_\_ Danny Barnes, Mark Rubin  
& Erik Hokkanen
- 14th \_\_\_\_ Debra Peters & The Love Saints
- 19th \_\_\_\_ Susanna Sharpe & Samba Police
- 20th \_\_\_\_ Solid Senders
- 21st \_\_\_\_ Johnny Degollado y Su Conjunto
- 26th \_\_\_\_ Los Pinkys con Isidro Samilpa
- 27th \_\_\_\_ Marti Brom & Her Jet-Tone Boys
- 26th \_\_\_\_ Sisters Morales

## ★ WATERLOO ★ Ice House

6th & Lamar

5pm Every Thursday, Cula De Cafe

- 5th Caryl P Weiss + Christine Albert + Emily Kaitz
- 6th Walt Lewis + Slaid Cleaves + Tom Prasada-Rao
- 7th Michael Fracasso
- 13th Antonio Dionisio + Los Hurting Dogs
- 14th Christine Albert 20th Fabu
- 21st Marti Brom & Her Jet-Tone Boys
- 27th Night Music & Friends 28th Kris McKay

38th Street

- 1st/15th/29th Children's Program  
with Bob Livingston & Friends (3-5pm)
- 1st Novellas & Friends May Day Celebration
- 5th The Derailers 6th Laughing Dogs + Earthpig
- 7th Susanna Sharpe Quartet
- 12th Night Music 13th Dirk Hamilton (CD release)
- 14th Meredith Miller + Damon Bramlett
- 19th Gary Primich 20th Steve James
- 21st Lisa Dilk + Laura Nadeau
- 26th Slaid Cleves & The Moxies + Damon Bramlett
- 27th The Derailers 28th Big Ed (CD celebration)

Austin's Premier acoustic showplace since 1976

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**David Obermann plays tracks from  
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**5/8 Karan Chavis**

**5/13 Rhythm Rats**

**5/22 Jimmy Neely Trio**

**5/29 TBA**

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**on Texas Radio, Sundays, 10pm  
and World Music, Fridays, 10pm**

## KUT 90.5 FM

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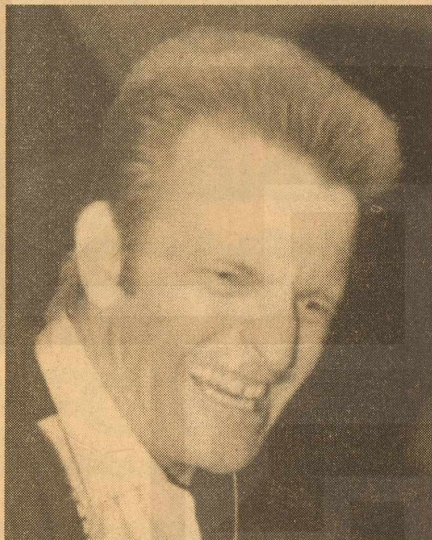
**MAY  
MUSIC**

- 1st Katy Moffatt
  - 5th Mike Jasper & Friends
  - 5th Laughing Dogs
  - 6th Yah-Yah Little Man (Up)
  - 7th Coffee Sergeants
  - 8th Doghouse (live recording) • Walt Wilkins (Up)
  - 12th Nancy Scott
  - 12th-15th, 19th-22nd & 26th-28th  
The Cow Pattys
  - 13th Pete & Maura
  - 15th Karen Tyler (CD release) • David Rodriguez (Up)
  - 18th Dosmillard & Davis
  - 19th Rosalie Sorrels
  - 20th Blush Noisette
  - 21st Breck Alan + Kim Simpson + Kevin Gant
  - 22nd Betty Elders
  - 24th Chicago House Showcase
  - 26th Lourdes Perez + Correo Aereo & Others (live recording)
  - 27th Laughing Dogs
  - 28th Susan Colton
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## SATURDAY, MAY 14th, 10pm