

**Oral History Interview of
Amy Maner**

**Interviewed by: Curtis Peoples
November 9, 2016
Lubbock, Texas**

**Part of the:
*Crossroads of Music Archive***

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Preferred Citation for this Document:

Maner, Amy Oral History Interview, November 9, 2016. Interview by Curtis Peoples, Online Transcription, Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library. URL of PDF, date accessed.

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Recording Notes:

Original Format: Born Digital Video

Digitization Details: audio extracted and enhanced from original .mov files

Audio Metadata: 44.1k/ 16bit WAV file

Further Access Restrictions: N/A

Transcription Notes:

Interviewer: Curtis Peoples

Audio Editor: David Rauch

Transcription: Savannah Calvert

Editor(s): Leah Blackwell

Final Editor: Andy Wilkinson

Interview Series Background:

The Crossroads Artists Project encompasses interviews conducted by the Crossroads of Music Archive Staff members. They hope to document the life, career, and creative processes of artists and songwriters from all across the Southwestern United States.

Transcript Overview:

This interview features Amy Maner. Maner discusses her career in filmmaking making the film, *Lubbock Lights*. She talks about the process, the people she met, and the film's reception. Maner also reflects on Lubbock as a hub of musicians and artists.

Length of Interview: 00:37:59

Subject	Transcript Page	Time Stamp
Idea for <i>Lubbock Lights</i>	5	00:00:00
Interviews and background research for film	7	00:12:12
Goals of the film	10	00:20:27
Memorable moments filming	11	00:22:49
The future of the film	11	00:25:15
Reception of the film	12	00:26:55
What is it about Lubbock?	15	00:34:20

Keywords

Austin, Texas, filmmaking, Lubbock, Texas, West Texas music

Curtis Peoples (CP):

Yeah that's some audio. Good afternoon Amy, how are you doing?

Amy Maner (AM):

I'm well Curtis, and you?

CP:

That's great. I'm doing well. Today is November 9, Wednesday 2016. We're at the Southwest Collection doing an interview with Amy Maner who was gracious enough to come and speak with my class last night in History of West Texas Music, and we'll talk about that here in just a few minutes, but welcome back to Lubbock.

AM:

Thank you, it's always nice, you know, I'm caught in the vortex right now, and it's easy to leave and it's hard to leave. It's that tornado vortex that is just so Lubbock, so it's been nice this week to not be in a hurry to leave and to be able to take the time to speak to you and speak to your class, and so thank you.

CP:

So you came back to Lubbock this weekend for the big UT/Texas Tech rivalry game and stayed a few extra days which is great, and so I had you come talk to my class—by the way this is Curtis Peoples—and my honors class is History of West Texas Music, and all semester long we've been looking basically from the beginning of Anglo settlement up through about 2009 is about as far as we'd get with the big Lubbock Centennial celebration, and along the way, we've had Chris Oglesby, the author, come in and who you know, and we'll talk about here in just a little bit as well as Bob Livingston Skyped in, and then we were fortunate enough to have you come in and talk about your movie Lubbock Lights which we watched in the class, which is a musical documentary about Lubbock music, and that's kind of what I want to focus on today, is that film, how the film got started, why you decided to make that film and future plans for the film, so I'll turn it over to you. Talk a little bit about the film and how you got the idea for it.

AM:

Yes, I got the idea when I was an undergrad at the University of Texas before I even knew I was going to be a filmmaker. I had gone to see a Jimmy Dale Gilmore concert at the venue called The Backyard, which was a beautiful venue, large venue, in Austin, and it's no longer there unfortunately. But you could sit under these big beautiful oak trees or you could sit in seats, I'm going to guess the capacity is probably around three thousand people, that's a guess, and it was sold out, and it was firstly one of the most touching, beautiful concerts. It was just the perfect night, and Jimmy's voice which is somewhat like a windy lullaby under these big oak trees, and so I was inspired by that concert. Although I had seen all of the players that are in the film play

live before of course, some here in Lubbock when I was really young, but most of them I had met and seen in Austin, and I came back to Lubbock about a week later, and I went to go see Jimmy Dale again. However, this time there were about ten people in the audience, and it really struck me that there weren't people appreciating one of their hometown heroes. He sells out in Austin, yet there's just a handful of people here in Lubbock, and I knew it was time at that point, and that would've probably been around 1989, that whether it was Lubbock or the Chamber or whatnot, while they've built some beautiful sports arenas around here that they just had not put as much time and effort into the arts, and yes Lubbock is known for a lot of great things but—when I travel the world Lubbock is known, Buddy Holly's the first thing that comes up. Lubbock is known, in my opinion, for all of the wonderful music and art that has come out of this city, and so I knew I wanted to make a film about the Lubbock music at that point. I then go into—upon graduation, I moved to Los Angeles, I actually went to go work in my other favorite craft which is costumes and costume design, and it was in LA that I was working for a fashion designer, and I was asked to go work on a music video, and again, boom, just one of those aha moments of I can do fashion and film and music all at once? And so it was about a year later after moving back to Texas that Steve Martin—I was coming to North West Texas and specifically Plainview to come shoot the film *Leap of Faith*, and there was nothing in my mind that was going to stop me from coming back here, back home, to start another venture, and that's why I got that job. Not that I had a lot of film experience, I'd worked on a couple of student films and a music video and that was it. But knowing the terrain, knowing how to get around, yeah, I was not going to take no for an answer for working on that film, and so I started my film career at that point. I worked on three or four large films, and then decided to go to graduate school to study directing and acting, to move into that part of film. I'd only worked in the costume departments, and so I came back to Texas Tech. It seems every time I'm ready to start a new chapter, I start that, that seed gets planted right here in my hometown.

CP:

You'd mentioned to me last night that Joe Ely, when he's looking for song inspiration sometimes comes back to West Texas and his hometown for an inspiration, and I thought that that was a very interesting point so—sort of kind of get going again coming back home.

AM:

Yes. Yeah, so Joe Ely shared that with me when we were interviewing him, that as much as he loves to go out, and he's traveled and played all over, all over the U.S. and Europe, but every time he's getting ready to start a new album that he comes back to Lubbock and plants that seed so whether he—it seems at that point, it was consciously that he did that. But sometimes, I think we do things unconsciously, it's just that grace that brings us back, and so yes, it was grace that brought me back here to get my Masters of Fine Arts in Acting and Directing at Texas Tech and then shoot back to Austin and continue with the film career. And then the next step was that I had seen the lovely Chris Oglesby, I had all—Chris had been writing and interviewing all of the

West Texas musicians for years. In fact, he was blogging before we knew what blogging was, in my opinion, but with a really personal interview style, and I just enjoyed reading through those, and so I had read through them, I had seen Chris at a Christmas party and said, “You ready to make a movie with all this bed of interviews and work that you’ve done?” And that’s when *Lubbock Lights* started.

CP:

So you guys met at this Christmas party and he goes on to publish this book *Fire in the Water, Earth in the Air* from those interviews, so did you sit down and listen to interviews? Or how did you guys plan out to do this movie, or what was going to be the theme, or what was really the seed to make this whole thing grow?

AM:

Well, we didn’t sit down, I mean we read through them because he had them all up on a website and started picking and choosing which artists would work, and it seemed the theme always kept coming back, what is it about Lubbock? What is it about this dusty, desolate, what some people see flat place has inspired so much great music and sound even? That always seemed to be a recurring theme in all of the interviews that Chris had done. Another reoccurring theme seemed to be everyone always wanting to just get out. I mean you look at even Mac Davis’ most famous song, you know, “Happiness is Lubbock Texas in My Rearview Mirror,” and you know it’s sort of the ying and the yang, and Terry Allen talks about it in his film, how he just was ready to get the heck out of here, yet when he wrote his album *Lubbock on Everything* and came back here to record it, all of these songs were about loving this place and loving Lubbock, and so it’s always the ying yang, the juxtaposition, the you know—justification was not the right word—

CP:

Juxtaposition?

AM:

Yeah, the juxtaposition of a place like Lubbock, and I’m sure there are many places around the world that maybe have that same feel, but I think Lubbock is very special and cool. That feeling that has given so many, you know, charge and fearless, yet how can you ever feel bad about this place? It’s also so full of love and spirit.

CP:

Now we had talked briefly before that when you were doing the film you kind of came up with a set of questions, I was going to see if you could talk about those questions that helped to ground you to these interviews and to you know to the movie.

AM:

So yeah, I decided to come up with a you know, that we had decided about ten questions could would be able to give a beginning, middle, and end to the film and the questions—really we used Lubbock as the framework, so some people could say, Oh it's a music documentary, some people could say, Well maybe it was a documentary about Lubbock. But you know, hands down we wanted the geography and the landscape you know to also be a character in the film and so some of the questions—and of course what Lubbock is also famous for—

(Phone vibrates)

CP:

Sorry.

AM:

Little sound glitch. What it's also known in other circles, are the Lubbock Lights, and it was always—I mean I know growing up the Lubbock Lights, although they happened in the fifties, my dad was fascinated with these Lubbock Lights, and it was part of my rearing and great, because I loved sleeping outside, I love sleeping outside to this day due to all of those beautiful summer nights that my dad wanted to sleep outside just in case some ships or some lights came for a visit, and I think it gave some interesting commentary to the city for many, many years and to photography, and it was kind of cool that it was a Texas Tech student that actually photographed—

CP:

The Lubbock Lights.

AM:

The Lubbock Lights.

CP:

So you said this is sort of a Lubbock documentary as much as it is a music documentary about these musicians, and so you wanted to incorporate and frame the documentary around Lubbock, talk about how you chose where to interview people and a little bit about that.

AM:

Okay so, of course I love the bumper sticker “Lubbock Has More Sky,” and it does, and I am always so pleasantly reminded of the big, beautiful open sky when I'm here. But so Joey Ely had so many interesting stories about growing up around here and how he would just—when he was ready to hit the road he would just jump on a train, and jump on, and he said he always had sleeping bag, and always had a guitar, and I'm sure he had somewhat of a journal to write and

whatnot and no cellphones back then of course, and that he felt completely safe jumping on, and while some people he said might've called that homeless, he thought he was just gypsy-ing around like some, you know other people might think I'm just not really having a home but traveling around and that was his—those travels I think really influenced his writing so much and that not knowing, yet again, that fearless soul that everything was probably going to be okay, whether he was with a truck driver or hobos on the train or hitchhiking you know with whoever, and so I knew that probably the best spot for Joe would've been somewhere near a train, and Joe was the one who was my first point of contact and who I knew the best at that time to talk about this documentary with and immediately no pause, I said, "Would you rather be interviewed in Austin or in Lubbock?" And oh without a pause he said Lubbock, and as I started calling people down the line, I mean it was really surprising that that was the answer for all of them. At the time, I didn't know I was going to get them here all at the same time for what was once the Buddy Holly Festival, and so that was just—

CP:

So The Flatlanders were coming to town to play, and so you got lucky to get them all in the same place at once to do those interviews.

AM:

The festival that year, which I believe was in 2001, they had invited all The Flatlanders Joe, Jimmy, and Butch along with Terry Allen and Jo Carol Pierce, and I believe that was it, that was it that was the main, you know to speak on a panel. So I was able to interview all of them here with my Austin film crew that week, as far as Jimmy went, I think he's kind of known for his authentic and beautiful voice, and so the windmill museum was a perfect spot for him.

CP:

I think you mentioned last night there's a bit of wind in his voice, and it just seemed to have been an appropriate place.

AM:

Yeah. Butch of course out you know on some farmlands near Acuff which was nice. Terry Allen, you know he's sort of a kaleidoscope of all things I mean he's an incredible sculptor, painter, and of course singer/songwriter, piano player, so we were also able—and he was commissioned to do the Stubbs statue here in Lubbock so we did, and there is part of the film where we go and we look at the Stubb statue, and so his was part at the statue and then of course at the Lubbock Panhandle Fair. I think more than anything I just love that signage.

CP:

I thought it was interesting that you had a Butch out in that field, and I think there's a pump jack in the background or something because he talks about the tractors and the land that just kind

of—he felt that and it came into his music, and his songs, and his body and being an architect guy and sort of that architectural design and just sort of, he could feel everything kind of coming through him and then being able to express that out in his music. I thought that was real interesting too. I think it was a very suitable set up for that.

AM:

Yeah, thank you. I think they were all—I mean you know you kind of go, you know if you had set those interviews up in Austin or just you know in a room, you know would I have gotten the amount of heart and feeling, and once again, those beautiful Lubbock reminders had we not been out on the landscape? I think the landscape helped the interviews.

CP:

There was emotion that came through from everybody in those interviews.

AM:

There was.

CP:

So you've got to interview a lot of people for this and of course not everybody got to be in the film, did you have a particular time period you were looking at? Or was it just artists, or what was the goal really of the film there?

AM:

I was really looking at what I knew and what I grew up with, I'm the youngest of six kids, and my two oldest sisters were in high school when I was born, and so they were blasting Joe Ely's record. I mean I will never forget you know I remember saying, "Play the piano song again." You know and "Hopes Up High" of course, that was the first song on Joe Ely's first album, and those were blasting through our house. The Maines Brothers also blasting through our house. Of course you know, Willie Nelson, who's not from Lubbock but a Texan, and so you know that's—I mean the time period, I figured just sort of—I was focused on my birth years to present, and of course who I knew best, who I was most familiar with because Joe and Jimmy and Butch, all of course, like me, transplanted to Austin. So I was fortunate during my college career there to really get to dig in and know them better. Terry Allen's children are my age, his son's Bukka and and Bale, Bale being an amazing painter and artist, Bukka being an amazing musician, so they each got part of his gene, and so they were part of my entourage, as well as Townes Van Zandt's son John Townes, J. T. Van Zandt. We were in a similar circle of friends so I was blessed to be around Terry a lot during—due to his children.

CP:

They say kind of to write about what you know. so you're making a film about what you know.

AM:

I think what you know and—

CP:

Yeah, the music of your life growing up and yeah.

AM:

Yes.

CP:

What would be, probably, your most memorable moment when making the Lubbock Lights film?

AM:

Let's see, what the most memorable moment? There were so many great ones.

CP:

Or a favorite?

AM:

Yeah, well I have to say one of my favorite people in the film—they're all my favorite and they are my family—but you know I did not know who the Legendary Stardust Cowboy was. Thank goodness for Sharon Ely, and I just I can never thank Sharon and Joe enough for not only all of the footage and photos they provided me but providing me the friendship with the Legendary Stardust Cowboy. So I looked him up, and I, you know—he's different, but he's just one of those things that sometimes could only happen in Lubbock or could only come from Lubbock, and so I think just, you know, really getting to know him and seeing an artist like him actually be able to go out and achieve some fame, whether it was thirty minutes of fame or whatnot. But it kind of goes back to that hope and that dream and not having any fear to go and do it, and I think, I know when I'm in Austin or other parts of Texas, or other parts of the world, people often comment on that I'm a very, that I'm an open person, and I think in Lubbock there's a lot of open people. There's nowhere to run to, nowhere to hide, we can't go hide behind a mountain or a hill, and so it is it part of what makes Lubbock people really kind and beautiful and interesting people.

CP:

So what do you have planned for the future for the film? I think you talked about maybe a re-release of this, what year did the film come out?

AM:

The film came out in 2005, and what's really pretty cool about this film is that a few players have passed on, the sweet and very talented Jesse "Guitar" Taylor who we lost some years back and Traci Hancock who was part of the Texana Dames and the Supernatural Family Band and the daughter of Tommy Hancock and Charlene and the sister of Traci¹, and you know it goes on and on. But you know these guys are still alive and well, and they are still making music and art and traveling, and playing, and so we still have a lot of live history here. We still you know we've got Joe, Jimmy, and Butch and Terry and Bob Livingston—I mean they're all alive and well and so I do think that this film has an incredible shelf life because they're still here and I'm sort of—this film will have hits as we no longer have, you know, some of those folks too, but so—

CP:

How was the film received when it was released?

AM:

You know, everyone loves the film but it's sort of almost like the Flatlander mystery. A lot of people have you know heard it but haven't been able to see it. Because I screened it at South by Southwest first. At the time South by Southwest was not the best venue to sell your film, there were better markets like the Toronto Film Festival and several other markets that specialize and that really like can take in or are good markets for music documentaries so—but because I had already screened it I was not able to show it at that Toronto Film Festival. So it was a smaller distribution, and now I think the producers had just paid for the run, the amount of DVDs and CDs that had been put out, so it takes money like anything else. So we are speaking with a distribution company out of New York, and since we are going to do a little redistribution deal, I'm going to take the film and just make a few more cuts, nothing too major. So we are getting ready to do that, and we are going to put a soundtrack out along with that redistribution, so we're looking maybe the next year for everything to be final and out and the music rights to you know be signed, sealed, and delivered, and so I think it will be exciting, and it will be in theatres as well as you know you'd be able to—probably it's going to get some television time. Again I've got all of that in the works and I'm not exactly sure, but it will be nice to pop it in the theatres too. It's always best to see a film at the theatre.

CP:

Of course, yeah. So do you think there's enough—I would think, I know there's enough material but a Lubbock Lights 2? Could there be a follow up or do you think just—what needs to happen for Lubbock music in the future to be promoted?

AM:

¹ Interviewer note: she probably meant to say Conni here.

That's a good question, what needs to happen to Lubbock music—isn't there—?

CP:

The Civic? Civic Lubbock—the Chamber of Commerce who's come out with a Lubbock Music Now CD, so the city is now beginning to promote Lubbock artists, Lubbock musicians with this CD so everyone had sent in a—well not everyone, whoever chose to send in a submission of a song, those were then judged by people outside of Lubbock for, you know, I'm not sure what they judged on because it was a closed judging process, but they picked like their top fifteen or sixteen or so like that then came out with this first CD, and then they had a big album release party just a few weeks ago, and now they're beginning to promote that and sell it here in the local United Supermarkets, so it's promoting locally, but I'd like to see it get outside here more. Because once you get outside, people really appreciate Lubbock music.

AM:

Right and I think maybe we need to talk to Terry Lacona at the Austin City Limits about having Lubbock night because I mean I think Austin City Limits, it is an international venue, and so many people watch that program.

CP:

We were doing trivia last night with my class as we were talking about the film, but who's made more appearances on Austin City Limits than anybody else.

AM:

Well my guess would've been Willie Nelson, but who is it?

CP:

Lloyd Maines.

AM:

Lloyd Maines of course.

CP:

Lubbock native, Lloyd Maines.

AM:

Yes.

CP:

So yeah I could see a Lubbock night happening, it would be great.

AM:

I think that would be really, really, really, really cool so—

CP:

Maybe the city of Lubbock needs to be talking to them, that's a great idea.

AM:

I think so. It just, I mean it's— and you know I'm around a lot, I work for South by Southwest for their film festival, and I'm involved in the Austin Film Festival as well. I'm always partaking in ACL, and everyone that comes outside for all of those events, they're inspired. I mean I'm told time and time again that they have discovered an artist or a new artist via watching Austin City Limits.

CP:

That's great. So in addition to re-releasing *Lubbock Lights*, what other film projects are you working on or what does the future hold for you?

AM:

So I have another music documentary that is in the works, and it is quite different from *Lubbock Lights* the title is called *Southern Girl* and it is from the black female POV [point of view] from the South, not necessarily from Texas, but you know from the South, and so I'm writing the script right now as we are talking for that and getting ready to get the backing, the finances, for that. So that's the next one on the list. However, speaking to your class yesterday and you, it's really reminded me that it might be time to do a whole other film of the women from Lubbock because—

CP:

I think that's a fantastic idea.

AM:

There are some great, strong women from this area that I think are worth putting on film and archiving.

CP:

There's a lot that have sung background vocals on many of albums, and throughout the years, and they just seem to get forgotten about it for some reason. But you know without them, those harmony vocals and those building tracks and some of have gone out in their own right and have become stars as we know from Natalie and Angela Strehli to—we were talking about Maggie Lewis who now owns the Louisiana Hayride from Levelland, Texas. So West Texas has definitely, it's more than a fair share I think of very talented women, so I look forward to that.

AM:

Yes.

CP:

You had mentioned something earlier as you guys were getting the film going early on and talking with Chris and some of his interviews. So what do you think it is about Lubbock? Did you ever get that question answered? What is it about Lubbock that so many people were coming out?

AM:

Well some people say, well there was nothing else to do, might as well pick up a guitar and sing. I do think that there is something about this open plain and the big blue sky that really draws an energy and a need to create, and so I think landscape, geography, has a lot to do with Lubbock, and I do think the fact that Buddy Holly was so influential to, you know, on such an international level, whether that be The Beatles or Joe Ely, I think having that seed here gave a lot of people the—

CP:

It opened the door.

AM:

It did, it did, and I think knowing that this little Lubbock guy with these funny glasses, if he could do it, they probably could too.

CP:

Well, is there anything else you would like to add before we leave this afternoon?

AM:

Let's see, what I would like to add. I do think that Lubbock is very aware that now, and of course they do the wonderful West Texas walk of fame which is great. So I do think that it has the attention and the importance of the arts, is better, and you say how do we get these other people recognized? How do we do that? You know, we'll have to talk to the Chamber about that, but you know I do think that Lubbock has started to pay a lot more attention to putting a lot of money into that, and of course the Buddy Holly Center is great. I think they did a fabulous job of that. Buddy Holly's grave, of all the people that come from London and Europe to go see that little grave, I don't know maybe we could somehow you know pop that up a little bit. But you know, and of course the naming of all the streets, I mean I didn't even know Glenna Goodacre had a street named after her until yesterday. So I think just always continuing to—I mean you have to fight for anything, but if artists themselves can get in and make those fights, it takes everyone, it takes a village to make those fights, and of course you know in Austin at our city hall, our statue is Willie Nelson. So maybe we could start planting a few more civic projects and

art projects and installations that are reminders of music and art, and it just takes people getting together and pushing it. I think Lubbock seems to be going for it these days.

CP:

Heading in the right direction.

AM:

Yes.

CP:

All right thank you Amy for coming by.

AM:

Thank you, Curtis.

CP:

Bye, bye.

End of Recording

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