



NEVER HEARD OF 'EM

Austin's Music Explosion



Introduction

I'M NOT A MUSICIAN. I'M NOT A CRITIC.
 I'm just a woman who was in love with a man who was in love with music. Together we found ourselves in downtown Austin in the 1990's, happily watching as The Do-It-Yourself music scene exploded all around us.

Mike and I opened Local Flavor in 1994 with one CD and 8 tapes by a total of six Austin musicians.

When we closed, more than 1,000 titles filled our shelves. Over those six years we saw lot of bands take many difference paths to success. Life was thrilling; creative energy was erupting all around us. Musicians would literally run into our shop with a tape of a song they just wrote and recorded in their living room – they couldn't wait to play it for us. They would call us from the road to tell us about a great gig or stop by before leaving on tour to tell us goodbye and have us wish them luck. Those memories are so rich that I wouldn't trade even one moment of that time for diamonds and oil wells. I wrote articles about “our bands” for magazines in Belgium, New Hampshire and Canada, and it was always my hope to compile those stories and articles into a book.

Family needs required us to move to Corpus Christi in 2000 and the rapidly changing scene in Austin began to seem much farther away than 200 miles. South Texas offered new bands and a growing scene of its own. Through another special record store, SurfClub Records, we kept an ear open to new music and our door open to old friends who found their way to the coast. I became co-founder of the South Texas Music Walk of Fame and hoped someday to write about all of those people, too.

And entire decade passed and along with it ... my Mike. His funeral in 2009 included music from Jeff Devillez and Mundi. Percussionist Ric Furley surprised me when he appeared as one of Mike's pall bearers. Billy Eil drove through an ice storm to sing “Ride All Night”, which he wrote for us, then turned around and drove back to Austin for a gig. Music people are the best people on Earth.

So, this year, 2010, seemed like a good year to make the book happen. I didn't know how it would flow, and it seemed to be getting very big. I was, however, certain that it would include interviews with musicians, some of the articles I wrote, and the memories I could recall in order to honor those years of our shop. Not to honor our shop itself – we didn't MAKE anything happen. Instead, I hoped to mark a moment in which I believe things changed completely for the independent musician. That moment began, I felt convinced, in the same year we opened our shop – 1994.

I arrived in Austin in July to interview the musicians whom we saw as pioneers and to seek support from a group of people who know more about Austin music than I ever will. The first of those people was Director of the Texas Music Office, Casey Monahan. “You're saying you think the explosion began in 1994?” he asked, then sent a staff member to look up the copyright date of the book, *How to Make and Sell Your Own Recordings: A Guide for the Nineties*, by Diane Sward Rapaport. Casey felt that this book was highly instrumental in creating the independent music movement. We learned that it was published in 1992, and, he recalls, triggered a wave of magazine articles on the subject and a subsequent rush to the recording studio by thousands of bands in Austin and elsewhere. Casey assured me of his support for this book and my feet never touched the ground the rest of the day.

David Cotton was next on my interview list. A very influential member of today's music scene and music buyer for several venues, and, in the 90's, he managed 6th Street's famous club, Steamboat. Every evening he stopped by our shop on his way to work and we chatted about bands. "So, 1994," he asked, "is the year you believe the DIY scene really got going? I'll buy that. Now, let me tell you what was going on in 1993." He explained that up through 1992, there were only a few clubs in downtown Austin, mostly playing either Blues or Country music. In 1993, however, the live music scene became massive. "Suddenly there were dozens of venues, playing every kind of music imaginable, from hundreds of brand new bands."

David share mountains of information with me and gave me the advice that altered the form of this book entirely. "There are already many books about Austin and Texas music, and there will be many more; the story is too big for any one book. Sit here and tell me," he said, "why you and Mike opened Local Flavor." I explained the events that led us to make a commitment to that little mission of love. "That's your book," he said. "Nobody else lived that life. Nobody else can tell that story."

Throughout the entire week, one supercharged interview followed another. I spent time with Spencer and Suzy Perskin of Shiva's Headband, Darrell Mayers of Mundi/Happy Valley, Ted James of Deep Eddy Records and others. I collected phone and e-mail interviews with Mike Blakely and Ponty Bone and set up future interviews with Miles Zuniga, Mike Vasquez and Phil Hurd. I was all over town – a native in a strange land – experiencing only a little melancholy over things no longer here and a great sense of adventure over all the new things I found.

I stayed in the downtown La Quinta on that trip, a special place for Mike and me. When we had a really good week of business, we would rent a room there for one night with air conditions, cable TV, a real shower and a laundry room. I worked late, had food delivered, and walked all over the city.

The book began to take form. It would not be the massive encompassing volume I first imagined. I would follow David's advice and make it a personal journey through the years of our shop and the decade since. It would include every memory I could recall from those wonderful years, and all the articles I wrote for *The Musician's Trade Journal* and for *Real Blues Magazine* that could be found along with tons of photos and several thumbnail bios on the people closest to me and Mike. It would also include a look at today, the changes and the constants of the Austin music scene. Every day the project became more clearly defined.

Every night was filled with music, and on one of those nights a series of special bonuses took place. I stopped by my new favorite rockin' rumpus room, Beerland, to interview owner Randall Stockton, formerly of the Headhunters. Then I went to Red Eyed Fly to watch its owner Heath Macintosh play

drums behind a local songwriter. Heath was drummer and songwriter for Soak during our shop years and I couldn't pass up an opportunity to see him play again. These days, both are successful businessmen. In the '90s, these two put their very first tapes in our shop and both guys are especially dear to me.

The set ended early so I slipped out to the back patio of Red Eyed Fly. Man, I love this place! It sits on a rocky cliff over Waller Creek, and a breeze stirs the leaves of the treetops all night. Dorito and The Devil Rides were listed on the chalkboard as the next two acts. I'd never heard of them. So ... perfect. While Dorito was setting up, I began to think there was a least one guy on that stage who might not be a stranger. I stepped forward a bit to try to determine if that heavily bearded, redheaded punk rocker was my old friend Bryan Nelson from Sweatbox Studios. It was! After a quick greeting and email exchange, he went back to setting up.

A few moments later, a lovely young woman tapped me on the shoulder, "Do you know someone in that band?" she asked. I explained my surprise at finding an old friend. She smiled and then said, "My husband is in the next band. Will you stay and watch them with me?" I assured her that I'd be delighted and she ran to get him. When they returned, he introduced himself as Julian.

"Julian," I asked, "where did you get that lovely British accent?" He told me he was from London, England. "And what," I asked, "brings a British rocker to Austin Texas?"

"Well," he began, "in 1994 ..."