

July 7, 2018

Hi Kate,

The Beacon City Band and Texas Summer Nights albums have never been converted to digital and have been out of print and undistributed for decades. My guess is that each LP had a pressing of 500 and no second pressing. Passing this music around is akin to early-1960s blues collectors sharing rare 1920s 78s. Best case scenario, like those blues sides, would be for this music to be rediscovered and distributed.

I've lost touch with everyone involved. Doug Hudson became a school psychologist in Austin. David Wright is a college English (poetry) professor in Japan. Franke is still making music in Houston (denicefranke.com). Since my dad's death, Christina and I now own two rent houses in San Marcos, and our new granddaughter Joni is in Austin (with Darcy and Jarrett), so we've been in San Marcos three times in the last 14 months, but I don't know which if any of these musicians might still be around.

When I lived at the intersection of Graton Road and the Gravenstein Highway, c1973-4, Kate Wolf lived nearby, produced little concerts in a nearby grove, and released her first album—the first time I realized that someone could release their own album. But until I moved to San Marcos in April 1976, all the songs I'd learned were from records. In San Marcos, I found a vibrant community of young songwriters. Undergraduate George Strait was playing two nights week at the local honky-tonk, a nameless singer in the band, and young folkie singer-songwriters played regularly at Grin's, the San Marcos college burger hangout, as they worked their ways up to their first albums—those included Lyle Lovett, Nanci Griffith, Robert Earl Keen, Darden Smith, Beacon City Band and many more. (It's where I played my first gig.)

Doug and David had come together to college in San Marcos from their north Dallas high school. The old bank on the corner of the San Marcos courthouse square—abandoned then as now—had been used by Sam Peckinpah when he filmed "The Getaway" there with Steve McQueen, and they'd added a sign with the fictional name "Beacon City Bank." As Doug & David started playing in public, they took the name Beacon City Boys, and that's how I first knew them. Another college student, Denice Franke (known simply as "Franke"...Frankie), started playing out around the same time and soon they combined, changing the name to Beacon City Band. Finally they added Roland Denny on upright bass. By then they had a devoted following that I came to refer to as the Beacon City Bunch.

I was cooking at another restaurant and would go after work to the BCB gig at Grin's. Afterward we'd go to Herbert's Taco Hut for post-midnight dinner, and often gathered at someone's house for what we called Choir Practice.

Tom Wassenich owned Grin's and near the end of the night would emerge from the kitchen in his grease-stained apron to join BCB in singing his "20th Century Daniel Boone" and "Sweaty Betty." After I'd moved to Santa Fe, Tom moved up there for a one-year songwriting sabbatical and we spent a lot of time together.

It was David Wright and Kay Hetherly that got me to Santa Fe. After graduating, they moved up there for a year while applying to grad school English programs. (I later stayed with them at U of Wisconsin in Madison when touring. David mastered Spanish to be

able to read Spanish poetry, then did the same with Japanese. Kay mastered Russian so she could read Russian literature in the original.) They supported themselves by playing a half-dozen regular restaurant music gigs around Santa Fe, which inspired me, having a lot to do with my getting a divorce, moving to Santa Fe, and starting to play restaurant gigs. (In fact, when they left, I took over some of their gigs. My online memoir—“Ameripass—Aimless in America”—has lots of stories about all of this and all these people.)

David had a great voice and created amazing melodies. Besides his own songs, he set to music many of the great poems he was studying—Yeats, Frost, Housman, and many others that didn’t make the records. The BCB in general, and David in particular, have been the single greatest influence on my own music—perhaps as big as Hank Williams, Bob Dylan, and Leonard Cohen combined.

One night at a Choir Practice, I introduced David to Joey Geaccone and suggested that David might help him craft his unfinished autobiographical song “Aunt Nora” which was rich with content but sprawling and unwieldy in form and melody. David never took the much-deserved co-writer credit for the song, which I still sing all these years later, one of a dozen David Wright songs and poems I’ve sung over the years. Joey later stayed with me in Santa Fe—I last saw him when I drove him ten miles out to a good highway intersection from which to hitchhike home to Austin. I learned last month from Darcy (via her mom who had seen the obit in the Austin paper) that Joey died last year at 63. I just found the obit under “Gasper Joseph Geaccone” and see his boyhood friends referring to him as the class clown—we affectionately called him Crazy Joey, the life of every party. (Doug and Franke also visited me in Santa Fe, and later played and sang harmonies on my first album.)

The Beacon City Band album was recorded in May 1981 and released later that year. When we joined the Beacon City Bunch outside Gruene Hall for the photo on the back of the cover, Sue was about six months pregnant with Darcy. I’m wearing shorts, running shoes (I was running 50 miles a week) and a mustache. My playing music was proving incompatible with my marriage—my guitar went into a closet.

Two years later, in 1983, Tracie Ferguson assembled some money and all the extended San Marcos/Beacon City Bunch singers and songwriters and recorded Texas Summer Nights. I was no longer in the music scene; coincidentally, this was when my marriage fell apart and I returned to music, moving to Santa Fe in 1984.

Three songs on Side One of Texas Summer Nights don’t fit the Beacon City Bunch genre and I excluded them when making the recording—thus, you were able to report that you “liked every song.” I wish I’d known Mickie Merkins better—my admiration for her songwriting has continued to grow, but I think she may have been as shy as me and we never knew each other beyond acquaintances.

That’s all—and more than you ever wanted to know! If you’re going to share this music, as I hope you will, I’d want the stories available—like the old blues collectors trying to find Mississippi John Hurt—the historian and archivist in me.

Enjoy.