

culture



Darden Smith performs at The Bugle Boy, once a WWII army barrack  
Photo by Connie Strong

It's 1942, and the Andrews Sisters can be heard on nearly every radio station in the country, belting out their iconic wartime hit "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy." In Bastrop a few short years later, no doubt soldiers in the barracks at WWII's Camp Swift Army Infantry Base are still listening to the popular upbeat song about a virtuoso trumpet player. It's a welcome musical distraction from the rigors of war. Today, this musical distraction from the pressures of everyday life can still be found—in the same barrack that housed our troops over 60 years ago. Now The Bugle Boy listening room, it's part of a unique approach to concert enjoyment.

The barrack, moved to LaGrange in 1948, eventually became one of the most

## The Secret is Out!

Rediscovering Music as it Should Be

BY CONNIE STRONG

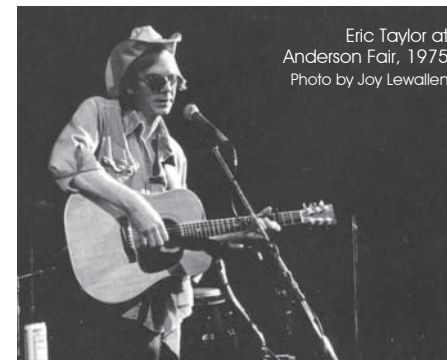
respected listening rooms in Texas. Owner Lane Gosnay provides concert line-ups for The Bugle Boy that include professional, local, regional, national and international touring musicians.

Singer-songwriter Darden Smith is one such artist who, in February, gave listeners a concert to remember. Darden, credited with 12 critically acclaimed albums, has opened for Stevie Nicks, Joan Baez and others. And yet, he loves the smaller venues. Darden performs in both listening rooms and house concerts.

Listening rooms and house concerts are two different music venues with the very same approach to music appreciation: top-notch performers and attentive listeners—together, in intimate settings.

While listening rooms are public venues, house concerts are private, non-profit "parties," held in the homes of hosts/hostesses.

Although not intentional, these venues have remained obscure, like a secret well kept from the average music lover. For those, however, who have been fortunate enough to discover this "secret," a world of music appreciation has been introduced in a venue that is entirely different from the noisy, distracting crowds of today's typical concerts. Brenham's Cheryl and Glen Duckett have been hosting the Flowers in the Desert



Eric Taylor at Anderson Fair, 1975  
Photo by Joy Lewallen

(FITD) house concert series for the past 12 years. As attendance increased, the concerts were moved from their home. "The Old Rock Store in Chappell Hill is as close to a cozy living room atmosphere as we could possible get. The intimacy remains, and that is our first and foremost concern. We have had everyone from crowd favorites such as Shake Russell, Ray Wylie Hubbard, and Dana Cooper, to the lesser known—but equally talented—artists," says Cheryl.

On April 26, FITD presented Jim Photoglo to an appreciative, receptive audience. Best known for co-writing "Fishin' in the Dark" with Wendy Waltman, Jim relates to his listeners on a personal level. The attendees leave with the impression that they have made a new friend—something they would never be able to say after leaving the impersonal atmosphere of a concert held in a larger setting.

When asked why a well-established artist would agree to perform in a small venue, Jim explains, "If you are playing to an audience of thousands, you get the collective response that comes with the momentum of the concert. But if you are playing to a small group in a house concert, you connect 'one on one' with the audience. The response is in their eyes. You see the honesty of whether or not they like the music."

The Ducketts continue their endeavors for one reason: passion for the music. "These concerts are completely non-profit," Cheryl says, "the audience is not here to drink or pick up partners for the night; they are here strictly to appreciate the music." The listeners are asked to provide a small donation, usually \$12-\$15. All proceeds go to the artist, along with any proceeds from CD sales.

Grammy winner Jon Vezner ("Where've You Been," co-written with Don Henry, performed by Kathy Mattea) states, "For

those who plan to attend a concert in this type of venue, I'd like to assure them that they are in for a delightful experience."

From the smallest historic towns like Chappell Hill, to the largest metropolitan areas, music lovers are discovering these two unique venues, but these concepts are not new.

Our State's oldest listening room is Houston's legendary Anderson Fair (AFair), established in 1969. Part of the city's eclectic Montrose district, AFair has a well-established reputation for being the quintessential example of a listening room. So much so, that Ghost Ranch Films is in the final stages of production on a documentary about this music icon. According to Producer-Director Bruce Bryant, "For The Sake Of The Song: The Story of Anderson Fair" will "pay tribute to the volunteers, the musicians and the patrons. Some of today's most accomplished artists got their start at Anderson Fair."

Producer-Cinematographer Jim Barham remembers, "Nanci Griffith told me AFair is the first place that she had ever sung where she didn't have to work to get the listener's attention. These venues can be very intimidating to a performer, because they know they are playing to an audience who is there strictly for the music. Lyle Lovett says it's so quiet on that stage that you can hear your heartbeat."

The Cactus Café, located on campus at the University of Texas in Austin, has been in operation since 1979. Part of this listening room's claim to fame is the success of the musicians who have spent much of their early careers here, trying to establish a place in the competitive music world. Robert Earl Keen and Lucinda Williams are among those who graced the small stage of, what is now, one of The Live Music Capital of the World's most respected venues.

These excellent options for quality entertainment are not given the notoriety that they deserve, partly because they operate on limited budgets; many are completely non-profit. Publicity is limited. Still, these concerts are becoming increasingly popular. If you're tired of "canned music" and synthesized noise, attend an acoustic concert in an intimate setting, and rediscover music as it should be.

And then, pass the word—

For information & schedules: The Bugle Boy: [www.thebugleboy.com](http://www.thebugleboy.com); Cheryl Duckett 979-836-6088 or visit [www.houseconcerts.com/fitd](http://www.houseconcerts.com/fitd); Anderson Fair & link to movie: [www.andersonfair.com](http://www.andersonfair.com); The Cactus Café: [www.utexas.edu/txunion/ae/cactus/index.php?section=ae](http://www.utexas.edu/txunion/ae/cactus/index.php?section=ae).

During performances, all cell phones must be turned off, and no talking is allowed.



Early days at Houston's Anderson Fair, 1975

Photo by Anderson Fair