

# Clifford Antone

Musician, entrepreneur, and nightclub owner, b. October 27, 1949, Port Arthur, Texas, son of Jamal and Georgette Ashy Antone; d. May 23, 2006, Austin, Texas. Clifford Antone is perhaps best known for founding the legendary Austin club, Antone's, in 1975. This popular venue became a Mecca for blues artists and fans throughout the world and played a key role in establishing Austin's vibrant live music scene.

Through his nightclub, Antone not only helped reinvigorate the careers of such veteran artists as B.B. King, Muddy Waters, John Lee Hooker, James Cotton, and Pinetop Perkins, but he also helped launch the careers of numerous younger artists, including Stevie Ray Vaughan, The Fabulous Thunderbirds, Sue Foley, Carolyn Wonderland, Gary Clark, Jr., Eve Monsees, and others. A remarkably diverse array of musicians, among them Doug Sahm, Marcia Ball, Johnny Gimble, Bonnie Raitt, John Lee Hooker, Shawn Colvin, Bono, Lucinda Williams, Otis Rush, Fats Domino, Lou Ann Barton, Joe Ely, Clarence 'Gatemouth' Brown, W.C. Clark, Albert Collins, Denny Freeman, Reckless Kelly, Delbert McClinton, Jimmy Reed, Lavelle White, Albert King, Paul Ray and the Cobras, Derek O'Brien, Angela Strehli, and Bob Schneider, have performed at Antone's over the years.

Born and raised in the upper Texas Gulf Coast's 'Golden Triangle' region, Clifford Antone absorbed a wide variety of musical influences from an early age, including blues, R&B, soul, gospel, Cajun, zydeco, honky tonk, and swamp pop. As a teenager, Antone began to frequent live music venues along the Interstate-10 corridor connecting East Texas with southwestern Louisiana. In such places as The Big Oaks Club and Lou Ann's, he heard a number of local and regional acts, including Lazy Lester, Slim Harpo, Katie Webster, the Boogie Kings, Johnny Winter, and Aaron Neville. Although the region was still racially segregated at that time, Antone worked alongside African Americans and often listened to blues and R&B on local 'black' radio stations. At the age of seventeen, Antone bought a bass guitar. Even though he never became a professional musician, he began to perform with other local blues players. Years later, he would occasionally sit in on bass at Antone's with some of his blues idols

In 1968, at the age of eighteen, Clifford Antone moved to Austin to pursue a law degree at the University of Texas. Although by the early 1970s he had lost interest in school, his passion for music remained strong. Disappointed that there were not more live music venues in Austin to showcase blues, R&B, gospel, and zydeco, Clifford Antone decided to open his own club as a way to share the music he loved with younger Austin audiences. He rented a vacant store front on Sixth Street in downtown Austin and, on July 15, 1975, Antone's nightclub opened, featuring the legendary Houston-based 'King of Zydeco,' Clifton Chenier and His Red-Hot Louisiana Band.

The club quickly gained popularity and became one of the first venues to attract live music fans to Austin's Sixth Street area. Although Antone's changed locations four times during its first thirty years, it consistently hosted many of the legendary blues, R&B, gospel, and zydeco artists whom Antone had long admired, including BB. King, Muddy Waters, Big Walter Horton, Barbara Lynn, Sunnyland Slim, Lavelle White, James Cotton, and others. As one of the pioneering institutions of Austin's burgeoning live music scene during the 1970s, Antone's also began to attract a number of younger aspiring blues musicians. By the late 1970s, Jimmie Vaughan had moved from Dallas to Austin, joining Kim Wilson, Keith Ferguson, and Mike Buck to form the Fabulous Thunderbirds and become the club's unofficial house band. Jimmie's younger brother, Stevie Ray Vaughan, also took up residence at Antone's and began honing his singing, songwriting, and guitar playing skills before going on to international fame

In 1986, Clifford Antone started the Antone's record label, which would include in its catalog such notable artists as Doug Sahm and James Cotton. Antone also opened Antone's Record Shop at 2928 Guadalupe Street, just north of the University of Texas campus. In addition to these business ventures, Clifford Antone was well-known for his humanitarian efforts. Not only did he often spend his own money to help musicians pay for medical care or clothing and school supplies for their children, he also was involved in a number of charity and educational activities. He led the 'Help Clifford Help Kids' fundraising campaign for American Youthworks, a non-profit organization that mentors at-risk public school students. He also helped organize the 'Neighbors in Need' concert to benefit victims of Hurricane Katrina. In addition to his charity work, Antone taught courses on the history of the blues at both Texas State University in San Marcos and at the University of Texas at Austin.

Although he is best known for his involvement with the blues, Clifford Antone appreciated all types of music. On any night of the week, he could be found at other local venues, including the Broken Spoke, Jovita's, and Artz Rib House, listening to, and sometimes sitting in with, honky tonk, western swing, folk, Cajun, and rock and roll bands.

Clifford Antone died of a heart attack at his home in Austin on May 23, 2006, and is buried at the Greenlawn Cemetery in Port Arthur. Antone is survived by two sisters, Susan Antone and Janelle Antone Raad, his niece Georgette Raad and nephew Jamal Raad, along with several aunts, uncles, and cousins. Shortly after his death, Austin-based Silver Star Entertainment released the award-winning documentary, *Antone's: Home of the Blues*, celebrating Antone's life and career in music.