

Champ Hood

Instrumentalist, singer, and songwriter; b. Spartanburg, South Carolina, August 16, 1952; d. Austin, Texas, November 3, 2001. Champ Hood gained fame in the Austin music scene in the 1970s as a member of Uncle Walt's Band, which included guitarist and vocalist Walter Hyatt and bass player and vocalist David Ball. The three formed the group in Spartanburg, South Carolina, while Hood was still in high school. In 1971, Uncle Walt's Band relocated to Nashville before moving on to Austin in 1973 after being encouraged to do so by fellow singer-songwriter, Willis Alan Ramsey.

Uncle Walt's Band played an eclectic mix of swing, jazz, and country with intricate three-part harmonies, which won them a large following in Austin's burgeoning live music scene. The group performed in a variety of venues throughout the Southwest and appeared on the acclaimed PBS program *Austin City Limits*. The group also recorded four independent albums—*Uncle Walt's Band* (1974), *An American in Texas* (1980), *Uncle Walt's Band Recorded Live* (1982), and *6-26-79* (1988). Uncle Walt's Band also helped inspire the early careers of other Texas singer-songwriters, including Lyle Lovett, who, as a younger artist, sometimes worked as an opening act for the group.

All three band members eventually would have successful solo careers, but as the most versatile instrumentalist, Hood also was a highly sought-after side man for other groups. He was equally comfortable playing the guitar, mandolin or fiddle, and had a three-octave vocal range (from baritone to tenor), which made him well-suited to singing backup vocals behind both male and female performers. Hood's unique talents helped win him membership in the Texas Music Hall of Fame in 2000 and made him a five-time recipient of the Austin Best String Player Award.

In addition to his work with Uncle Walt's Band, Hood performed with a number of other popular Texas musicians, including Jimmie Dale Gilmore, Toni Price, Lyle Lovett, Kelly Willis, and Willis Alan Ramsey. For a while, Hood also led the Threadgill's Troubadours, later known as Champ Hood and the Troubadours, who performed regularly at Threadgill's Restaurant on North Lamar in Austin, the same venue in which a young Janis Joplin began performing publicly years earlier. Hood spent the late 1970s and early 1980s playing a regular house gig at Emmajoes, an Austin venue considered legendary by many music fans. Hood also performed backup guitar and vocals for Toni Price for several years and was regularly featured at her 'hippy hour' show on Tuesday nights at the Continental Club on South Congress Avenue. Hood played in the studio nearly as much as he did live, appearing on recorded works by numerous musicians, including Toni Price, Jerry Jeff Walker, Richard Buckner, Peter Keane, Mandy Mercier, Don Walser, Terry Clarke, Tish Hinojosa, and Blaze Foley.

It came as a shock to the Austin music scene when Champ Hood died on November 3, 2001. His private battle with lung cancer had been just that, having notified his friends and family of his illness only one month before he died. “For the musicians in Austin, this loss [of Hood] is on the order of Doug Sahm and Townes Van Zandt,” said friend and collaborator Jimmie Dale Gilmore, adding that, “The public may not be aware of what has been lost. But most musicians know for sure.” Champ Hood is survived by his son and fellow Austin musician, Warren Hood, his brother Robin Hood of Spartanburg, South Carolina, and two nephews.

John M. Lindsay