The Austin Chronicle Music Anthology

For over 30 years, The Austin Chronicle has delivered progressive perspectives and alternative journalistic visions to the Austin community. Founded in 1981 by publisher Nick Barbaro and editor Louis Black, the Chronicle promotes, analyzes, critiques, and defines all things Austin—film, art, literature, theater, food, politics, and, of course, music. Not only has The Austin Chronicle been the premiere publication documenting the vibrant musical scene that gave rise to the “Live Music Capital of the World,” the Chronicle itself has become a significant aspect of the musical culture with its promotion of Austin music to an international audience.

Celebrating the relationship between the Chronicle and the Austin music community, the University of Texas Press published The Austin Chronicle Music Anthology in 2011. This volume of over 200 articles and reviews, strengthened by scores of iconic photographs, was edited by respected veteran music journalists Austin Powell and Doug Freeman. Despite stylistic changes in the Chronicle throughout the decades, the articles reveal a seamless consistency that exhibits the expertise of the Chronicle staff. Black, whose weekly editorials set the intelligent tone that characterizes The Chronicle, introduces the anthology with his observation that “the Austin scene has never been about only one kind of music or style but rather the full past of music honored with cross-breeding and constant reinvention into innovative explorations.”

Many critics have portrayed Austin music, and often the Chronicle as well, as a community of self-absorbed elitists who have hyped an image that has become a catchy Chamber of Commerce slogan and promotion. Those critics are wrong. However, they are correct in that there is a community—a community of singers, songwriters, clubs, promoters, journalists, and devoted fans. This community emerged in the 1960s and grew to maturity during the 1970s and 1980s. Now there are three generations of participants in the evolution of Austin music. For 30 years, The Chronicle has served as their journalistic voice.

Talented and passionate writers have been the trademark success of the Chronicle. No one exemplifies that more than veteran journalist Margaret Moser. Moser writes the first of three introductory essays that cover the 1980s, the 1990s, and the 2000s. By the 1980s, it was evident that Austin music had matured and evolved beyond the so-called “progressive country” era, which was so closely associated with the Armadillo World Headquarters, Soap Creek Saloon, Willie Nelson’s Fourth of July Picnics, and other venues. Blues-rock and alternative sounds were emanating from the various incarnations of Antone’s Nightclub and scores of other locations. Moser was there to experience it all, and her voice is as trusted and respected today as it was 30 years ago. In addition to her introduction to the 1980s, the “best of Moser” is included in all three sections with articles ranging from the Doug Sahm experience at Soap Creek Saloon to profiles of such diverse artists as The Fabulous Thunderbirds, Joe Ely, and the Skunks.

Three of Austin’s premiere journalists of the 1980s—Jeff Whittington, Michael Corcoran, and John T. Davis—have several contributions in the 1980s section. Whittington, the original music editor of the Chronicle, was the father of The Austin Chronicle Music Poll and the Austin Music Awards. Corcoran, always with his pulse on the Austin creative community through a long career at the Austin American-Statesman, is at his best tapping into the emotion and passion of the artist. Examples in this volume include profiles of Joe “King” Carrasco, Dino Lee, and Stevie Ray Vaughan. Davis has been a premier journalist in Austin since the mid-1970s and has no equal in bridging the cultural gap between the so-called “progressive country” period of the 1970s and the emerging blues scene. His Austin Music Award previews are a valuable addition in this volume.

Raoul Hernandez introduces the 1990s with a reminder of that timeframe, the “death of Stevie Ray Vaughan on August 27, 1990, and Doug Sahm’s on November 18, 1999.” Hernandez has served as The Chronicle music editor since 1994, and his tenure has been notable in its commitment to that powerful reality, the diversity of Austin music. Highlights of the 1990s section include Lee Nichols’s features that range from Don Walser to the Dixie Chicks to Jerry Jeff Walker. There are three of Ken Lieck’s weekly must-read “Dancing About Architecture” columns. The 1970s-era Austin resident Chet Flippo, later of Rolling Stone magazine fame, gives his take on the “cosmic cowboy” phenomenon and an invaluable review of the albums that defined that era. Appropriately, the last essay on the 1990s is Joe Nick Patoski’s portrayal of a night at Soap Creek Saloon with the Texas Tornado himself, Doug Sahm.

The final section on the 2000s is introduced by Christopher Gray, Chronicle columnist from 2003 until 2007, and includes several of his own profiles and reviews. Despite more freelance writers and more attention to South by Southwest, the Chronicle remains respectful of the traditions and roots of Austin music throughout the 2000s. Notable articles include profiles of Patty Griffin and Jimmy LaFave by renowned music critic Dave Marsh. Audra Schroeder and Belinda Acosta add their voices to the recent collection, and Mose’s interview with Clifford Antone relives “those magic moments” with one of the spiritual fathers of the Austin sound.

For those seeking a scholarly history or a thematic survey of the last 30 years of Austin music, this anthology is not for you. For those seeking an entertaining and informative experience in the community of Austin music, you will find the best of music journalism.

Larry Willoughby