

Jim Boyd

Jim Boyd was a singer and multi-instrumentalist who contributed to the creation of the genre of western swing music. He was born on September 28, 1914, in Fannin County, TX, four years after his brother Bill Boyd, the noted bandleader. Both brothers found their interest in music encouraged by their mother, who, possibly due to Depression-era desperation, helped Jim Boyd find work on an early morning local radio show while still in his teens. Boyd recalled walking four miles to the station in the pre-dawn hours, earning \$2.75 per week.

Also in his teens, Boyd formed a band with three other musicians, and began playing informal dances. Called the Rhythm Aces, the band would seek engagements near Cedar Hill and other small towns around Dallas. One weekly Saturday night gig was an open-air dance, probably on a dance platform, where they brought a camping lantern to warm their hands during chilly winter performances.

In addition to the Rhythm Aces, Boyd was hired by a local band leader who had an eight-piece band that performed on Dallas radio station WRR. He continued to play guitar and sing with that group until 1932 when his brother Bill landed his own show and formed the first incarnation of his seminal group, the Cowboy Ramblers. Jim Boyd was a charter member of the group, who went on to record for RCA Victor in San Antonio in 1934. The younger Boyd claimed to have been involved in every recording made by the Cowboy Ramblers, and to have played bass on 90% of the recordings.

His success and skills prompted WRR to hire him as a staff musician, where he was called upon to play guitar, bass, banjo, mandolin, or whatever instrument might be needed. It was in this capacity that Boyd accompanied a young female singer, who although billed as Kathryn Starling at the time, would go on to national stardom as pop and jazz vocalist Kay Starr. In demand as a sideman, he also began playing with Roy Newman's band, on WRR and at live engagements.

In 1938, Boyd was approached by Parker Willson with the Light Crust Doughboys, who at the time were enjoying enormous popularity on the western swing band circuit, and had appeared in two Hollywood films. In need of a bass player who could solo and sing tenor, Willson invited Boyd to audition, probably at the urging of Smokey Montgomery, with whom Boyd was acquainted. Boyd auditioned, and was immediately hired.

The Light Crust Doughboys offered Boyd a steady salary of \$35 per week, not an insignificant amount during the Great Depression. Boyd was able to propose to his sweetheart, and they married shortly after he joined the band.

After two years with the Doughboys, Boyd received a call from recently-elected Texas Governor W. Lee "Pappy" O'Daniel. As General Manager of Burrus Mills, O'Daniel had hired the first incarnation of the Light Crust Doughboys, providing radio sponsorship. He went on to form his own flour company, Hillbilly Flour, and created a musical group to go along with it, the Hillbilly Boys. After losing his singer, O'Daniel offered Boyd a position with his band, who had helped his campaign greatly, and who continued to help him sell flour. Boyd agreed to meet the famous

and powerful politician at the Governor's mansion, but told O'Daniel that he was not interested in leaving the Doughboys. O'Daniel made him an offer he couldn't refuse, offering him two hundred and fifty dollars a month with lodging and utilities paid.

Boyd gave his notice to the Doughboys, and joined the Hillbilly Boys, helping O'Daniel get elected Governor again in 1940, and US senator in 1941. O'Daniel moved to Washington to assume his senate seat, but Boyd chose to remain in Texas, where he was still in great demand as a sideman. He again found work performing, broadcasting and recording with his brother's Cowboy Ramblers, and with side projects including the Crazy Water Gang.

Beginning in 1942, Boyd stepped into the role of bandleader, fronting a group he first called the Texas Mockingbirds before eventually settling on the name Jim Boyd and his Men of the West. With this group, Boyd secured a recording contract with RCA. He recorded numerous sides for RCA from 1949 to 1951, and by 1952 they had their own regular Saturday night radio program, broadcasting over WFAA. They also were featured on WFAA's television affiliate, playing music, and performing comedic skits. Boyd also worked as a disc jockey and advertising sales representative.

After being fired by WFAA, Boyd rejoined the Light Crust Doughboys in 1953, reuniting with Marvin Smokey Montgomery with whom he had been bandmates two decades earlier. Now featured on guitar, vocals, and bass, Boyd remained with the group until his death in 1993.