

# Benny Thomasson

Benny Thomasson was born in April 22, 1909 near Gatesville, Texas. His father Luke was a well known fiddler in the area, as was his grandfather. One of ten children in a very musical family, he first began playing the fiddle himself at the tender age of three, balancing the neck of the instrument on the bed, since it was too big and heavy for his toddler's hands to hold. He was influenced by renowned fiddlers such as Eck Robertson and Lefty Franklin, who were friends.

By the time Thomasson was twenty, he was a regular at the popular fiddling contests held throughout Texas and the South. He helped define the style of fiddling that would be known as "Texas Breakdown," experimenting with different instrument tunings, and song arrangements.



The popularity of old-time music enjoyed on the radio eventually enticed record companies, who sent their scouts all over the country in the 1920s and 30s to find regional talent. Thomasson and his brother Jim made a recording for the Okeh label in 1929, but unfortunately that recording has been lost. He and another brother, Lewis, had a radio show sponsored by Sears Roebuck and Co.

Thomasson had an extraordinary talent, and won the Texas State Fiddling Championship fifteen times, He also won the World Championship, held in Crockett, Texas, three consecutive times in 1955, 1956 and 1957. After the third worldwide win, he retired from competition.

After decades of playing live, Thomasson recorded his first released album in 1965. *Texas Hoedown* met with a small measure of success, but Thomasson and his wife relocated to Washington state in 1970. There he discovered, and was discovered by a group of young local players who were involved in a resurgence of interest in old-time music. That year, County records released his album *Country Fiddling From the Big State* which met with great success. He signed with Voyager Records and continued to record throughout the 1970s, releasing four records before his second musical retirement.

Thomasson was an influential and important artist, who is considered to be one of the founders of the Texas fiddling tradition. Although his most notable acolyte is Nashville fiddle whiz Mark O'Connor, he has taught and influenced countless others. Benny Thomasson died in 1983.