

# Bob Skyles

Guitarist and fiddler; b. Robert Kendrick, March 22, 1910, Eastland County, Texas; d. May 11, 1998, Palo Pinto County, Texas; Bob Kendrick grew up in Cisco, Texas, where he began performing music at an early age with his father, Brooke “Doc” Kendrick, at local dances. Bob first learned to play the mandolin and later fiddle, guitar, bazooka, saxophone, and clarinet. Doc Kendrick and his sons, Bob, Sanford, and Clifford, traveled around the state performing at medicine shows and on radio station KNEL in Brady, Texas. By 1932, the group also was performing three thirty-minute shows each day on Pecos radio station KIUN, as well as two to four concerts a week at nearby dance halls and night clubs.

Within a few years, Bob had left the band and began traveling elsewhere across the Southwest. At a 1936 recording session with Jack Moser in San Antonio, he met E.E. Oberstein of RCA Records. Oberstein suggested that Kendrick change his stage name to Bob Skyles and form a new band, Bob Skyles and the Skyrockets, which made its first recordings with RCA Records in 1937.

Between 1938 and 1939, Skyles and the Skyrockets recorded around seventy songs with the Bluebird Label at RCA. Oberstein envisioned the band as more of a novelty act and had it record many humorous tunes with bazookas, saws, whistles, ocarinas, cowbells, tubas, and accordions. However, when the group performed live, it included many popular big band swing and jazz songs in its repertoire. The Skyrockets’ first hit, “Arkansas Bazooka Swing,” was soon followed by others, such as “Sweet Georgia,” “Little Coquette,” and “Blue Bazooka Blues.”

Over the years, Skyles recruited a number of musicians who would become regionally, and even nationally, prominent, including Max Bennett, Moon Mullican, and Dave Hughs. In 1940, the Skyrockets switched to Decca Records and began recording more serious songs, most of which they made in Decca’s Houston and Bakersfield, California, studios. In 1942, the band split up due to United States entry into World War II, although Skyles remained in California with Ray Wade’s ten-piece band for a couple of years before relocating to San Angelo, Texas.

Shortly after returning to Texas, Skyles reportedly attended a fiddle contest, which inspired him to return to performing regularly. He soon began winning fiddle contests throughout the state. Later in his life, Skyles also supplemented his income by tuning pianos, a skill he learned by necessity while on the road in the late 1930s. Skyles spent the last years of his life battling health problems and died in a retirement home in Palo Pinto County, Texas, in 1998.