

# TJ McFarland

Drummer, producer, talent scout, and booking agent; b. Thomas James McFarland on November 15, 1946, Littlefield, Texas, to Thomas J. and Gwen Foster McFarland; d. September 1, 2005, Austin, Texas. Nicknamed “Tiny” and “The Gentle Giant,” because of his large size and friendly demeanor, McFarland was involved in a number of aspects of the Austin music scene for well over thirty years.

McFarland grew up in Lubbock, Texas, and, at an early age, began singing in the choir and learning to play the drums. He enjoyed listening to older blues musicians, especially Jimmy Reed, and therefore tried to mimic that style in his own playing. In the eighth grade, at around the age of 14, McFarland formed a band called The Twilights with friend and fellow musician, Joe Ely. The group practiced in McFarland’s living room and were only allowed to perform at local venues if Mrs. McFarland went along as a chaperone.

For a short time, McFarland moved to San Marcos to attend military school. However, he later returned to West Texas and graduated from Lubbock High School before going on to enroll at Texas Tech University. In the mid-1960s, McFarland quit Texas Tech and moved to Austin, where he joined a band named the Hub City Movers. In 1970, the Hub City Movers were the first group to play at the Armadillo World Headquarters, a club that soon became not only a Mecca for a diverse array of local and national musicians, but also the centerpiece of Austin’s burgeoning live music scene. By the mid-1970s, McFarland was performing with Jesse Ashlock and Kent Finlay in Finlay’s San Marcos-based band, High Cotton Express. McFarland also played drums with Alvin Crow and the Pleasant Valley Boys and later worked as Alvin Crow’s booking agent.

Before long, McFarland began branching out into other areas of the music business, including record production, booking, and working as a talent scout. He became a friend, mentor, manager, and band mate to such popular Austin musicians as Stevie Ray Vaughan, Alvin Crow, Ray Benson, Don Walser, Kimmie Rhodes, Jessie Taylor, Butch Hancock, Brent Wilson, and many others. McFarland also acted in several movies and commercials, including *The Life of David Gale*, *Where the Heart Is*, *Blind Fury*, and *Lay Down Sally*. McFarland eventually opened his own recording company, Austex Music.

In 1980, when the Armadillo World Headquarters closed its doors, Ray Benson, leader of the popular western swing band Asleep at the Wheel, invited McFarland up on stage to perform on the final song of the evening. This would make McFarland the first and last drummer to play at the legendary venue.

By the late 1990s, McFarland had contracted Hepatitis C from a tattoo he received years earlier in California. As complications from the disease worsened, McFarland would spend the final five years of his life waiting for a liver transplant donation that never arrived. He died on September 1, 2005, at Hospice Austin's Christopher House and is buried at Cook-Walden/Forest Oaks Memorial Park in Austin. McFarland is survived by his mother, Gwen Foster McFarland, his partner, Charlotte Herzele, his sister, CK McFarland, two stepsons, and many aunts, uncles, cousins, and life long friends.

*Erinn Park*