Keith Ferguson

Blues and rock bassist; b. July 23, 1946, in Houston, Texas; d. April 30, 1997, in Austin, Texas. Keith Ferguson was raised in the Sixth Ward in Houston and graduated from San Jacinto High School in 1964. The tremendous ethnic diversity of Houston provided a rich cultural environment for Ferguson's musical upbringing. As a youth, he was strongly influenced by local black and Hispanic musicians. In fact, he reportedly learned to play from one of the members of a leading Hispanic musical family, the Compians. By the age of twenty, Ferguson began performing in local venues, such as the Suburban Lounge, the Polka Dot, and Guys & Dolls. He also teamed up with guitarist Johnny Winter, who had recently moved from Beaumont to Houston.

In 1972, Ferguson relocated to Austin to play in guitarist Jimmie Vaughan's band, known as The Storm. Ferguson also worked with other local musicians, including Stevie Ray Vaughan and Doyle Bramhall. In reference to his early years as a struggling artist in Austin, Ferguson recalled, "We were so hard-core [blues], nobody knew what to do with us. But Antone's came along, sort of saved us. At least we could get some food. They served lots of poboy sandwiches."

In 1975, Ferguson, along with Jimmie Vaughan, Kim Wilson, and Mike Buck formed the blues-rock band, the Fabulous Thunderbirds. For a time, the group served as the unofficial house band for Antone's nightclub. It also performed in venues across Texas and recorded several albums for the Chrysalis label, although the record company dropped the band from its roster in 1982. By 1984, Ferguson had joined the Tail Gators, and he also played with other bands, including the Solid Senders and the Leroi Brothers. He was voted best bass player at the Austin Music Awards in 1985 and was inducted into the Texas Music Hall of Fame in 1997. Keith Ferguson died April 30, 1997, from liver failure, due in part to a nearly thirty-year addiction to heroin.

Shaun Stalzer