

WOMEN IN TEXAS MUSIC: STORIES & SONGS

By Kathleen Hudson



I can't even mention Ruthie Foster without fans speaking up with accolades about her voice, her performance and her songs. I have a long history of listening to Ruthie, which includes a Willie Nelson picnic at Luckenbach, the Kerrville Folk Festival many times, Schreiner University for the Literacy and Learning concert produced by the Texas Heritage Music Foundation, the Texas Music Coffeehouse on campus, The Texas Book Fair, and best of all...in my English classroom!! Yes, she has always been generous, and before a coffeehouse performance she visited my classroom, telling her story. Cyd Cassone was playing percussion with her at the time so we heard stories from both women. My interview with Ruthie for my second book, *Women in Texas Music: Stories and Songs*, was so long (like the Terri Hendrix interview), that I had to cut out lots of our conversation.



Here's what I remember. The women in the church in East Texas, tapping those shoes and wearing those big hats in church, her experience singing in the Navy, her roots in small town Texas, and her experience traveling the world. And her smile! When she smiles, and she usually does, Ruthie shines her inner light out on all around her. Yes, the voice embraces us, but the smile invites us to join in the beauty of the moment.

Ruthie's new album, "Promise of a Brand New Day," is her third Grammy nomination in a row, says her website. My experience with Ruthie is tied up in my love for the Kerrville Folk Festival as well. And my love for Rod Kennedy, the founder. How he loved Ruthie! Well, he loved many of the performers

on that stage, but seems to be some kind of special love showered on a few.

You can read the bio, the press, the reviews on her web. I can tell you what it was like to showcase her at a luncheon one June in Monterey, California. The Young Rhetorician's Conference in June is a gathering of teachers young in heart and spirit, "willing to dance." I was given the honor of choosing the luncheon speaker.

Once we had Thom Steinbeck as I had met him at a Willie Nelson concert. Ruthie was playing that Monterey stage where Jimi Hendrix burned his guitar, and I asked her to come early and talk to this group of writing teachers. We heard a few songs with stories of the writing. All were inspired. Now the Monterey Blues Festival is no more. A tragic loss to budgets I suppose. And over 100 California teachers have heard the stories of Ruthie Foster.

Yes, we know she plays to thousands at festival and moves hearts with her voice. But the intimacy of a classroom, a coffeehouse, a conference give her the chance to really share herself. And she does! I just attended two Bob Dylan concerts, one in Austin and one in San Antonio. Bob did not choose to share himself even though the set was dark and intimate. As were the songs this time. The difference? I think Ruthie has the courage to share herself. It takes that to reveal rather than conceal. And I am a huge Bob fan as many of you know. Takes all kinds for sure.

Ruthie will take the stage again on Sunday night, June 7, the final night of the Kerrville Folk Festival. Right before the Chubby Knuckle Band and finale. Her voice will ring through the hills, and her energy will awaken the spirit in all. The ghost of Rod Kennedy will be sitting in his usual spot, grinning. I can see that now. "Death comes knocking," "Got to put on my travelin'

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Ruthie Foster from page 7 . . .

shoes,” “Got a hole in my pocket” are some words that come easily to my lips these day. Her rendition of the Terri Hendrix song is always mentioned by Terri when Terri plays the song.

Terri and Lloyd will return for the third year as special guest of the Texas Heritage Music Day, Friday, September 25. Terri will be on campus all day, pay tribute to Jimmie Rodgers, and be featured at 7:30 p.m. in the Cailloux Student Center with Lloyd Maines. And I know we will hear her song with her shout out to Ruthie Foster. Seems I discovered them both in my life at the same time. Soul sisters in a way. Toyota of Boerne presents Terri and Lloyd so the concert is by donation only. Put that on your calendar! And head out to the Kerrville Folk Festival this year. Dalis Allen, the producer and great compadre of founder Rod Kennedy, brings a woman's wisdom and beauty to the event. See you there. Ils sont partis. KH

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So the next time you ask the question, “Are you a real cowboy?” to the guy in the hat and boots and spurs, do it with respect. You might want to check whether there's a horse anywhere nearby and whether he's got his spurs on the right feet – or not. “All hat and no cattle” cowboys are real, too, or as The Kingston Trio sang, “I can see by your outfit that you are a cowboy./You can see by my outfit I'm a cowboy too./You can see by our outfits that we are both cowboys./Get yourself an outfit, and be a cowboy too.” It's about respect. It's about heroes. Yes, ma'am.

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