



Her presence in a room and on stage carry a warm embrace. Susan Gibson is in the line of strong women who also share love in the songs they write and the performance. Seeing Terri Hendrix and Susan Gibson on tour together once was double the pleasure and warmth. October 6 was a night with Susan at the Blue Sage Hall in Kerrville, a venue that is home to the Troubador Nights series created and hosted by songwriter Randy Palmer. The business model is a set price for the entire series with extra tickets for sale at the door if available. Music at the Mansion at Schreiner University uses this same model. A good one, I think.

Stephen Morris opened the show with a love song in a minor key, my favorite. I could hear some Guy Clark influence, and he shared that influence with me after the show. That means I liked it! "Fool's Gold" was a song he "wrote for a woman who asked me to write a love song, then she threatened to beat me up."

Susan came on with "Perfect World," and then told the story of a royalty check that came in 1999, saying, "Thank you God and the Dixie Chicks." The song that launched another level in her career (after time with The Groobies) was "Wide Open Spaces," and her version tells the story. I use the words of that song in presentations I give on women in Texas music. Reading it as a poem works! Reading it as a message....we all need those wide open spaces, space to make big mistakes in.

But Susan is not a one-hit wonder, and the stories she tells each night in song cover the Texas landscape, the landscape of a mother's love, messy love affairs, and social issues (Breast Cancer Awareness month and a song). I was particularly moved by her stories of mom, as I talked with mine each morning for the year before she died in 2015.

Susan says of love, "I know I'm falling, I prefer to call it Cloud Nine....If I'm going to be in love, I want you in it." A favorite Susan love song of mine. She noticed trees tangled up with each other in her bit of heaven, Wimberly. "Room enough to grow, courage to get too close." She talked about the deep roots beneath the surface as the only way to survive.

She invited Jamie Harris up to sing a few songs, and we heard more stories by a woman who said, "Writing through the dark matters."

I met up with Susan years ago in a motel lobby at SXSW in Austin. She gave me time for an interview for my book, and we quickly dove into deep conversation, including our shared experience of the book "The Red Tent." My sister, Carolyn Pillow, was with me, and she also felt included and warm talking to Susan. Her presence does that.

Susan said, "We are preservers, recorders, communicators, storytellers. Being a woman makes you do all these things."

