

CURBSIDE

chronicle



THE MUSIC ISSUE

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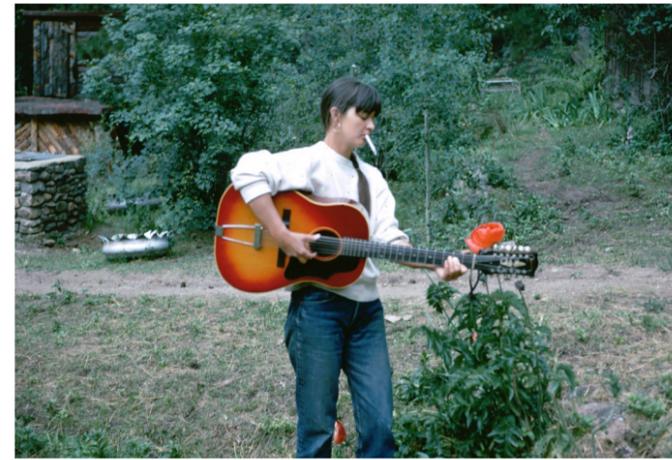
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FROM THE EDITOR



Karen Dalton was an Oklahoma-born musician who never celebrated much success during her lifetime, but her songs continue to find new fans more than 50 years later.

Photo by
Carl Baron

Music is a balm. Just about every day, I'm listening to something soothing while I work, while I drive or attempt the impossible task of doing nothing at all. You might be wondering what any of this has to do with homelessness. Well, you're holding a music-themed issue and our cover story focuses on songs that are important to *Curbside* vendors as well as a mixture of local and international touring musicians. Our intention is to drive home a simple reminder: We all have things in common. It doesn't matter if you're on stage or on food stamps — music connects us all.

I feel inclined to include a song that's made an impact on me. I suggest listening to "Something On Your Mind" by Karen Dalton. The song was recently remastered for its 50th anniversary thanks to the folks at Light In The Attic Records. It still slaps. Dalton was born in Enid, Okla. She was never famous in the classic sense of the word, but her bluesy, woozy vocals sounded as if they were carrying an unliftable weight. Bob Dylan described Karen as one of his favorite musicians — with a voice like Billie Holiday and the guitar chops of Jimmy Reed. Karen's life was no fairy tale. She experienced homelessness and struggled with addiction. Karen was also famously shy, but the passion she put into her recordings survived obscurity. If you root for underdogs, you'll find she's both one of the most overlooked artists who called Oklahoma home and a totally unique talent.

Finally, I want to welcome a new member to the *Curbside* crew. Miguel Rios is our first full-time staff writer. You might recognize his name from the pages of the *Oklahoma Gazette* or his healthcare-related work at Oklahoma Policy Institute. I'm excited for all y'all to read his stories in our magazine. He's off to a great start. His first piece is on Page 28. This will undoubtedly be another step forward for our small but mighty street paper. This wouldn't be happening without your support, OKC. Thank you for giving us a chance to grow and to find new ways to amplify voices in our community. — **Nathan Poppe**

The *Curbside Chronicle* is Oklahoma City's street paper. It was created to provide both a voice and employment for people experiencing homelessness. Our vendors buy magazines at 75 cents per issue and sell them for a suggested \$2. They keep the profit. Thanks for your support in **ending homelessness** in OKC.

MARCH 2022

- 4** **Matthew Viriyapah** shares his passion for being a courteous concertgoer
- 8** **"Quiet Kismet"** uses music to tell stories of hope and resilience
- 15** **Curbside vendors** share memories of playing music in their youth
- 16** **Sounds Good To Me** explores songs important to musicians and vendors
- 24** An excerpt from **"THE HAG"** detailing one of Merle Haggard's biggest hits
- 28** **Miguel Rios** visits El Sistema to learn more about the musical nonprofit
- 30** **Parting Shot** shows a page right out of Woody Guthrie's song notebook

Cover credits: Illustration by Marcus Eakers

Marcus was born and raised in Oklahoma. His vibrant art draws influence from surrealism, symbolism, animation, illustration and everything in between. Each work depicts an exaggerated experience from the viewpoint of a focal character. He believes *Curbside* provides a much-needed, positive service for the community. His design for this cover represents a music lover's journey across time, as the melody coming from his headphones carry him past the various forms of technology used to deliver music from both then and now.



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A PROGRAM OF THE HOMELESS ALLIANCE

How to be a better concertgoer

By Matthew Viriyapah

► Welcome to our column, **GOOD TO KNOW**. The idea is to explore topics — in a quick and easy way — that can be part of your everyday life. We hope it'll both entertain and educate a broad collection of readers who are mindful about everything from food and fun to politics and public transportation.

Concerts are coming back! Knock on wood. I'm Matthew Viriyapah, the host of KOSU's music podcast, Songwriters & Tour Riders, where I interview Oklahoma and touring musicians about songwriting and the stories that went into the music. It has been an unbearably long time for live music. I missed hearing live music so much that I got into the Grateful Dead.

But as more people get vaccinated, the more shows and tours have been scheduled this year. And while there is so much that I love about live music, I think there are a few things that we could all do to make the experience even better. So, as we dust off our dancing shoes and shriveled up social skills, we could probably all use a refresher on some concert tips and etiquette.

Know the type of show or concert you're going to

Cause that's going to dictate much of the socially acceptable behavior. Yes, a rock concert is going to be very different from a jazz club. Duh.

But I distinctly remember going to a punk rock show. And somebody clearly did not know what the early signs of a mosh pit looked like — "Hey! Suddenly there's a lot of breathing room around me." Thankfully, she washed up on shore before the punk tsunami overtook her.

On the other end of the spectrum, if somebody has a guitar singing their heart out about being in jail or a coal miner's daughter or in jail as a coal miner's daughter, maybe it isn't a good time to try and have a conversation about whether to eat at Waf-

file House or IHOP. Try and keep the chatter to a minimum while the music is playing. Either it's going to be too quiet for you to do it unnoticed or so loud that you're just reading lips.

You can talk about what to eat later outside or after the show.

And if you have no idea what you're going to get... if it's something like nu-jazz electro funk, then look around and just do as the Romans do.

We can dance if we want to

I'd like to advocate for dance. No specific kind. Just not enough people dance. If you felt like nobody wanted you to dance, I'd love for you to bust a move. Whether big or small, just move. I'm a small dancer. I nod my head, sway 15 degrees left, sway 15 degrees back. And in my book, that counts.

If there is one tip that I can give as a self-declared advocate of dance, it's don't dance with an open container. No laws against it, except Newton's first law of motion. Spilled beer just makes for spilled tears.

Keep your hands to yourself

Please, keep your hands to yourself. Everyone should be well practiced at social distancing so this should be easy. Keep your hands to yourself. *Keep your hands to yourself. KEEP YOUR HANDS TO YOURSELF.*

Concerts are not a place where you get a free pass to sexually harass people.

Besides being an unwanted violation of personal space, it is a surefire

way of getting yourself kicked out of a venue. You'll look like a jerk. And worse, you'll look like a jerk in front of a musician you like who might go and call you worse things than that.

Take care of yourself and others

It pays to practice some awareness especially when there are more people in one place than you might have seen in the last year. Look behind you, especially if you're tall. No one's purposefully looking at the back of your shirt, unless they're really interested in what tour dates Rush had in 1985.

Charge your phone. Maybe your mom wants to know how the concert is.

Drink water. It's easy to forget, but you have to do it, before you end up having to take your fluids through an IV. And stay safe. I've probably heard that more times in the last year than any other time in my life. The best concertgoers are the ones who watch the band and watch out for others.

Clap

Cheer! Woop! Whistle, snap, stomp or bark if you want.

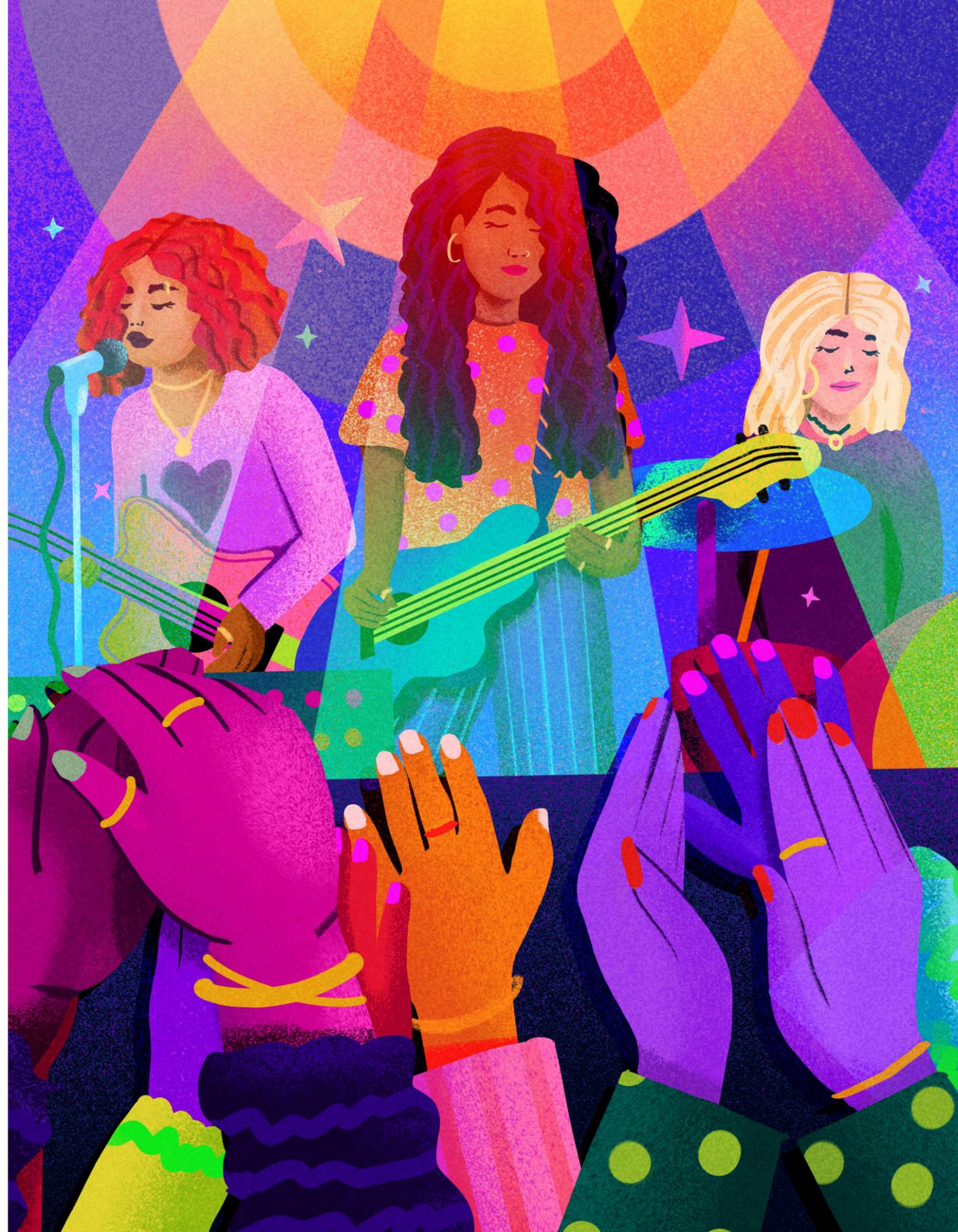
There are few places where everyone there has something in common. Where everybody is joined in mutual enjoyment of music. And when it's all over, it should be momentous.

From venue owners, bartenders, roadies and musicians, no one working is taking this for granted. You shouldn't either. It takes a lot of unseen work just to get those few band members on stage. So, celebrate it! Buy some merch. Tip the staff. Show your appreciation any way you can.

Finally, don't forget to check the venue's vaccination or negative COVID-19 test requirements. Nothing is worse than being stuck at the door without proof! **CC**

Editor's note: Matthew Viriyapah is KOSU's production assistant. He hosts the music podcast Songwriters & Tour Riders and helps produce StoryCorps Oklahoma. He joined the station as an intern in 2019 after graduating from OU with degrees in Economics and Professional Writing and a minor in Japanese.

ILLUSTRATION BY JAYNA HADWIGER



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Don listens to an original song inspired by his life story. He was one of six participants who experienced homelessness and shared their struggles for a music project led by UCO School of Music.



A STORIED SOUND

UCO School of Music's "Quiet Kismet" is a collection of new songs based on the lives of people who've experienced homelessness in Oklahoma. The album's creators and storytellers share how this unique project was brought to life and how it'll be celebrated.

What's the worst that could happen? And where do you go from there? A new project led by faculty and students at the UCO School of Music answers these and other hard questions in song. "Quiet Kismet" is an album of original music written about six Oklahomans, and while it's not about homelessness, that experience is the subjects' common thread. The name "Quiet Kismet" challenges the idea of accepting one's fate, and as such, the record deals in universal human themes — regret, hope, happiness, trauma and resilience.

The challenge of crafting these songs within the framework of homelessness was overcoming the perception of it as a person's defining characteristic, rather than what it is — something that could happen to anyone. "Quiet Kismet's" concept is sound, literally and figuratively: Music can foster shared experiences, so why not use it to illuminate individuals whose stories often go untold?

UCO School of Music multimedia recording and production engineer Bryan Mitchell, who joined as UCO faculty in 2009, approached professor of cello Dr. Tess Remy-Schumacher with the idea. Mitchell's volunteer work includes time at shelters, and Remy-Schumacher's CV includes 13 records that use music as a tool for student-centered outreach. She applied for a grant from UCO's Office of Research and Sponsored Programs in early 2021, which would ensure compensation for songwriting, album production and student assistants and musicians.

After receipt, Mitchell interviewed, with help from the Homeless Alliance and Pivot, people who illustrate a spectrum of variables that lead to homelessness. He then wrote their stories as songs, recording them with UCO students who listened to the interviews in order to understand the depth of each story. Various UCO faculty who played instruments on the recordings, including Remy-Schumacher, donated their time. ➡

Story by
Becky Carman

Opening photo by
Nathan Poppe

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"I was humbled to realize that many taking refuge in shelters are in the position they're in as the result of circumstances outside of their control," Mitschell said. "Or they had made some mistakes, but they were the type of small missteps any average person has made ... and had the family support or resources to gracefully recover from. We were playing the same game the same way, but I had the privilege of a more forgiving set of rules."

That lesson in empathy is a timeless one. Many of the subjects interviewed are currently experiencing homelessness or just on the other side of it, but Diane, the teenage narrator in "Full Speed Ahead" who flees to El Paso to get away from her mother's abusive partner, is now 87 years old, with decades between her life now and not having a place to stay.

"It's a turkey shoot, really, how we end up in situations we would never have dreamed. You fall into it, and then it's hard to get out," Diane said. "Sometimes you feel like you're so beaten down that nothing is ever going to change."

HER SUNNY DAY

No two stories are exactly the same. However, Blanca — an Oklahoma City woman also interviewed for "Quiet Kismet" — remembers feeling like change was impossible as well. "Somebody would say that the day was very pretty, and I would go outside, and I would see nothing pretty at all. Nothing. My life was gray," she said.

Blanca and her four children are now on the other side of homelessness that occurred after an abusive relationship. Her family spent time living in her car and in shelters until a Homeless Alliance caseworker helped her secure housing last year. She recently got her GED and is studying to become a social worker.

The song Mitschell wrote about her is called "Sunlight," sung from the perspective of an effusive bird experiencing flight after being caged for years: "One sunny day, my problems weren't so large / I could squeeze between the bars."

After hearing it for the first time, Blanca said it felt, in fact, "like sunlight. A field full of sunflowers, me running free." It lived up to her only expectation for the song — that it would be about hope.

BIGGER THAN ME

"It could have been about anything. It could have been about a lot of things,"



ABOVE From left, Katelyn McKinney, Maddy Young, Bryan Mitschell, Jaylon Crump and Tess Remy-Schumacher. They're responsible for the "Quiet Kismet" music project. Photo provided

BELOW Jaylon Crump tracks lead vocals on "Worst That Could Happen." This session took place at White Rose Recording Studio in Guthrie. Photo by Bryan Mitschell

said Don, about his track on "Quiet Kismet." It's called "Worst That Could Happen."

Mitschell wrote about Don's gobsmacking streak of bad luck that brought him from a "normal" life with a home, family and steady job through a bout with pancreatic cancer, pandemic difficulties, unemployment, divorce and ultimately a stretch of homelessness while in a medical crisis.

A lifelong athlete, being waylaid by a cancer diagnosis hit him especially hard: "I played basketball ... professionally (overseas) for several years. I never had a health problem until I had one, and it was a doozy."

After surgery, chemotherapy and assistance from outreach organizations, Don has a new home and is in good health and spirits. He's even in the planning stages of a new business with one of his sons. His song takes listeners through one blow after another but also underscores his ability to reach for the silver lining. "When the walls came down around me," the song goes, "that's the bluest sky I'd ever seen."

"I had a car, whatever I owned outright, a few clothes. So even though I was in that situation, I could still see it could be worse. At least I didn't have to walk, you know?" Don said. "There are still people out here with bigger problems than me."

Don admits he had doubts about discussing his struggles for the project. "In a way, it's an honor — they did a terrific



"I'm telling my most personal feelings, which is not that easy for me."

— Don

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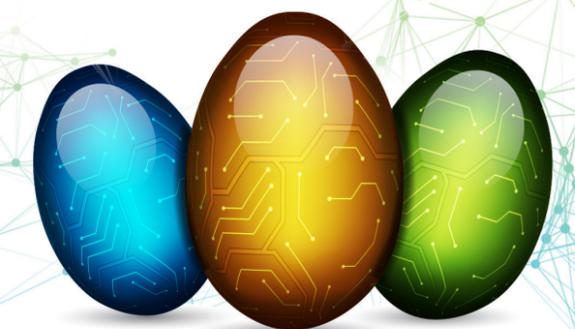


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Blanca listens to an original song inspired by her life story. She recently earned her GED and has her sights set on pursuing a college degree. Photo by Nathan Poppe



IN CONCERT

"Quiet Kismet" Release Shows

March 30
7:30 p.m.

UCO Jazz Lab
100 E 5th St.
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March 31
7 p.m.

ACM Live
25 S Oklahoma Ave.
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Admission is free for both concerts but donations are encouraged.

job, and I'm glad I did it – but in another way, I'm telling my most personal feelings, which is not that easy for me."

Like everyone who participated in the making of "Quiet Kismet," Don wants the stories to serve a purpose larger than himself.

"It was for me to get it off my (chest) and at the same time, it'd be nice if somebody else hears this and thinks, 'Oh, I'm not done. It's not over,'" Don said.

GIVING BACK

There is no typical path to homelessness nor out of it. Blanca, Don, Diane and the other storytellers on the album came to it in different ways. Some are still working on finding stability, and for others, that season of life is behind them, but the experience is life-altering, no matter how temporary.

"I'm not in any way in a hard place now, but you don't forget," Diane said. "If you don't have a little help from somebody, it's difficult to impossible to change things. I think it's fantastic not for me to be known, but for these situations to be known. There are a lot of people struggling."

Blanca's hope for her own future is the

same hope she holds for others who might hear her story.

"Anything I can do to give a little bit back of all I've received is a huge satisfaction," she said. "Maybe there's someone out there that feels a very heavy burden, and it's like, 'Hey, if I made it, that means you're going to make it.'"

"Quiet Kismet" debuts live in concert at 7:30 p.m. March 30 at the UCO Jazz Lab and 7 p.m. March 31 at ACM Live. CDs will be available, and wider release and streaming plans are in the works. It's only fitting that the songs will meet the public face to face and that these stories will find listeners not quietly, but very much out loud.

"In my opinion, one of the keys to dismantling homelessness is to establish a line of communication ... to create a two-way emotional connection and greater understanding of each other," Mitschell said. "We believe that turning up the volume on these untold stories and making them accessible and approachable ... through popular music could help move the needle." **CC**

Editor's note: Becky Carman is a longtime music writer, among other things, based out of Tulsa. She loves food and her dog, who is named after food. On most days, you can find Becky indoors.

"Anything I can do to give a little bit back of all I've received is a huge satisfaction."

— Blanca



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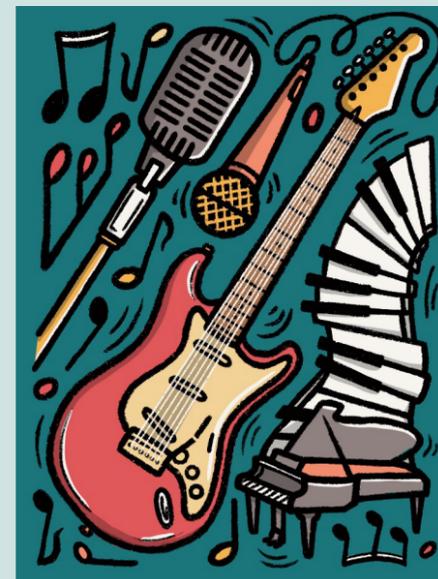
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When We Were Young

Did you take music lessons when you were a youngster? How about joining your school band or choir? Surely, you at least heard people practicing music in the hallways. These things are practically rites of passage for any creative kid who grew up in the U.S. We asked three *Curbside* vendors to reflect on the impact of singing and playing music in their youth.

Compiled by
Nathan Poppe

Illustrations by
Sydni Nasada



JAMES

I TOOK MUSIC classes throughout elementary school, middle school and high school. I joined the school choir for a couple of years. I would've been about 15 when I started that. I just like singing. I still sing along with music, but not like I used to. Back then, a lot of our performances were gospel songs. Every now and again, we'd go on choir meets with other schools and visit nursing homes. I even sang at a children's hospital. It was cool to get out into the community and give people a way to get their minds off of what was going on for a little bit.



MARK

WHEN I WAS about 10 years old, my family drove to Colorado to visit my cousins. It was summertime, and I remember the radio playing "The Star-Spangled Banner" by Jimi Hendrix. I heard it, and I couldn't believe it. It was revolutionary. I hadn't heard anything like it. My cousin Randy had a red electric guitar, and he gave it to me. I wish I still had that! Hendrix was almost like a mentor to me. I'd listen to his records and play them. Music comes from the heart. That's why I liked Hendrix so much. Music is straight up magic. I know it can really change the world.



DOUG

I CAME FROM a good family. I got good grades in school. My parents didn't argue or fight. We weren't poor. I started weekly piano lessons around age 8. Mrs. Pope was my piano teacher for about three years. I wanted to play rock and roll music. We had a little bit of a falling out. Oh man, I'll never forget her. She used to whack your hand with a ruler if you missed a note. She was a great piano player and wanted me to play more classical tunes. I was hoping to play Black Sabbath, Led Zeppelin and stuff that really wasn't made for the piano. So, I went and bought sheet music books because I knew how to read music. When I was supposed to be practicing her music lessons, I was learning Led Zeppelin. I liked playing piano because I could just be in my own world — nothing else going on mattered.

CC

**CURBSIDE VENDORS + MUSICIANS
REFLECT ON SONGS THEY LOVE**



SOUNDS GOOD TO ME

COMPILED BY
NATHAN POPPE

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
STEVEN SILVA

What is a song that's important to you? That's the question that sparked the 21 responses you'll read throughout this story dedicated to music that's cherished by performing artists as well as *Curbside* vendors who are transitioning out of homelessness. Pretty wild how that one question could have more than 50 million different answers. From a genre-bending creative force — and honorary Okie — like Barteets Strange to a Beatles-loving *Curbside* vendor selling magazines at an intersection, I find it borderline magical that music can connect anyone. You just have to ask. Hopefully, these tracks resonate with you and serve as a reminder that we have a lot more in common with one another than we'll ever know. Heads up, vendor names will be in **green** and musicians will be in **pink**. — *Nathan Poppe*



BARTEETS STRANGE LOVES
ONE ARMED SCISSOR
BY AT THE DRIVE-IN

One song that's huge to me — and probably will always be — is “One Armed Scissor.” It's amazing. They rocked so hard. The band performed on David Letterman, and I realized for the first time that these musicians looked like me. I had to be 13 or 14 at the time. It was cool to see people of color shredding and playing music their own way. It was a cool thing to see, and it was my introduction to the band. They were from El Paso, Texas. I was living in Oklahoma at the time. I was like, “Oh wow, they're not even that far from me.” I'd call it an informative musical experience. I was like a lot of teenagers — looking to find my identity and trying to figure out what people like me are doing. In a way, I was looking for a hero and it showed up on TV. At that point, I was playing trumpet at school. I sucked. I pretty much flunked out of the band. So, when I saw Omar Rodríguez-López play that opening riff on TV, it woke me up. Maybe I could play guitar? — **Barteets**



Photo by Nathan Poppe

LISA LOVES
HEY JUDE BY THE BEATLES

I like the lyrics about not carrying the world upon your shoulders. That one particular line is inspiring. Recently, life has been hard on me. I lost my brother in January, and I dedicate this song to him. We used to listen to music together growing up. He was a musician and was in bands off and on throughout his life. He suffered a lot of loss himself be-

LEFT - Barteets Strange — born Barteets Cox Jr. in Britain — spent much of his early life on the move before settling down in Mustang, Okla. He's joining Car Seat Headrest on the road and will return to Oklahoma for a concert at Tower Theatre on May 7. Photo by Bao Ngo

BELOW - S. Reidy is a Norman-based rapper whose 2022 release “An Album, With Songs” will be followed with a performance at Norman Music Festival in April. Photo by Kelley Queen



S. REIDY LOVES
ONE MISSISSIPPI BY WHY?

For several years, this track has been a mantra for me. I've always loved it. When I saw WHY? live at the Opolis in 2019, I almost cried hearing this song's hook. You can go your whole life with people telling you to let go of the things you can't control, but it takes a special band like WHY? to put it into a song that you can really feel in your heart. As a Christian who struggles with his faith as much as anyone in this age, to hear the lyric, “Whatever it is in control,” really puts in perspective the “give it up to God” mantra. The most healthy thing I've taught myself to do is submit to it and live by its terms because you have to play by the rules to be free sometimes. — **S. Reidy**

tween medical and financial hardships. I must've been about 14 or 15 when I first heard “Hey Jude.” The song makes me think about both good and bad memories. It's bittersweet. It also reminds me there's a lot of hope to live for and space to grow. We can live and learn. I feel like Paul McCartney is saying to be strong and carry on. — **Lisa**

Be on the lookout for **Lisa** who sells magazines around N Penn Avenue and W Memorial Road.

RIGHT - Bassist Tommy McKenzie performing live with the Flaming Lips. Photo by Blake Studdard

BELOW - Jose Gonzalez is a Swedish singer-songwriter. He's touring in support of his third studio album "Local Valley" and will perform at OKC's Tower Theatre on March 25. Photo by Hannele Fernström



JOSE GONZALEZ LOVES

AIN'T GOT NO, I GOT LIFE
BY NINA SIMONE

This is a medley of two songs from the musical "Hair." I remember hearing it for the first time when my bandmate showed me a live recording on YouTube. Nina Simone is always great — her piano playing and her voice especially. This live version is so groovy. It's sonically amazing, and I feel like the sentiment is great. She talks about what she doesn't have in life before switching to things she does have. Nina sings "Ain't got no god." I think it has resonated with me in terms of thinking about god. I'm a secular humanist. I don't have a god. Nina ends the song with, "Got life, I got my life." I like that it has this uplifting tone even though it doesn't start on that note. The way she's able to take songs and make them personal is an inspiration to me. She's one of my top five favorite artists. I listen to a lot of music through playlists. I use playlists to get into different moods or for running. This track is on a list of songs to get me motivated. It's one of the first songs I listen to when I start my day. It gets me moving and with a smile. — **Jose**



JASON LOVES

WHEREVER I MAY ROAM
BY METALLICA

When I was experiencing homelessness, I walked around at night to find a safe place to sleep. I'd focus on the lyrics, "Where I lay my head is home." Any time I worried about where I'd go, I would start thinking about the song before I went to sleep. I want people to know that I like a lot of types of music outside of

TOMMY MCKENZIE LOVES

VENUS BY AIR

The older I get, the more I realize how my taste in music aligns with calming my anxiety. Tracks like "Venus" work almost like a breathing exercise. This is one of the first songs that gave me that relief, and that sense of relief has evolved a lot over my life. A friend of mine introduced "Venus" to me at a summer camp. The long drive back home after an intense week of working at the camp was soothing. The nature of "Venus" evolved further when my now fiancée and I saw Air perform in Chicago. When I heard them play "Venus," all of my feelings on that song and memories all orientated around her at that moment. The song had always been there for me as an individual. Now, its comforts are shared with my soon-to-be wife. — **Tommy**

heavy metal. I listen to country music, rap and Christian songs, too. I listen to music while I work, and I'm always looking out for new songs. "Wherever I May Roam" is just one song that has helped me through my life. I still listen to it today and enjoy it. I feel music in my mind, body and soul. I'm a music guy. — **Jason**

Be on the lookout for **Jason** who is currently working at Curbside Flowers.

Stepmom is a four-piece indie rock act based in Oklahoma City. You can catch the band performing for free April 30 at Norman Music Festival. From left, Stepmom is Amie, Danielle, Lindsey and Cheyenne. Photo by Madelyn Amacher



STEPMOM LOVES...

Growing up, my parents made sure we got a nutritious variety of music during rides in the car. One song that always makes me reminisce is the synthesizer-laden futuristic tune "**I.G.Y.**" by **Donald Fagen**. It's on his first solo album, "The Nightfly." It sounds totally revolutionary yet strangely familiar at the same time. The title stands for "International Geophysical Year," a period between 1957-1958 where many of the world's scientists came together and hoped to create great things. It's such an optimistic song describing trains under the ocean, solar-powered towns and everyone receiving a spandex jacket. It's sort of poking fun at the wide-eyed hopefulness, but I think it's beautiful. Those ideas seem more possible now than ever! The song brings me perspective when I get caught up in the doom and gloom of life. — **Amie Reardon**

"**Blood**" by **ANIMA** is best listened to with headphones — like most songs — as the melodies swirl around your head, much like thoughts and lyrics do in the creative process. It's an extremely vulnerable experience being an artist and putting everything out there — hoping that what you are saying gets across — but also choosing to not let that hinder your creative flow. It takes dedication and showing up even when you feel like you have nothing to give. I think this song captures that perfectly. — **Danielle Szabo**

I remember hearing "**Baba O'Riley**" by **The Who** at age 10 and feeling an overwhelming sense of awe. Later on, The Who introduced me to the idea that music has the potential to be expressed through many different realms — like the rock opera "Tommy" — and that songs can live within a world the artist has created. This idea played a huge role in my art and music to this day. When I listen to "Baba O'Riley" today, it takes me back to sunny Sunday car rides to the comic book store with my dad. — **Lindsey Cox**

On "**Crane Your Neck**" by **Lady Lamb**, Aly Spaltro's voice sounds like your high school crush — the girl on the softball team who offered you a cigarette once and you shared it with her so she'd think you were cool. "Crane Your Neck" is cathartic every time I listen to it. It's gotten me through college, a move from Fayetteville to OKC, some deaths and even some breakups. This song resonates with me more as I get older. It's so easy to miss simple, tender times in my life — especially in the realities of navigating three jobs in a pandemic. But what her music reminds me of is that the tender moments that I hold with me in my memories can be what keep me driving forward. — **Cheyenne Rain**

WHAT SONGS DO CURBSIDE VENDORS LOVE?

We Are The Champions
by Queen

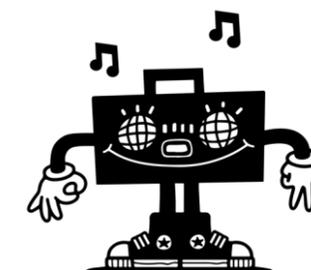
"We Are The Champions." takes me back to being a teenager and playing baseball. My team was playing in a tournament, and we'd just won the semifinals. Our coach took us to a pizzeria and bought pizza for the whole team. We played the song on a jukebox even though we weren't even champions yet. Everybody sang together. We were having a blast. The next week, we won the baseball tournament. — **Jim**

Stairway to Heaven
by Led Zeppelin

My favorite song in the whole world is "Stairway to Heaven." I'm not proud of myself, but I first heard it while I was in a California prison. There was an outlet in my cell wall that I could plug headphones into. Hearing it made me sad, but I fell in love with it. Every time I hear it, I feel like I might cry. It reminds me of a time that I wanted to make a positive change in my life. I hope to make my own stairway to heaven some day. — **David**

Beast of Burden
by The Rolling Stones

The track says to me that no matter what you're going through in life, it's best to pick up your head and walk straight through it. That's how you get to the other side. — **Chuck**



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- 03/09 - ELDERBROOK W/ AYOKAY
- 03/12 - THE HAPPY FITS
W/ SARAH & THE SUNDAYS, & AUDIO BOOK CLUB
- 03/19 - HUSBANDS
- 03/21 - LEIF VOLLEBEKK W/ DOSH
- 03/23 - DAVE MASON
- 03/24 - TODRICK HALL
- 03/25 - JOSÉ GONZÁLEZ W/ JESS WILLIAMSON
- 03/26 - CARLY PEARCE
- 04/02 - MY SO CALLED BAND
- 04/09 - WEIRDLESQUE
- 04/13 - MAXO KREAM
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- 03/21 - MONDO MONDAY
ANIME, FILM, COMEDY OPEN MIC
- 03/25 - HARPY HOUR 5:30-7:30PM
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Singer-songwriter Kaitlin Butts, left, and Flatland Cavalry frontman Cleto Cordero pose with a longhorn at their wedding. The musical couple got married in 2020. Both artists are constantly touring and often share the stage together. Photo by Cameron Gott

KAITLIN BUTTS LOVES TOMORROW WILL BE KINDER BY SECRET SISTERS

I travel alone most of the time, and it can get really mundane and lonesome. I'll feel like I'm fighting the fight all by myself. Sometimes, I'll lay in bed at the end of a long, busy day and wonder how I made it through. Some days are much tougher than others, and the idea that I might have to go to sleep, wake up and do it all over again is overwhelming and tiresome. If there's ever a night that I feel like this, I turn on this song and purge a few tears in hopes that tomorrow, in fact, will be kinder. The melody and feel of this song reminds me of when my mom used to sing to me as a young girl. Its simplicity comforts me and helps me drift off to sleep — feeling safe and at peace once again. — **Kaitlin**

CLETO CORDERO LOVES CARBON RIBS BY JOHN MARK MCMILLAN

I struggle to keep a dry eye each time that I listen to "Carbon Ribs" by John Mark McMillan. In his "Live at The Knight" live album performance, John Mark sets up the song with the biblical story of Mephibosheth — the crippled grandson of former King Saul — who is invited by King David to eat at his table for the remainder of his days for no reason other than wanting to show kindness to him. The song brings to mind the brokenness or incompleteness that I feel from time to time that I can't quite put my thumb on and how love, grace and forgiveness fill in the cracks and redeem me. — **Cleto**



Photo by Nathan Poppe

BORIS + CHEYENNE LOVE UNSTEADY BY X AMBASSADORS

We get emotional listening to this song. We're dealing with homelessness and relate to a lot of the lyrics. The band did an awesome job touching on family, struggles and love. Everybody is going through something whether it's family or relationships. We're fighting for housing and to keep our family together. We've chosen to stick together and work to

solve this together. We've gotta hold on no matter what. This song helped us realize there's still time to restore our love. We'll play this song for each other on a phone if either of us gets upset. It reminds us of the value of partnership. — **Boris and Cheyenne**

Be on the lookout for **Boris and Cheyenne** who sell magazines around the Farmers Public Market near downtown OKC.



ABOVE - The band Husbands is Wil Norton, left, and Danny Davis. The duo shares much of the songwriting duties on their third full-length album, "Full-On Monet," which was written during the onset of the pandemic. The band is scheduled to celebrate the record's release with a concert March 19 at Tower Theatre. Photo by Chris Moranchel

LEFT - Mothica — fronted by Oklahoma native McKenzie Ellis — has found viral success via TikTok. She also makes stunning music videos and deeply personal songs. McKenzie has relocated to Los Angeles but will return to Oklahoma in April for a performance at Norman Music Festival. Photo by Skylar

BOTTOM LEFT - Guitarist Coy Bowles, far right, plays live with the Zac Brown Band. The Grammy Award-winning country act will perform in Oklahoma City on May 20 at the Paycom Center. Photo provided

BOTTOM RIGHT - Be on the lookout for Gary who sells magazines around N Santa Fe Avenue and NW 23rd Street. Photo by Nathan Poppe



HUSBANDS LOVES...

"Wakin On A Pretty Day" by Kurt Vile is one of two reasons I think it would be sweet to name my first child Kurt. The gentle vocals, warm acoustic strumming and the phased out five-minute-long guitar solos vibe so hard and effectively that you can turn it on whenever you're feeling overwhelmed and basically experience it as a guided meditation to calm your nerves and reflect on any one of the many profound and simple truths it has to offer: Don't lose sight of what makes you happy, know and be true to yourself, appreciate the beauty of your surroundings, don't allow external distractions to misdirect your own sense of well-being. None of these ideas are new or groundbreaking by any means, but sometimes successful communication is all in the delivery. Kurt tends to ramble and it's not always clear what he's saying — to himself even — but his voice is so sweet and sincere you can know without a doubt he's feeling and sharing something pure. It's hard not to feel it, too. — **Danny Davis**

I could've picked four or five tracks from this classic, but the title track of **"Graceland" by Paul Simon** is the one that — when I'm in a certain mindset — can wreck me in the best way possible. Genre-wise, it's a spiritual, but mediated through a band from Soweto, South Africa. So, it's got this unbelievable yearning just from a sonic perspective. When you add Paul Simon's lyrics about striving to make it to Graceland — is it heaven or is it the birthplace of Elvis? — it's this amazing contrast which makes me, a guy who has struggled with faith and transcendence for forever, feel these incredible emotions. It's such a masterful contrast of the high and the low, the sacred and the profane. — **Wil Norton**

MOTHICA LOVES EVERYBODY BUT ME BY LYKKE LI

Hearing Lykke Li was the first time I felt like maybe I could sing or pursue music. She's not a traditional pop singer. Her voice has a rasp and an unique tone. "Everybody But Me" has these personal lyrics about being at a party where almost everyone's having fun, but one person feels left out. It's the first time I remember the idea of depression being captured in a song. I'd say her writing really led me to start trying to write my own songs in high school. I felt like I could think about music differently. It didn't have to be this huge production. It got me excited to try to experiment, write and produce my own stuff back then. I was feeling out of place. I was going to Harding Fine Arts Academy. It was a weird time. I was drinking and partying at such a young age. I just wanted to be an adult. I was put on antidepressants. At 15, I attempted suicide. I lost a lot of friends after that. I spent months keeping to myself and learning to play guitar. Music became an emotional outlet. My intention wasn't so much to perform. The songs were like a diary. I just saw myself in "Everybody But Me," and its relatability. That's honestly how I start to write my music today, so other people can see themselves in it, too. — **Mothica**

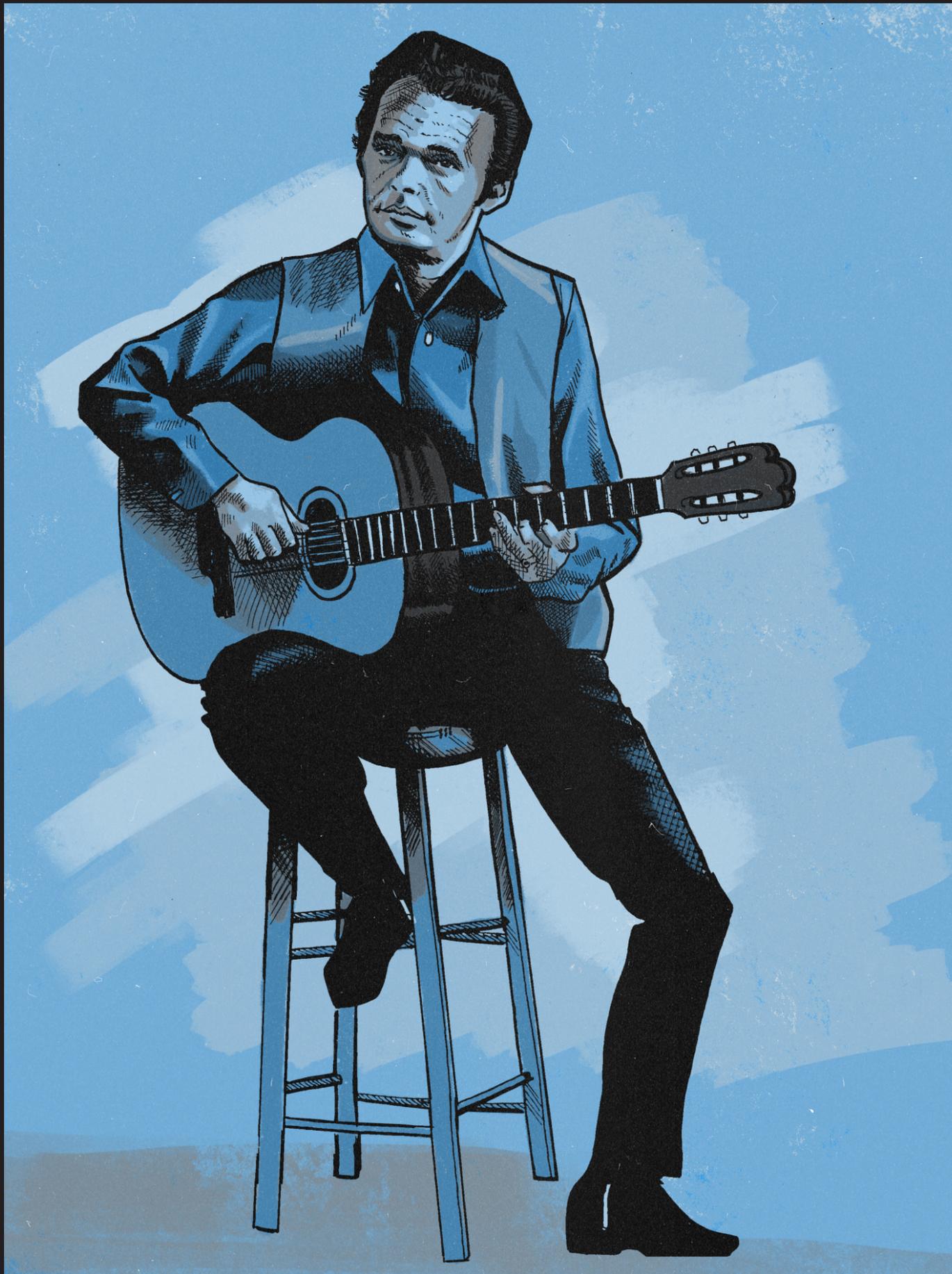
COY BOWLES LOVES THE HOUSE THAT BUILT ME BY MIRANDA LAMBERT

As a small-town boy — born and raised — I often reminisce about my younger years when life was simpler in Thomaston, Georgia. My life has changed so much thanks to traveling with Zac Brown Band for 15 years. I've seen all 50 states and visited other countries. Those things don't normally happen to a small-town boy. When things get quiet, I often think of what it would be like to visit the small, two-bedroom house that I grew up in. My aunt painted a Snoopy mural on my wall. I wonder if it's still there. "The House That Built Me" has a special power in it that music can possess: The power to transport you back to a time and place where you can see, feel, hear and smell the way things were back then. When I go home to visit, which is fairly often, I drive by my old house and remind myself how far my parents and I have come from a lot of hard work and love. I'm grateful to have the life I do. Every time I drive by, I think, "This is the time that I'm going to stop and knock on the door." I never do, but "The House That Built Me" connects all the dots for me in that journey. — **Coy**

GARY LOVES SWING LOW, SWEET CHARIOT (TRADITIONAL)

About every time I left church, someone told me that I was a good singer. I was even part of a quartet, and we got on TV one day. These were my close friends. We got connected thanks to my music teacher. We'd also sing before square dances in Enid. I always loved singing gospel songs. "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" is one I can still sing today. I've known that song for more than 50 years. That was my singing group's best song. Sometimes, I'll sing it while I sell *Curbside*. — **Gary**





IT STARTED OUT WITH A JOKE.

MERLE HAGGARD — ALTHOUGH NOT BORN IN OKLAHOMA — PENNED AN OKIE ANTHEM THAT WAS A SERIOUS HIT ACROSS THE U.S. THE TRACK ARRIVED DURING A DIVISIVE TIME AS THE VIETNAM WAR CONTINUED TO SPARK DEBATE LEFT AND RIGHT. ON ITS SURFACE, “OKIE FROM MUSKOGEE” COULD BE READ AS A CONSERVATIVE ANTHEM. BUT OVER THE YEARS, THE SONG’S MEANING HAS BEEN OBSERVED IN A DIFFERENT LIGHT. MERLE EVEN CONSIDERED HIMSELF A HIPPIE LATER IN HIS CAREER. THIS EXCERPT FROM A NEW BIOGRAPHY AIMS TO DOCUMENT THE ORIGIN OF “OKIE FROM MUSKOGEE” AND HOW THE SONG SAT WITH LISTENERS THROUGHOUT THE YEARS — FROM BOB DYLAN TO THE HAG HIMSELF. BY MARC ELIOT

In 1969, Merle continued on as the biggest-selling country star in America, playing to standing-room-only crowds wherever he appeared. He was sitting pretty on his throne, until the floor beneath it gave under the weight of the same self-destructive streak that continued to shadow Merle like a recurring nightmare. In the spring of '69, Merle's tour bus was driving through Oklahoma. On Interstate 40, he saw a sign that said “19 Miles to Muskogee.”

The band was, by now, feeling no pain, as almost everyone on the bus except Merle was into smoking pot, and as a joke someone said, “I bet they don't smoke marijuana in Muskogee.” Everyone broke out laughing, including Merle. As he remembered, “We started making up some more lines, and in about twenty minutes we had a song.”

According to Frank Mull, “Merle asked Eddie Burris if he had anything to add, and Burris gave him that line about beads and Roman sandals, which Merle thought was the best one in the song. He loved the detail, the description. He loved that kind of songwriting. Because of it, [Merle] gave him half of his publishing of it. He probably made a half-million dollars for those couple of words. Merle was extremely generous that way, but not much of a businessman.”

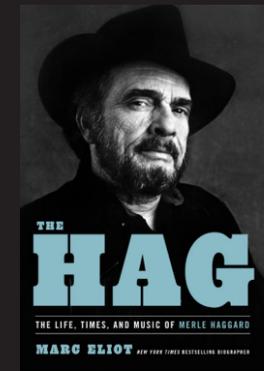
After it was finished, Merle went straight to Bonnie's place on the bus, sat on her bed next to her, and worked out the harmony parts. By the time he went to sleep, it was finished. For her help, Merle gave her half of his portion of the publishing. The next night, he tried the song out at the noncommissioned officers' club concert at Seymour Johnson Air Force Base in Goldsboro, North Carolina. Merle recalled, “At the end of the song, some ser-

geant came walking up to the stage and just completely stopped the show and asked if I'd sing it again. I said okay. So we did it again. And again.” Merle was surprised by the immediate and intense reaction the song received, even if, he insisted, he didn't fully realize all the implications of its lyrics.

On the last night of the tour, Merle and the Strangers were scheduled to play the Civic Center in Muskogee, and there they put on a tumultuous concert; once again, the audience cheered and stomped the loudest for “Okie.” Fuzzy recorded the show live on an 8-track machine, as he did every show, on equipment he lugged with him all the way from Bakersfield. “Fuzzy was a poor man's genius with electronics,” said Frank Mull. “I kidded him about it, but he was real good. He always had on the bus his high-end recording equipment, to make quality recordings at anytime and anywhere. He turned the bus into a traveling recording studio.” Fuzzy later got in trouble when Capitol wanted to release it as an album, because he didn't have a union engineer on-site while he was recording Merle's shows. Nelson had to pay his studio engineer, Hugh Davies, even though he wasn't on the tour and had nothing to do with the making of the album. It was released in September 1969 and immediately went to No. 1 and went platinum (it sold over one million copies).

It was the raucous live receptions “Okie” received whenever he sang it that convinced Merle the song was something special. “Okie” was not just another patriotic reverie that reinforced the notion of “living right and being free”; it eviscerated those who wore sandals and beads, had long hair and no respect for the college dean, lyrics that perfectly summed up the so-called silent majority's attitude toward all the student demonstrations. Merle felt they did a lot of shouting and screaming, but had no answers to what they were protesting about.

Oddly, “Okie” was the song that finally made the mainstream sit up and take notice of Merle Haggard and it is the one he likely will be most remembered for. It became his show closer, com-



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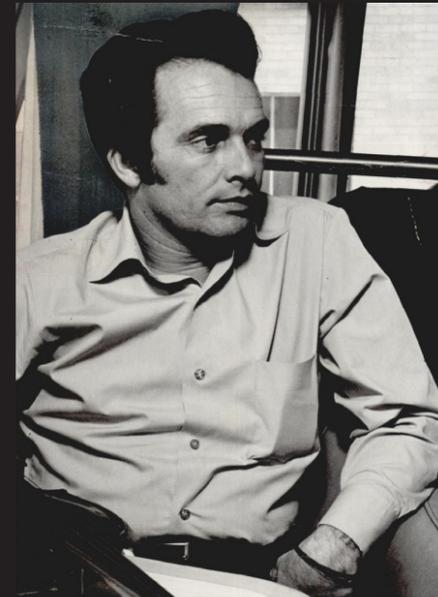
Merle Haggard performing live in Oklahoma City at a 2014 music festival. The songwriter's mother and father both had deep roots in Oklahoma.

Photo by Nathan Poppe

RIGHT >>

Taken in 1970, this photo's caption originally read "Mayor Elmo Madwell has proclaimed Jan. 8 'Merle Haggard Day' to honor the entertainer who made the song, 'Okie From Muskogee,' popular."

Photo by Don Fisher, The Oklahoman Archives



“THERE ARE ABOUT SEVENTEEN HUNDRED WAYS TO TAKE THAT SONG.” – MERLE HAGGARD

plete with a giant flag that dropped behind the Strangers as it was being performed.

In the tumultuous aftermath of the song's arrival, Merle was caught off guard by the controversy "Okie" generated. The response was both positive and negative. Merle often referred to it as a joke, insisting it was not very important. As he told one journalist, "There are about seventeen hundred ways to take that song."

Other times, Merle's explanation of its meaning was that it was his personal tribute to his dad. Merle explained, "Muskogee was always referred to in my childhood as back home. I saw that sign

MERLE'S FAMILY MOVED FROM CHECOTAH TO CALIFORNIA DURING THE GREAT DEPRESSION. HE WAS BORN APRIL 6, 1937 AND DIED ON HIS 79TH BIRTHDAY AT HIS HOME SURROUNDED BY FAMILY.

and my whole childhood flashed before my eyes. I thought, 'I wonder what Dad would think about the youthful uprising occurring at the time, the Janis Joplins, etc ... I understood 'em, I got along with it, but ... I thought, what is goin' on, on these campuses?' It was something more than a joke when he saw the sign that inspired the song. Jim Haggard had had to endure the endless Okie slurs when he'd first moved to Oildale, and he met them

all with a silent pride, determined to prove himself to the community, and through hard work show off the pride of his people. That's why the operative word in the first line of the chorus of "Okie" is "proud": "I'm proud to be an Okie from Muskogee."

For years, every time he played "Okie" live, he introduced it by saying, "Here's a song I wrote about my dad."

However, there was not much pride on display when Merle said this, in response to some of the song's lyrical references: "I don't like [the hippies'] views on life, their filth, their visible self-disrespect.... They don't give a shit what they look like or what they smell like." "Okie" put Merle on the line of scrimmage for the defense, where he continually declared how proud he was of what he had written and sung, and that he was willing to pay whatever price for his American right to speak his mind. According to Frank Mull, that pride never wavered the rest of Merle's life: "In 1973, it was still a hot topic for discussion and dispute, and Merle

said, 'Who [did] I offend [with "Okie from Muskogee"] ... I have nothing against long hair as long as there's nothing growing in it. It's like the words of the song. We don't let our hair grow long and shaggy. That's the thing. Shaggy means dirty. Right? Ain't that what it means?'"

The single of "Okie from Muskogee," taken from Fuzzy's live recording, was finally released September 29, not because Nelson was afraid of the controversy around it — the album had proved that controversy and Merle made for great sales — but because Merle had put out a lot of music that year and Nelson didn't want to oversaturate the market. Nonetheless, "Okie" made it to No. 1 on Billboard's country chart and No. 41 on the Top 200, his eighth chart-topper in three years, and the first to sell more than five hundred thousand copies. It earned Merle his first gold record.1 People didn't necessarily buy it because they agreed with its message; the controversy it created made some people want to hear it for themselves, play it as a joke at parties, or simply smash it to pieces.

The song's controversy helped amplify the divide between the silent majority and the counterculture, but its impact was so huge, it was difficult for anyone on either side to ignore it. Leftist topical folk singer Phil Ochs's best friend at the time was Andy Wickham, and he likely introduced Ochs to Merle's music. When "Okie from Muskogee" was released, it was one of the few songs Phil Ochs added to his playlist that he hadn't written. He introduced it in his shows by suggesting to his mostly middle-class, college-age, long-haired audiences that Merle needed to be paid attention to because of the quality of the songwriting. His point was, it's not necessarily the message, but the way the message was written. It was always met with laughter and applause whenever he sang it, not in support of the message but mocking it. At the same time, So-Cal's ultimate fun-and-surfing band, the Beach Boys, recorded it and added the song to their live concerts. So did the Grateful Dead. Even the always congenial John Denver put it in his live shows, with a few lyrics changed to make it sound like more of a joke. The Oh-gosh, oh-gee Denver was not especially known for his sense of humor and the joke didn't go over with his hippie audiences.

Rock radio's new free-form FM stations started playing "Okie," even if it was just to make fun of it. As unintended as it was, "Okie"

was the song that finally put Merle on the mainstream map and, as journalist Daniel Cooper observed, "catapulted Merle Haggard from standard country music star to full-fledged media sensation," even if there was a bull's-eye around his handsome face in dormitories all across America.

Perhaps most meaningful to Merle, the controversy of "Okie" drew large crowds to his concerts, if not always there to cheer him on. As Kelli Haggard remembered, she was eight years old when the song came out, and one time when she and Noel were on the bus at a concert, the following incident happened: "The Vietnam War was still going on, and it was a real scary time, but Daddy didn't want us to know about any of the protesting going on in the country. He didn't want to scare us. But there were a lot of protesters and hippies who hated 'Okie from Muskogee' and let their feelings known. This one night, after Dad did a show, it was somewhere probably near San Francisco, we were all in the bus when a bunch of screaming hippies gathered outside and began rocking it back and forth, trying to push the bus over. Daddy stayed calm and said, 'Kelli and Noel, get into a bottom bunk.' We did and held on to each other. We were very afraid, not knowing what was going on." Fortunately, the bus did not go over, and the crowd eventually dispersed.

Rag or gag, in the 2010 American Masters PBS documentary about Merle, he pinpointed "Okie" as the beginning of his being a target of the counterculture, whose anti-Vietnam songs were anthemic and revered along the frat rows across the country. Merle said, "That's how I got into it with the hippies. ... I thought they were unqualified to judge America, and I thought they were lookin' down their noses at something that I cherished very much, and it pissed me off. And I thought, You sons of bitches, you've never been restricted away from this great, wonderful country, and yet here you are in the streets bitchin' about things, protestin' about a war that they didn't know any more about than I did. They weren't over there fightin' that war any more than I was."

While the song was celebrated by the populist/conservative Right and just as vigorously ridiculed by the liberal/radical Left, of all people, Bob Dylan came to the defense of "Okie" (and of Merle), insisting it was a satire on politics, not a statement of principle: "Nobody would take the song at face value if Randy Newman had recorded it."

Besides Dylan, it gained Merle one other notable fan. Richard Nixon, president of the United States at the time, raved about "Okie" and wanted to invite Merle to the White House to perform it. Merle turned down several invitations, smartly deciding it might stoke the fires of controversy that were already burning and actually boil over to the point where it could hurt his career. A year later, George Wallace picked up on the song's flag-waving and "White Lightning" references and made overtures to Merle about getting his support for the upcoming 1970 Alabama gubernatorial campaign. Merle, whose bullshit detector was among the highest calibrated of any performer's, considered Wallace to be a would-be demagogue and rejected the invitation out of hand.

Nearing the end of his life, however, Merle mellowed his views. In one of his last interviews, he said, typically, "It's just a song. It doesn't necessarily say anything about me. A man could kill himself trying to live up to his material. I believe in America and I believe in the right to disagree. We probably do 'Muskogee' with a different attitude and different message than when we first wrote it. I was dumb as a rock. I didn't know much about what I was talking about. But I knew more than the hippies knew. We've come to terms with each other. I've got a lot of hippies in my audience. And I'm pretty much a hippie myself. A short-haired hippie. And [starting in 1981] a well-known pot smoker."

At the time it was released and the controversy over it first erupted, whether the message of "Okie from Muskogee" was admired or reviled, stylistically it continued his four-chord autobiographical journey of rage, recrimination, and rejection, colorfully put on display in a three-minute musical critique. "Okie" became the enduring example of Merle's antihero political poetics, projected through his rough but luxe, insanely seductive voice. Aaron Copland had written "Fanfare for the Common Man," and Merle had given that man his voice and his pride.

The controversy over "Okie" raised his minimum price per show to \$9,000, perhaps the sweetest vindication of all. **CC**

Editor's note: Excerpted from "THE HAG: The Life, Times, and Music of Merle Haggard" by Marc Eliot. Copyright © 2022. Available from Hachette Books, an imprint of Hachette Book Group, Inc.

Making space for music

With free lessons and community support, OKC's El Sistema eases access to the world of music

Music provides a space for everyone. That's what Kim Wilson says about El Sistema, a local nonprofit that offers free after-school music education to public school children.

"It allows a lot of expression, and a lot of these kids need a way to express themselves," said Wilson, executive director of El Sistema Oklahoma. "Music education is very therapeutic mentally. It's relaxing. You can identify with it. You can grow in your skills and feel accomplished in achieving something."

"The idea of El Sistema is to offer kids a chance to learn an instrument who normally wouldn't have a chance or who really need community and a source of joy and hope."

The Oklahoma City-based nonprofit is inspired by a Venezuelan program with the same name founded in 1975. It was founded by José Antonio Abreu and gained a reputation for directing children in poverty away from drugs and crime.

"It was started as a way to give children living on the streets hope and purpose," Wilson said. "Many of those kids in that first program ended up growing up in the program and have now started El Sistemas all around the world. Several are very successful musicians as well."

There is no standard formula or formal way to establish El Sistema programs, but they typically focus on the importance of music education as a way to foster community, development and joy.

"Music has to be recognized as an agent of social development, in the highest sense because it transmits the highest values — solidarity, harmony, mutual compassion," Abreu once said. "And it has the ability to unite an entire community and to express sublime feelings."

Tuning in

El Sistema Oklahoma became a nonprofit in 2013. It began with elementary and middle school children but has also expanded with their students.

"Now we go from 3rd to 12th grade," Wilson said. "This year will be our third class of graduating seniors that have stayed with the program most of the time that they've been in school."

There's about 170 students in the program this year.

El Sistema Oklahoma accepts children from various Oklahoma City Public Schools. Students can join the program after being referred by a principal, counselor or music teacher. There is no audition and everything is provided for free.

"I love how El Sistema is a free program because it's hard to find a free program, especially one that teaches you so much," said Iris-Pearl, a sixth-grade student learning to play the cello. "I like how there's always something more that

you can learn. You don't have to learn it all at once. There are different stages and levels that you learn at. I love that process."

Back to school

As with most things, the COVID-19 pandemic threw a wrench into the group's operations, making it impossible last year to meet daily with their students. To adapt, El Sistema decided to meet in person once a week with their students while offering virtual lessons. It soon became clear that more was needed.

"We realized there was a significant amount of our kids who just weren't doing school work or going to school, so we were able to open up a hope center for our El Sistema kids," Wilson said. "They could come during the day and get support with school, have reliable Wi-Fi and get fed. We had between 30 and 40 kids that attended that hope center every day."

The program is back to in-person

Story by Miguel Rios
Photos by Nathan Poppe

El Sistema runs on various partnerships, donations, volunteers and grants. Kim Wilson said they've been fortunate to receive grants from some big names.

In 2020, the group received a grant from Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute for the fourth year. The grant provides funding, professional development, various resources and access to workshoping with Emmy award-winning musicians.

In 2021, El Sistema was one of the first organizations to receive a \$10,000 Music Has Value Grant from Big Machine Label Group, a Nashville music label. Big Machine recently launched the grant fund and chose El Sistema as one of five organizations across the country to be awarded the first set of grants.

Photos From Left

Iris-Pearl plays cello in the chapel at First Presbyterian Church.

El Sistema orchestra rehearsal on Feb. 8 at First Presbyterian Church.

Angele shows off her viola outside of her El Sistema classroom.

sessions this year, operating five days a week after school at First Presbyterian Church of Oklahoma City. Students take lessons for composition, music fundamentals and their specific instruments. They also participate in full orchestra rehearsal.

Students are given a substantial snack and can take some home at the end of the evening. El Sistema also provides homework support for students.

"The mission really is to balance the social, emotional needs of the kids and also to grow in their music abilities," Wilson said. "We have kids who, actually this year, made First Chair in the state orchestra, and we have other kids who kind of just play along with a few notes. There's room in our program for both."

For children like Angele, a 9-year-old viola student that has always loved music, being in El Sistema was a great match.

"When I was younger, my mom showed me videos of girls my age playing the viola," Angele said. "That was my dream, and here I am — playing the viola. I really like it, and I'm getting the hang of it. I really love El Sistema. It's the best thing."

Wilson said several high school students wanted to give back or pursue music education, so they started offering a new class in recent years: Future

Awesome Music Educators (FAME). The class meets once a week and teaches students how to be educators and mentors.

Julian, a 17-year-old trumpet player, has been in the program for about five years and is part of the FAME class. He said El Sistema has helped him become more mature and responsible.

"I really enjoy my time here. I love the energy, the company and the attention from the directors and staff," he said. "I used to be more disorganized, but I'm being shaped into a mature adult and I owe a lot of that to this program. It really teaches kids how to be good teenagers and then good, successful adults."

El Sistema is planning to host a free concert featuring chamber groups and ensembles tentatively set for 6:30 p.m. May 6 at Oklahoma City Community College. For more information, visit elsistemaok.org. **CC**

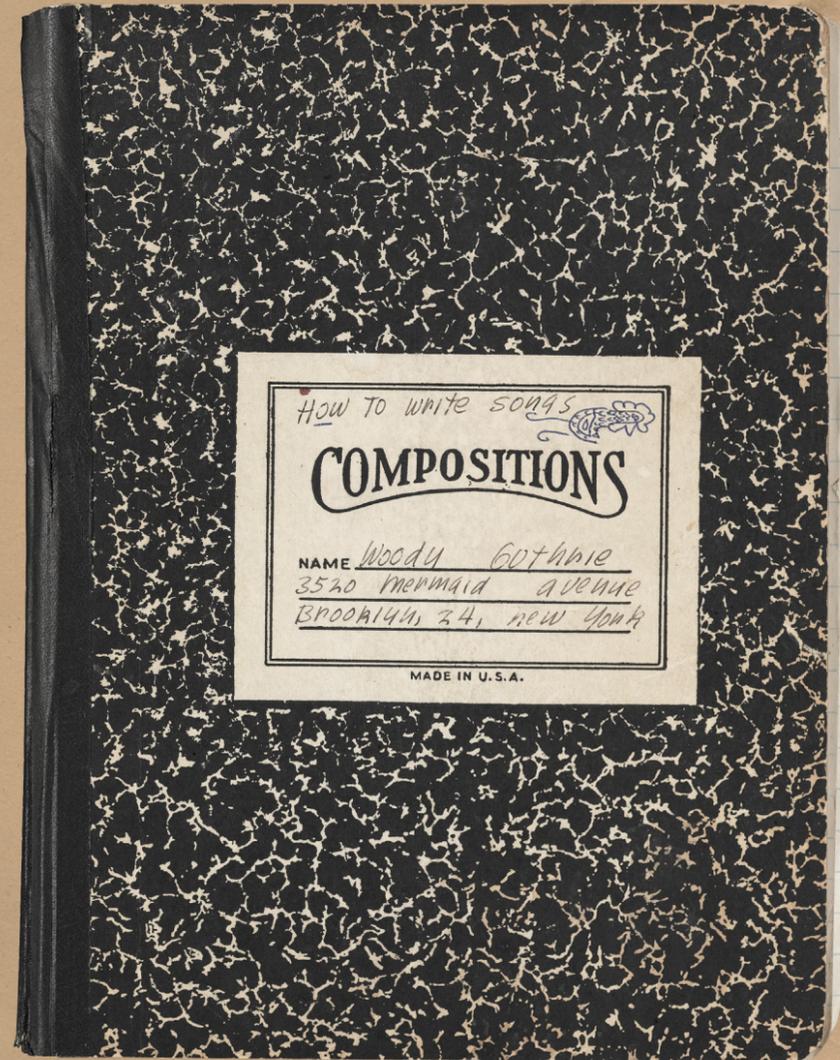
Editor's note: Miguel Rios is *Curbside Chronicle's* first full-time staff writer. He previously led the *Oklahoma Gazette's* news coverage and most recently worked to support Oklahoma Policy Institute's work by giving voice to the stories of Oklahomans impacted by healthcare policy. Rios has a mass communications degree from Oklahoma City University and lives in OKC with his dogs Baxter and Oliver.



➤ Goodbyes are tough. **Parting Shot** is simple. It's a photo with something important to say.

Parting Shot

Photo and words excerpted from **Woody Guthrie: Songs and Art * Words and Wisdom** by Nora Guthrie and Robert Santelli | Chronicle Books



A recently published book focuses on the handwritten lyrics, art and correspondence of Woody Guthrie. You'll find pages from the Okemah-born songwriter's journals and notebooks as well as illustrations and the social issues he cared about. You can buy a copy signed by Woody's daughter Nora Guthrie, who co-authored the book, via the Woody Guthrie Center in Tulsa.

Guthrie wrote: "a folk song is whats wrong and how to fix it or it could be whose hungry and where their mouth is is or whose out of work and where the job is or whose broke and where the money is or whose carrying a gun and where the peace is" CC

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