

Rock 'n' roll diary - Jon Nolan takes a roadtrip deep in the heart of Texas

By Jon Nolan , of Newmarket ZuZu, , Portsmouth Herald, March 27, 2005

Shortly after midnight, Elvis Costello strolled casually onto the stage to thunderous applause. Bars and clubs are piled, tucked and folded into every nook of the prodigious music town of Austin, Texas - like those summer homes on Hampton Beach, or like the fans clamoring for a better view of the musical legend in front of us. But on this night, Elvis (the English one) was at La Zona Rosa, an excellent 1,000-seat venue with amazing sound. When he and his small crack band kicked into the classic "Radio," I knew I had made the right choice.

You see, at the same time around town, I could have been seeing Buddy Holly's Crickets playing with Nanci Griffith; folkie Melissa Ferrick; Morphine's ex-members in their new project Twinemen; Duncan Sheik; the punk trio Sleater-Kinney; rock chicks The Donnas, countless lesser-known bands from all around the world or even Billy Idol. And, this was only the first official night of the annual four-day festival known as The South by Southwest Music Festival & Conference (SXSW). Having to make choices like this is a pretty good problem, yes? I was equal to the task.



Courtesy photo of Jon Nolan by Matt Robbins

Truth be told, being a musician, I was in Austin last week to do some business as well as have some fun. SXSW is kind of like rock 'n' roll summer camp. It's a musical Mardi Gras. Some musicians call it the "festival of false hopes" because of all the bands that hemorrhage cash with delusion that all they need to do is play for a "talent scout" and they will be on the road to "making it." My old band Say ZuZu, a regular attendee of the conference, never suffered from such delusions. We hemorrhaged cash, knowing full well that we would never "make it." Whatever you call it, it's a schmoozefest of epic proportions.

Former Say ZuZu frontman Jon Nolan is preparing to release his new solo CD with a party at The Stone Church sometime in May. Stay tuned.

In spite of our being soundly rejected by the conference for a showcase for seven years in a row(!), 'ZuZu still managed to make the most of our time in Austin, and even landed a record deal with a European label. Fame and fortune? Not quite. More like a hobby where you get paid now and again. However, the importance of SXSW cannot be understated in regards to the music business. Where else could we have rubbed elbows with and shared bills with members of Wilco and Neko Case? "Hey look! It's (insert star here)."

Robert Plant of Led Zeppelin fame was the keynote speaker this year. The Wallflowers, Aimee Mann, Hot Hot Heat, Robert Randolph, Stephen Malkmus, Jason Mraz all played. I can't even list them all. This thing is huge.

Over the official four days of the conference, over 1,300 bands from all around the world performed for their SXSW showcase, thousands of others registered for and attended the conference without an official showcase, and thousands more had applied and couldn't get in. This doesn't even count the non-sanctioned SXSW events - or the music fans attending who just buy the wristband to see all the music (\$110!). Also, there are the daytime "parties" where labels, agents, magazines and every conceivable outpost of the music industry showcase their own artists. This is where the

real action happens, or at least in my little circle. I'm not likely to be rubbing elbows with the bigwigs, unless rotund, uncategorizable, rootsy singer-songwriter types have suddenly come into vogue. It could happen.

Rotund: Adjective.

1. Rounded in figure; plump.
2. Having a full, rich sound; sonorous.

Check and ... check.

I had one goal for my trip. To acquaint myself with the folks who had previously championed Say ZuZu in Europe, and to chat them up about my forthcoming debut solo CD with the hopes of landing another European deal. Conveniently, they all come to SXSW every year. The event can be overwhelming, so I thought it was best to keep it simple. Anything else that came of the trip I would consider gravy. (Perhaps salsa would have been more apropos?) This short (ha!) synopsis should give you an idea of what it was like to be me for a week at rock 'n' roll summer camp:

3:40 a.m., Tuesday

Rock Standard Time (RST)

The alarm goes off. Ugh. So much for being on Rock Standard Time. I go to bed at 3:40 a.m. more than I get up at that hour. I say goodbye to my sleepy wife and daughters and I'm out the door. I am lucky that my father-in-law has graciously donated a free ticket on Southwest Airlines. Alas, I have somehow stupidly selected to depart Manchester at 6 a.m. (thank God it wasn't Logan). What was I thinking? Shortly before 5 a.m., I bid adieu to my lovely guitar - a gorgeous 1963 Gibson J-45. It's always a terrible moment to see your guitar go away with the baggage guy. I have heard waaay too many horror stories about them never reappearing, or appearing ... in two pieces. Oh, and I hate flying. It's scares the bejeezus outta me. A necessary evil I guess.

There is one stop in Baltimore for an hour, I switch planes and happily a few hours later I land with little fanfare in good ol' Texas. Lucky for me, a kind and pleasantly chatty seatmate took my mind off the thought of plummeting to an untimely death Buddy Holly style. You know, minus the fame, culturally significant songs and certainly Don McLean isn't likely to pen an anthem to mourn my loss. But I digress! Also, as luck would have it, I discover to minor chagrin, that the other quieter seatmate is the vice president of A&R for Rounder Records - the chagrin coming from the fact that I only discovered this during the last five minutes of my flight. Blast! Ah well, it happens. This is exactly the kind of thing that doesn't happen except at SXSW. I do my thing though, and mention that I will be at The Hole in the Wall (an Austin institution) that evening if he'd like to stop by and see my short set. It has begun! This kind of activity consumed most of the next week. That is, while I wasn't consuming tasty

Mexican food. I say adios (I'm so cosmopolitan) to both my seatmates, and it's off to get my luggage.

With my Baileybag on my shoulder, I grab my suitcase off the luggage belt. The next thing I know, I'm standing with AmPop, an Icelandic band here for the festival, next to a luggage belt that has yet to yield either my guitar, or two of theirs. Yikes. A baggage guy comes along, sees us, realizes what's up and gives us a nervous look. This doesn't make me feel all that good. Turns out, after 15 painful panicky moments, that the missing gear was in the "Going to El Paso" compartment of the plane. Whew. I was gonna freak out on the guy.

My first order of business, after calming down and picking up my small rental car, is to stop at a pharmacy and get all the toiletries I have forgotten to bring along. It is, however, in a plaza which I know to contain a fine vintage guitar and amp store - one of many in town. I stroll in and spend an hour lustily playing the many fine guitars and amps they have. Next,

Mexican food on South Lamar at another Austin institution - Maria's Taco Express! Don't let the name fool you, this ain't Taco Bell, this stuff is the real thing and my first of many stops at Mexican food joints. (See "rotund.") Yum. Two enchiladas and it's off to my friend Brian's house to get some rest before my first big night in town.



Former Say ZuZu frontman Jon Nolan is preparing to release his new solo CD with a party at The Stone Church sometime in May. Stay tuned.

Photo courtesy by Laura Nolan

7 p.m., Tuesday

The Hole in the Wall

Having cleaned up and rested a bit, I check in with the friends I have in town. Most are musicians from around the country too, and a few, including my friend Cathy from Manchester, are just in town on vacation to enjoy the festivities. I also check in with Spencer Albee of Portland's As Fast As, who comes out to show his support. My pals from Northampton, Mass.'s Ware River Club are there too.

The Hole in the Wall, as I have said, is indeed an institution in the city. Also, it happens to be the place where for the last 10 years "The Swollen Circus" has taken place. The brainchild of a chap named Walter, who fronts a New York City band called The Silos, it has become a bit of a "see and be seen thing" in my roots-rock circles. Ryan (not Bryan!) Adams played it a couple years ago, as have many others who are likely to be impressive to me, and not you. Suffice it to say, it's a great gig and the room is full when I arrive early. I am lucky to land this gig with Walter, since I got a late jump on the whole festival thing, and I am scheduled to play first at 9 p.m.

The head of ZuZu's old record label Blue Rose Records is there - the affable Edgar Heckmann. We chat a bit, and I ease into the biz I'm there to do. I catch him up on what I've been up to and what I'm hoping to get happening with the new CD. It's good to see him. Jan Donkers, a Dutch radio personality who is another fellow that championed the ZuZu cause, is there too. I hand him an advance copy of my disc, and to Robbie Klanderman, another Dutchman/ZuZu fan who is a well-known and well-respected publicist in Holland. So far, so good. We spend a few minutes catching up. A couple Italian journalists I have met before are there too. I mumble a hello in Italian. Can't remember if I gave them a disc. In any case, there are so many people there I know, it is astonishing.

At 9 p.m. I sidle up through the crowd to the stage, and after a brief introduction by the hosts, I am off. Time to show 'em where I'm from. Um ... Newmarket. Every act on the bill gets 20 minutes or three songs. There are a load of acts on the bill, but I'm first. It turns out opening the show was a great slot. Everyone is attentive (aka - not drunk yet) as I sing one of the songs from my new CD. It is received well, and I drive on. A few flashbulbs goes off, and I notice that Edgar from Blue Rose is videotaping the set. I start into my well-worn story about breaking down outside of Hope, Ark., that precedes the song of the same name. I get a few laughs (as I'm supposed to) and I do my thing. Everybody seems into it and I feel in control of the room - folks laugh at the right parts of the song. I'm feeling good. I'm killing it. My friend from Minnesota joined me for the last song, another new one "Mary (won't you come along?)." There is genuine applause, and I know that phase one is complete. Success. After my set, I check in with my business pals to see what they thought. Good reactions all around. The problem is, I haven't any other definite appearances scheduled for Austin, just a proper gig in San Antonio, 75 minutes south of the city.

Hmmm.

I hang out soaking up the scene, seeing old friends, meeting new ones, and talking 'bout plans for the week. Late night, some pals and I go to Beerland on Red River and see some old pals - the Austin-based "Grand Champeen." A thoroughly excellent rock band a la early Replacements/Soul Asylum at an equally excellent dive of a bar. After a friend gets a little too "sleepy" (he took the club's name to heart), we all consume some nasty late-night food and I drive everyone home. That's the good and bad part about being the guy who doesn't drink. Sometime after 2 a.m. I hit the hay.

11 a.m., Wednesday

Let the networking continue!

Can't remember what time I got up exactly, but eventually I did get up. A note left by my gracious hosts, instructed me on how to operate their impressive grinder/coffee set up. Mexican breakfast food rocks.

After breakfast, I headed over to one of the prime networking spots of the week for yours truly. It was one of those daytime parties I mentioned before, out on a covered patio with a stage and full sound set up. The party is called "Guitar Town" after the online music message board community of the same name at an Irish joint named Mother Egan's. It was packed, and the lineup of bands was great. The weather was unseasonably cold, but given that I'd just left my house where there was two feet o' snow on the ground, I'll take it. All the same characters from the night before were there again for me to talk to - the German, Dutch and Italian folks. I chatted with them all again briefly. It's always good just to keep showing one's face I think. Beyond that, I hung out with some friends from another online community of which I am a part - the "No Depression Board" - which sounds like a therapy group, yes? Actually it's named after an old Carter Family song from the Depression era, and is also a term used to describe the niche of rootsy music I happen to play. The group looked to as the "founding fathers" of this brand of country-infused rock (think Crazy Horse, not The Eagles) was called Uncle Tupelo. Their first album was called "No Depression" as well. (Most of those members went on to form Wilco, a great, great band.) The fellow who mixed my album, Paul Kolderie (Radiohead, Morphine, Pixies), is also the guy who produced and recorded the first two Uncle Tupelo albums - I try and connect the dots for the folks who don't know him. He's a bit of a feather in my cap, a good name to drop. In fact, the magazine that most fans of this genre look to as the leading publication is called No Depression, too. Yikes, pretty incestuous eh?

As I'm hanging out with some friends, I look to my right and see the magazine's co-editor, Peter Blackstock. Getting press in No Depression, or ND as we hipsters call it, is an important coup for a guy like me. I try and turn as casually and naturally as possible to chat with Mr. Blackstock.

"It's Jon, right?," he says.

Sweet! He remembers me!

I give him my CD, and tell him about some fine other bands that he should look into, like The Mammals and The Everybodyfields. No sense giving any kind of hard sell. He'll either dig the CD or he won't, and I've shown my face. Either way, it's just nice to talk with him a bit. Nice guy, big music fan.

I end up spending most of the day at 'Egan's chatting with old friends and making new ones, and talk more with the Europeans about my plans for ye olde Jon Nolan record...

8:30 p.m., Wednesday

Elvis ...

I end up hanging out with my pal Bryan, cousin to my 'ZuZu band mate and continued rock 'n' roll hostel host. We decide we'll head over to The Austin Music Hall where the Austin Music Awards will be going on. Aha! So this is where all the beautiful people are. Everybody is decked to the nines. I try and look cool. We catch the end of Alejandro Escovedo's (of the True Believers) set with John Cale (of Velvet Underground). Two very influential, musical heavyweights. Never heard of them? Hmm. Well, try and be impressed. It's cool, but the room is big and the sound is boomy. They give out some awards to folks after the set. I marvel at the size and diversity of the music scene. Seemingly every genre is represented. We decide not to hang out and wait for Nanci Griffith and The Crickets. So, off to La Zona Rosa it is! Right across the street no less. So much good music.

During the day, all I heard anybody talk about was how Elvis Costello was playing at La Zona, and frankly I fully expected to see a huge line. To my surprise, Bryan and I walk right in, he with his badge (badges get in first) and me with my wristband. We stroll into the crowd and set up shop about 30 feet from the stage, dead center. Mary Gauthier (pronounced go-SHAY) is finishing up her set. It's a swell country folk set. She's making her major label debut this year. My friend saw her open up for Slaid Cleaves at The Press Room a few years back. Now she's playing to a comfortably filled room at the esteemed La Zona Rosa. Go girl!

Next is Tift Merritt, another pseudo "It" girl on the rootsy scene. It's a fine show of Springsteen-esque soul-infused rock, but with a few too many cliché arena-rock moves for my taste, you know, the whole I call and response sing-along audience participation bit, getting everybody to clap, tambourine with scarf attached. Granted, I am a bit jaded. But I want to like it.

Next on, however, is the man himself, the one and only Elvis Costello. His huge and immediate presence fills the room and after Tift Merritt, it makes it all the clearer what the real thing looks like. His every gesture is our command. Whereas Tift had to implore the crowd to clap, seemingly all Costello has to do is look at us a certain way and we comply. Yes, Mr. Costello. No, Mr. Costello. As you wish, Mr. Costello. He blows me away. I am riveted. My friend Bryan has to get up early the next day however, and I am forced to tear myself away from the show and split with my pal. I hear the next day he ended up playing for 2½ hours. Sigh.

It is great to hang with my friend though, and we hit another "must" in Austin, Magnolia Café for a late short stack.

2 a.m., Thursday

Zzzzz (Sound of snoring here.)

10 a.m., Thursday

I Swear! I'm hip!

Shower. Best rock duds. Coffee. Mexican. Yum. Happy St. Patrick's Day. My first order of business after joining the world of the living is to head downtown to Club Deville to the New West Records Party. This hip shindig has become an invite-only affair. My Dutch pal, the aforementioned publicist Robbie Klandermann has graciously given me one of the laminates that'll get me in. Suddenly I feel hip as I show my laminate at the gate to get in. My old band Say ZuZu had a three-year-long courtship with New West that ended up in ashes. Too bad. It's a great label. John Hiatt, The Flatlanders, Ben Lee (that Australian dude who dated Claire Danes for a few years), Dwight Yoakam, Vic Chestnutt, Drive By Truckers and my oldest and dearest friends Slobberbone are all on New West. (Perhaps we bonded so well for having terrible band names?) They have just completed a farewell tour however, and I only get to catch up with Brent Best, the lead singer, who is there with his manager (and my old manager) Amy. Kathleen Edwards is there hanging out. She disappears before I can say hello and gush about being a fan. Sigh. Buddy Miller plays and is fantastic. So is Ben Lee, and

Vic Chestnutt. I had only walked in when Sarah Lee Guthrie (yes, of the Guthries) and husband, Johnny Irion, finish up their set. What I heard sounded good.

The schmoozing reaches a fever pitch as I pass out CDs and cards listing the showcase opportunities I've lined up. A friend from western Mass., and I have created another showcase for ourselves for Friday morning in an effort to be proactive, and Matt has generously offered half the time of his Cheapo Disc showcase on Sunday afternoon. So, I pass out the cards to get folks to come to both. My European friends are there too and the dialogue continues. I waste most of the day once again catching up with pals, and trying to make new ones. I decide to go "home" because Bryan's wife, the lovely Michelle, is home from a business trip. I hang out with their sweet children too, and then take a nap for a bit. Naps aren't very rock 'n' roll, I admit it. Also, as an aside for all you rockers out there, I've found it is impossible to rock in shorts. This is a serious rock foul worthy of a 10-point deduction. I'm just saying.

6 p.m., Thursday

Grand Champeen. Rock is not dead.

I call my go-to one-woman-posse Cathy to get a bite before heading out for the night. After the greatest chimichanga in all of the world, we depart for separate destinations. We agree to meet up late night for The Grand Champeen set at Room 710 at 11 p.m. I head off to the Yep Roc Records showcase at the Continental Club. Yep Roc being another great label, and really a great fit for my album. I'd love to get a deal with these folks. Furthermore, they handle both the United States and Europe with great presence and a great reputation.

Nick Lowe, Robyn Hitchcock, Los Straightjackets, Dave Alvin, Marah, Robbie Fulks, and Bob Mould are all on Yep Roc. They would be great company, me thinks.

The Continental Club rules. It's a very velvet Elvis kinda place, and hey, there's a velvet Elvis over there! I have played the room many times. The ol' "ham disease" kicks in and I pine for the opportunity to get up and play. Oh well. I catch some of the bands playing, catch up with an Austinite friend Rebecca, (who never ceases to make me feel like a rock star), and soak up the place. Eventually, I sidle up to the two label heads and re-introduce myself. Happily for me, they remember me. 'ZuZu used to sell stuff via their distribution company, and we ended up selling good numbers to Europe through them. It's always good to be remembered, especially for making someone money. Alas, after a few fun hours, it is clear that my efforts may be swallowed by the intensity of the party going on. We'll see, they have the CD, and I'll follow up after SXSW is through.

By 11 p.m., I have made my way through the beery crowds filling the blocked off 6th street to Room 710, where the torch carriers of all that is still rock are playing - my old pals Grand Champeen. Channing's voice seems a bit shot, but the packed room thoroughly enjoys themselves (me included), and after we all spill out onto the street post set, it is agreed that the new material is top-notch. I chat with the fellas, congratulate them on kicking butt, and talk about hanging out later on that week. I am once again wiped, and it's off to bed around 2 a.m.

9:30 a.m., Friday

Allen's Boots (appearance No. 2!)

The mantra continues ... Shower. Best rock duds. Coffee. Mexican. Yum. Then it's off to the portion of sidewalk my friend Matt and I will commandeer outside Allen's Boots for our "showcase." The place is strategically chosen for its proximity to the Yard Dog, where Bloodshot Records will be holding their party. I know all of the European types will be hitting this shindig, and it is my hope they will come out for my short set, which starts at 11 a.m. Portland's As Fast As has agreed to take one for the team and back me up with their acoustic instruments.

'Champeen's guitarist Michael Crow gets the MVP award and shows up on time with a small PA for us to use. A few 'ZuZu fans show up (as does Rebecca from the Continental Club. She rules.), along with a small crowd that seemingly dig what they hear and stop to listen. Given the fact that I was teaching the guys my songs on the sidewalk an hour before the set, they play fantastic! I actually have a blast. It's good to be able to play more than three songs, and there is a big enough showing of people that I am pleased. Some of the Dutch radio folks show up. It ain't a sexy gig, but it gets the job done. I make a crack about what a coveted slot this is.

Success.

Midday, and after a lunch of - wait for it - Mexican food(!), I persuade the Ware River Club guys to head over to The Horseshoe Lounge for a game of shuffleboard. This would be the table-top kind. I think the Portsmouth Brewery has one, but The Horseshoe ain't The Brewery. No windows, no liquor, just beer, chips, pool, poker and shuffleboard! I could spend all week there playing. It's the best kind of dive. Slaid Cleaves wrote a song about it on his "Broke Down" album. What a blast. I thump the WRC boys at shuffleboard (boo-YAH!) and talk loads of trash. Good times.

6 p.m., Friday

San Antonio and back

I raid my friends' CD collection for a few things, pack up my guitar and Mapquest directions, and hit the road. Casbeers, another amazing and homey joint, is a club in San Antonio where Say ZuZu was embraced. This is my only proper paid gig of the week. I open up for Bobby Bare Jr., who I am a fan of. They sound great. Casbeers' famous enchiladas go down easy. Steve and Barbara (his wife) reminisce about old times. The set goes well. I hang out for the Bare Jr., set, and then split for the hour drive back to Austin. Another great band called Centro-Matic is playing at 1 a.m. on 6th street and I don't want to miss it. I find my friend Cathy, who is watching Mary Lou Lord playing on the street (so much good music everywhere!) and I drag her to the Centro-Matic show. Quite simply, it is a cathartic show. The crowd is thrilled. Belligerent barkeep and doorman-types usher everyone out with the classic "you don't have to go home.." bit. Sheesh. Chill, guys. My friend Cathy wants to go back to her hotel, but I persuade her to get some late breakfast at Magnolia's. This is a good idea, except it's 3 a.m. and it's a 15-minute wait. What's worse is I think it would be "pure comedy" if I put down a fake name for the waitstaff to call over the PA. However, they see through my ruse, and they never call* Hugh Jorgan? Party of two." They skip the name, and we keep chatting unaware until we are the only ones left waiting. "I've been skipped!" I protest. Said the stoney faced waiter, "We're not gonna be the brunt of your joke dude." Geez. Tough crowd. Clearly, the dude has an underdeveloped sense of humor. Actually, it becomes clear I am an ass. I can see my poor wife shaking her head. How old am I? Bed at 5 a.m. I wasn't that hungry.

1 p.m., Saturday

Laying low

Ugh. Still not enough sleep. I take my time and hang out with my hosts Bryan and Michelle Noteboom, nurse coffee and read the local rag. I've accomplished everything I've set my mind to. Now it's just a matter of whether the people like the CD or not. I hang out with the kids, and think about how much I miss mine. We take turns telling jokes. SXSW is a total blast, but when it's time to go, I will be happy. After a relaxing day spent mostly with the Noteboom family, I headed over to The Horseshoe for another game o' shuffleboard. I end up beating a local! Woo! I leave Austin undefeated. I'm the man.

9 p.m., Saturday

Taking one fo' the team

My business all but done, I decide I'll go and check out some pals at their showcases to lend my support. Turns out my pal Jabe, another singer-songwriter from Boston, has flown down to back-up Boston folkie Kris Delmhorst at her showcase. It's at a place called BD Riley's, a terrible joint I would never be caught in. This is SXSW however and you play where they put you, so it is what it is. I wave to Jabe on stage, he catches my eye and gives a wave back. The PA sucks bigtime, and the exasperated soundman tells me the problem lies in the lack of power to the stage. Every once in a while the whole thing just kind of cuts out. There are big open windows to the street just behind the stage, and the thunder of activity, of people, bands, and drunkenness mixes to squash any subtleties in Kris's music. It's a shame, and a classic example of the bad side of one's SXSW showcase. Jabe and Kris are pros though, they fight through it, and do as good a job putting on a brave face as is possible. Her songs are great.

I check my schedule and see that BD Riley's is hosting the other show I want to see. Oh man. Brent Best of Slobberbone has his own SXSW showcase there at 11 p.m.. I know that there will be a full crowd, as everybody is curious to see what his new stuff sounds like. There isn't a big crowd now though, so I leave to savor the utter chaos of 6th street. It sounds like a jet engine. Every possible rock look is represented. You could play a "guess the style of music" game. Hey Look! It's The Strokes! Oooo look! Emo Kids! Bet they play punk. You think? Maybe it's the mohawk and Ramones jackets that gave 'em away. I grab a slice of crappy pizza and stroll up the street and end up running into Ken Coomer, the former drummer from Wilco. He remembers me. I am psyched. I give him a disc.

After a short bit I mosey back to BD's and to my horror there is a line. I really want to see the show. I do end up getting in, and witness a fantastic set of amazing new songs. All the usual suspects are there, and I say my goodbyes to them since most are taking off the next day. I congratulate Brent on his set. It's a beautiful Texas night of 70-some-odd-degrees, and a bunch of us head to a party just outside the city. I spend a couple hours talking with Brent, Tony and Jess from Slobberbone about old times. They were the ones who helped 'ZuZu get to The Netherlands, while we helped get them to Italy. We first met on the road in '97 in Athens, Ga. It is great to see them, and I remember why I do this whole music thing. It's a pretty special experience. After a bit, I grab Cathy and a Dutch pal Sandy, and bring them back to their hotel. Sleep calls. It's 4 a.m.

8:15 a.m., Sunday

Coming down

Yikes. Early. My warm bed (courtesy of Michael Noteboom who is banished to his sister's room) calls to me like The Sirens. However, I have told the Notebooms I'd like to go to church with them since I'm a good Catholic boy (see Mom?) And I want to hang out with them a bit more. Sure am wiped though. Later that afternoon I nap a bit more and subtract a few points from my rock 'n' roll scorecard.

Sunday is another beautiful day, and the perfect lazy segue out of the hectic SXSW schedule. Matt and I play our final showcase at Cheapo Discs, a great music store on Lamar, to some gracious shoppers and a smattering of folks who are there to see us. No matter, it is a fun enough set, and the Noteboom kids are there to see me play. My business is done. A gorgeous day.

8 p.m., Sunday

The perfect ending

I end up spending most of the afternoon hanging out with Cathy, Crow and the 'Champeen guys. Cathy gets a call from Slaid Cleaves inviting us to dinner. Being only an acquaintance of Slaid and his wife, as well as a big fan of Slaid's music, I am thrilled at the prospect. The next few dreamlike hours were spent in the charming Cleaves home with Slaid's wife, Karen; Slaid; Cathy; and, Slaid's charming father, Craig. Smoked chicken fajitas with homemade salsa and brisket. I am

beside myself the food is so tasty. What's more, Karen offers me one of the good cigars she brought home from work. Seems her boss had some extras. She offers me all of them, but I assure her that since I enjoy being married, that one will suffice. With dinner over, we head out back to their spacious yard, and to the fire pit that they've constructed with an old washtub buried to its rim. I turn and see Karen coming toward us with two guitars. Trading tunes with Slaid? Woo! Slaid plays some covers he's been learning, I croon some of my own tunes, and we end up getting out Slaid's Beatles fake book to sing some of those great tunes. If you had told me that I would end up sitting around the fire at Slaid's house smoking a Romeo Y Julieta, trading songs until the wee hours I would have called you crazy. Apparently not. What a night. It was perfect.

With an early flight for me the next morning, Cathy and I bid adieu to our excellent hosts, and made our way back to town. The thought of coming back to the snow-covered land that is New Hampshire didn't seem too appealing, but seeing my wife and daughters is reason enough for me! The next morning, I dropped off the rental car, boarded the plane for another white-knuckle adventure. I made it home just in time for baby bedtime. It's good to be home.

So what will come of my time in Austin? Who knows. Time will tell. I'll follow up with the people I talked to and we'll see. Don't hold your breath until I hit the big time though. You might be holding it a while. I just want to make music. Whatever level of "success" (however one judges what success is) I reach, what's important is making the music. Austin rocks. I'll be there next year. Right now though, I've got to get a burger or something. Anything but Mexican food.

Sunday, April 24 - Inn on the Blues - "The Joyce Andersen Show" - 7 Ocean Ave., York Beach, Maine, 7 p.m. The show also featuring Bruce Derr, Roger Williams and Lincoln Meyers.

Wednesday, May 4 - The Big Easy - Market Street, Portland, Maine, 9 p.m. Opening for John Eddie.

Look for Stone Church CD release show in May! (Date tba).

For information on Jon Nolan, check out his Web site www.jonnolan.ne