

Sgt. Fitch

THE LEGACY OF SARG RECORDS



A DOCUMENTARY FILM BY DAMON COOK AND DAN PRINGLE

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SPECIFICATIONS

Format: NTSC, SD 1:33:1
Color, Stereo
Close-Captioned

Language: English
Rated: TV-PG
TRT: 56:40

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SYNOPSIS

SGT. FITCH explores the advent and influence of Sarg Records, a small independently owned label cultivated by WWII hero, Sgt. Charlie Fitch. With his unconventional approach to the recording industry, Fitch redefined Texas music in the 1950s by mixing ethnic styles and different genres to create entirely new ones. Although, Sarg played a significant role in launching some of today's rock 'n roll and country music legends, the label's legacy arguably lies in the overlooked and undervalued treasures from its relatively unknown artists.

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Exploring the advent and legacy of Sarg Records, *SGT. FITCH* reveals the stories behind Charlie Fitch's independent label that launched the careers of some of today's rock and country music legends.

ABOUT THE FILM

Sgt. Fitch explores the advent and influence of Sarg Records, a small independently owned record label cultivated by WWII hero, Sgt. Charlie Fitch. With his unconventional approach to the recording industry, Fitch redefined Texas music in the 1950s by mixing ethnic styles and different genres to create entirely new ones. Although, Sarg played a significant role in launching some of today's rock 'n roll and country music legends, the label's legacy arguably lies in the overlooked and undervalued treasures from its relatively unknown artists.

The story of Sarg Records is a tale of minor enterprise in 1950s small town America. Luling is a South Texas oil town renowned for its petroleum and watermelon farms, but not for its music. Nevertheless, what began at the Luling Phonograph and Record Shop at 311 East Davis Street in 1953 produced or influenced music heard throughout the entire world today.

Charlie Fitch, the engine behind Sarg Records, enlisted in the Army Air Corps in 1940. He served as a tail gunner on over one hundred battle missions in WWII, and became a war hero on his final mission when his B-17 bomber took a hit from a Nazi anti-aircraft missile over Frankfurt on the morning of November 5, 1944. Fitch took control of the situation, calming his young and inexperienced crew, systematically rigging their jump gear and seeing them to safety before jumping himself. He was captured on the ground and spent the next six months as a Prisoner of War in the notorious Nazi prison camp, Stalag Luft 4.

It was Fitch's experience working on the electrical systems of his airplane in WWII that gave him the technical knowledge to open an electronics repair business upon returning home from the war. While stationed at Brooks Air Force Base in San Antonio, his part-time job was to service broken radios, televisions and phonograph players. As fate would have it, he was called on to service jukeboxes for a local operator in South Texas. Sensing a burgeoning business in the jukebox trade, Charlie purchased his own jukebox with his Air Force re-enlistment bonus in 1946.

By the time Charlie was honorably discharged in May 1950, his foray into the jukebox business had flourished. He was now a full time jukebox operator (or 'op' as they were known in the trade) and eventually built up his business to include 25 jukeboxes spread across South Texas. He moved back to his hometown, Luling, where he and his wife, Bennie, took up residence at 311 E. Davis Street, formerly the site of a grocery store, with living quarters in the back. They had no special plans for the front room of the building, initially using it as a storage area for parts and records for the jukeboxes. The idea occurred to Charlie that he could use the space to sell the same records he was buying for his machines in a retail capacity . . . on October 9, 1950 the Luling Phonograph and Record Shop was open for business.

Charlie spent most of his time driving from town to town servicing his jukeboxes . . . collecting coins, making repairs and changing out records. Every couple of weeks he would travel to San Antonio and purchase the latest 78s and 45s from distributors for his jukeboxes and store. In the meantime, Bennie managed the retail store selling records over the counter, and because they lived in the back of the shop, she could keep an eye on the kids. It was a perfect arrangement for both of them.

Spending much of his time working his machines in country dancehalls and honky-tonks, Charlie encountered hundreds of local musicians, bands and singers. This inevitably led to other music related ventures. He started working as a promoter and booking agent for local concerts and dancehalls bringing stars such as Johnny and Jack, Kitty Wells, Faron Young and Webb Pierce to the area. Next, he hosted a live two-hour radio show for KCNY in San Marcos, TX adding 'disc jockey' to his resume' that now included jukebox operator, record store owner and booking agent. However, it would be the next phase of the music business that he ambitiously embarked upon that would be his legacy.

Immersed in the local music scene, the idea struck Charlie that it would be good business if he had records of these unknown local acts to put in his store and jukeboxes to take advantage of their immediate fan base. The opportunity presented itself to him in the summer of 1953, when a local Luling woman approached Charlie and introduced him to her nephew, a young singer named Neal Merritt. Charlie was impressed with Merritt and helped to arrange a session to record his original tune, *Korean Love Song*.

Knowing nothing about the actual record manufacturing process, he chose to act as an agent and help Merritt land a record deal. He packaged the newly recorded material with a demo tape of another local musician he had encountered in San Antonio, 12-year-old child prodigy 'Little' Doug Sahm, and began shopping it to major labels. After a series of rejections, Charlie began to explore the possibility of starting his own label to record and promote regional talent.

With the confident assumption that he knew as much about what would sell to the public than those snide producers from Nashville, Fitch began drawing up plans for his new label. Although he'd handled records for several years by this point, and knew the trade as well as anyone in South Texas at that time, he still had little understanding of what went into the recording and manufacturing end of the business, however; undeterred, he jumped right in. There was no question as to what the label would be named. Everyone in Luling had called Charlie by his rank, "Sarg", and he had sometimes referred to his jukebox and dance promotion business as 'Sarg Productions'. Inevitably, with the release of Sarg 101 (Neal Merritt's *Korean Love Song*) in December 1953, Sarg Records was in business.

Whereas most startup labels in the fifties were 'copycat' labels, relying on trends and radio marketing, it was Fitch's love of all types of music, regardless of marketability, that kept him afloat. Virtually every style of music performed in Texas was documented on the Sarg Label from western swing, country, rhythm and blues, rock and roll, rockabilly, conjunto, waltzes and polkas, pop and jazz.

Although two Texas icons, Willie Nelson and Doug Sahm, made their earliest recordings for Sarg, the label's legacy lies in the celebrated records by western swing pioneer Adolph Hofner, honky-tonkers Herby Shoelzel and Larry Nolen, rock and rollers The Moods and The Downbeats, and rockabilly mavericks Cecil Moore and Al Urban.

Over the next two decades, Sarg Records maintained a steady presence on the music scene in the multicultural milieu that is South Texas, eventually releasing over 150 singles over a twenty-year period. The label's massive historical importance lies in the documentation of a time period and talent-laden region where ethnic diversity and new post war attitudes led to the birth of entirely new genres of music. By unintentionally creating this archive of sound, Fitch carved out a niche for himself and his artists in American music history.

Brown, Andrew. [The Sarg Records Anthology](#). Book Accompaniment to CD Box Set: Bear Family Records. 1999

Brown, Andrew. [That'll Flat Git It!](#), Liner Notes to CD. Vol. 18: Bear Family Records. 1999

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CAST BIOS



Charlie Fitch

Charles Wesley "Charlie" Fitch was born in Hallettsville, Texas, on October 9, 1918. He enlisted in the Army Air Corps in 1940, serving as a tail gunner on B-17 bombers during World War II, and was a German prisoner of war in 1944-45. He married Bennie Lou Bassett of Luling, TX in September 1945 and they had three daughters and a son. He worked at San Antonio's Brooks Air Force Base until his honorable discharge in 1950. He then moved to Luling and started the Luling Phonograph & Record Shop, and began Sarg Records in December 1953 with Neal Merritt's "Korean Love Song." In 1954 Dave Isbell & The Mission City Playboys featuring Willie Nelson on lead guitar, recorded for the label, and a 12-year old Doug Sahm released "A Real American Joe" in January 1955. Drawing from a talent pool that stretched from Houston to San Antonio and throughout South Texas for more than 35 years, Sarg Records released more than 150 singles in Western swing, country, polka, rockabilly, rock & roll, R & B, and conjunto. Sarg Records' biggest hit was Cecil Moore's 1964 instrumental "Diamond Back". Fitch also served as Caldwell County's Veterans Services Officer until his death on May 7, 2006.



Aaron Allan

Singer-Songwriter/DJ & Emcee, Aaron Allan has written over 900 songs with 27 of them being recorded by the likes of the Osborne Brothers, Charlie Walker, Stony Edwards and Willie Nelson, who made Aaron's "Truth Number One" a hit in 1970. He has been inducted into the DJ Hall of Fame and the Country Music Association of Texas Hall of Fame. He has worked for over 50 years in the country music radio industry working at stations all over Texas, Kansas and Tennessee. When Aaron left KBOP in 1954, Willie Nelson took his place. He and Nelson remain good friends, whereas he continues to serve every year as Emcee of Willie Nelson's famous 4th of July Picnic. He was also a recording artist for Sarg Records forging a lifelong friendship with Charlie Fitch. He is still an active radio personality hosting "The Double A Show" at KCTI in Gonzalez, TX every weekday afternoon where he features Texas and regional music, conducts guest interviews and hosts live in-studio performances.



Larry Nolen

Larry Nolen was born in Mineola in Northeast Texas in 1933 and moved to San Antonio as a child. He began his professional music career as a rhythm guitarist in 1946, at the age of 13, when he joined The Mountain Rhythm Band, a family band that featured Boy and Gene who later achieved success as The Jacoby Brothers. Smiley Whitley, leader of one of the most famous western swing bands in Texas, recognized a star on the rise and invited Larry to play with his band, Smiley Whitley and the Texans. They performed most Saturday nights at Bandera's famous Cabaret Dancehall and also hosted a radio show at San Antonio's KONO / KMAC radio station five days a week. In 1954, Nolen left the Texans, started his own band Larry Nolen & The Bandits and released "I Need You Now" and "Hillbilly Love Affair" on Sarg Records. Nolen went on to share the stage with Elvis Presley, Porter Wagoner, Spade Cooley, Hank Thompson, Doug Sahm, Marty Robbins, Johnny Paycheck, Roger Miller and George Jones frequently appearing on The Louisiana Hayride and more than fifty Grand Ol' Opry Road Shows. Larry has been inducted into the Rockabilly Hall of Fame for "King of the Ducktail Cats", the Texas Western Swing Music Hall of Fame with the Texas Tophands, and the Bandera Music Hall of Fame as a Living Legend. A few of his hit records include "I Need You Now", "Please Talk To My Heart", "The Bandit", "Hillbilly Love Affair" and "Ramblin' Rose" which was recorded by Nat King Cole. Larry currently lives on a ranch near Pipe Creek, Texas with his wife, Dixie. He owns and operates Bandit Records, his own private recording studio on the ranch. Larry continues to perform live at venues and events throughout Texas and has recently recorded his latest CD, "Hangovers Sure Hang On".

Jeff Stone

Jeff Stone was born in San Antonio in 1936. He began working with area bands as early as 1953 and with a group of teenagers called The Texas Cut-Ups, he landed a radio spot on KBOP in Pleasanton around the same time Willie Nelson was deejaying there. Stone auditioned for Charlie Fitch at Sarg Records in 1956 by showing up at the record store unannounced and performing his original composition *Everybody Rock*. Fitch liked what he heard and booked time for Stone to record at ACA on September 21, 1956. Though aficionados revere the record today, at the time of its release, it barely sold. After a stint in the Air Force, Jeff Stone continued to pursue music in San Antonio. He recorded for the local Alamo Audio label circa 1965 and later Stop in Nashville, where he had a small hit with *Hey Little News Boy* under the name Bobby Stone. He toured with Marty Robbins and Willie Nelson in the early 1970s. Enjoying resurgence in popularity and interest in his music in Europe, he continues to record and release records on his own label. In 2000, on the success of his album *Stone Country*, he had 6 #1 hits in Europe and was nominated for several awards by the European CMA including 'Entertainer of The Year' and 'Male Vocalist of The Year'.



Cecil Moore

Cecil Moore was born on a farm six miles from Luling, TX on July 5, 1929. He began playing music in the late forties with Clarence 'Sleepy' Short, a fiddler who'd worked with some of the top bands in Houston and San Antonio. As a duo, Cecil and Sleepy appeared at area nightclubs like The Bluebird Inn in Kingsbury and the Shamrock Inn in Luling. The Korean War put Cecil's music career on hold for a couple of years, but by 1953 he was out of the military and forming his own band, The Notes, who took up residence at the Flamingo Club in Seguin, holding down a regular gig there for a few years in the mid-fifties. Charlie Fitch had been aware of Moore for some time, but for whatever reason did not record him until 1958 (and only then after Cecil agreed to help finance the session). Moore recorded *Walkin' Fever* and *(I Lost My) Little Baby* at ACA in Houston on March 22, 1958. Sales of the single were encouraging and for the next several years, Moore became a steady presence for the Sarg Label and the South Texas music scene. In 1964, Moore recorded the instrumental tune *Diamond Back* that went on to become the single most successful Sarg record. The response upon its initial release on April 7, 1964, was immediate. Of the radio stations that issued their own charts, *Diamond Back* hit the Top 10 in San Antonio, Houston and Austin. Atco picked the record up for national distribution and sold several thousand records. The attention Moore garnered from *Diamond Back* was inevitably brief, but fun while it lasted. He appeared on several television shows performing the tune, and managed to play some of the biggest clubs in Texas. He was also one of the opening acts for the Roy Orbison - Everly Brothers concert at the Houston Coliseum in the summer of '64, where he played his hit in front of 13,000 screaming kids. Moore continued to record for Sarg, among other labels, for the remainder of the sixties and into the seventies. He received an unexpected boost to his notoriety and income when in 1993; The Max Weinberg 7 began playing his original composition *Gotta Go* as a recurring theme song on NBC's *Late Night with Conan O'Brien*. Cecil Moore passed away on February 9, 2006.



Al Urban

Al Urban was born on a farm in Gonzales, Texas, on March 1, 1935. He began playing the guitar in his mid-teens and formed his first band, The Daybreakers, in the early fifties and obtained a regular gig at the popular Log Cabin Inn north of Luling. In 1956, Urban recorded his original songs *Lookin' For Money* and *I Don't Want To Be Alone* at Gold Star Studio in Houston. Al sent the master Tape to Charlie Fitch who agreed to release it on Sarg Records. The record debuted on November 30, 1956 receiving rave reviews from Billboard magazine. It was a modest hit and sold respectably. Urban was invited to appear on the Louisiana Hayride on the strength of the single. He was a prolific songwriter often returning to Bill Quinn's Gold Star Studio on his own dime to record his compositions. George Jones was using the same studio during the same period and the two often shared the same backing band. Charlie Fitch released four more Urban records and passed on several others. Disgruntled with Fitch, Urban started his own label, Fang to promote his releases, and eventually recorded for several other small labels as well, including Kash and Tennessee. He continued to be an active performer, but tiring of the nightly grind; he began concentrating more on songwriting. His windfall came in 1971 when Charley Pride recorded several of his songs including the hit *I'm Beginning to Believe My Own Lies* that was included on the Grammy award winning album *Charley Pride Sings Heart Songs*.



Ray Benson

Ray Benson was born March 16, 1951 in Philadelphia, PA. In 1969, Benson formed the legendary western swing band Asleep at the Wheel with Lucky Oceans and Leroy Preston. After brief stays in Washington, D.C., and San Francisco, the band (which got its record deal when Van Morrison raved about them in Rolling Stone) landed in Austin, Texas in 1973. Since then, the group has released more than 20 albums and collected eight Grammy Awards. In addition to two-all star Bob Wills tributes in the '90s, the ensemble offered a concept album *Asleep at the Wheel Remembers the Alamo* in 2003. Also that year, Benson (the only remaining founding member) released his first solo album, *Beyond Time*, which earned two Grammy nominations. In addition to his work with Asleep at the Wheel, Benson is also an accomplished producer whose credits include tracks for Willie Nelson, Aaron Neville, Pam Tillis, Merle Haggard, Dwight Yokum, Tim McGraw, Lee Ann Womack, Shawn Colvin, Lyle Lovette, The Dixie Chicks and Vince Gill. In 2005, he co-wrote, produced and starred in the musical "A Ride With Bob", a stage play about the life and music of Bob Wills.



Bill Bentley

Bill Bentley was born in 1950 and raised in Houston. He moved to Austin, TX for college and between gigs drumming in a band called LeAnne and the Bizarros with original Velvet Underground guitarist Sterling Morrison, he had a hand in the founding of The Austin Sun, a forerunner to the Austin Chronicle. After relocating to Los Angeles in 1980, he served as the music editor at the then-fledgling L.A. Weekly, now a sister paper to the Press. From there Bentley jumped to the ranks of the flacks, through which he rose slowly from indie label Slash to senior vice-president of media relations for Warner Brothers. As a publicist, he's worked Los Lobos, Elvis Costello, The Blasters, Green Day, X, Lou Reed, The Red Hot Chili Peppers, The Replacements and R.E.M. As an executive, he's helped guide the careers of the Barenaked Ladies, Kenny Wayne Shepherd, The Flaming Lips and Wilco. As a record producer, he brought to life 1990's exceptional Roky Erickson tribute, *Where the Pyramid Meets the Eye*, and most recently, the critically lauded *More Oar: A Tribute to the Skip Spence Album*. He left Warner Brothers in 2006 to become Neil Young's personal PR man. He is also the co-founder of the music webzine SonicBoomers.com.



Clyde Wallace

Clyde Wallace of Luling, Texas assembled some local musicians together in 1958 for the sole purpose of auditioning some of his original songs for Charlie Fitch and Sarg Records. Fitch told them they had potential, and if they stuck together as a group to come and see him again in six months. Wallace, along with Jimmy Bazar (lead guitar, vocals), Ross Whiteside, Jr. (tenor saxophone), Fred Frazier (rhythm guitar), Larry Voight (bass) and Alvin Smith (drums), began working together soon afterward as a result of this informal meeting. The Moods recorded their first session on June 1, 1959, at ACA. *Little Alice*, written and sung by Wallace, was pure teenage rock 'n' roll and sold all of the 1,000 copies that Fitch had pressed. They went on to release five records on Sarg, all issued within a year-and-a-half of each other in 1959-60. From the late 1950s, through the late sixties, The Moods were one of about three bands that dominated the teenage market in South Texas selling out virtually every dance they played for nearly a decade. After leaving Sarg in 1961, they continued to record for labels like TNT and Renco in San Antonio and Kool in Houston. They underwent many shifts in personnel over the years, until by the 1970s none of the original members were still in the group. Wallace recently retired from teaching and coaching and currently manages the Luling Municipal Golf Course in Luling, TX. Recently, the original members of The Moods got back together for a reunion show and were so surprised by the response that they've began playing together again on a semi-regular basis.



Dave Isbell

Dave Isbell (b. 1927) formed The Mission City Playboys in San Antonio along with steel guitarist Tiny Williamson in 1947. The Mission City Playboys are one of the few Sarg Records acts to have been acknowledged in print over the years. . not for their music, but because future stars Willie Nelson and Johnny Bush were members of the band. In 1953, a teenage Johnny Bush joined as rhythm guitarist, but later switched to drums. Willie Nelson, still strictly a guitarist, and his friend, fiddler Cozette Holland, sat in with the band one night in 1954 at the Mugwam Club in San Antonio. Dave Isbell recalls he was looking for a fiddler, and hired Nelson to appease Holland. Nelson and Bush made their recording debuts with The Mission City Playboys at a session for Sarg Records on August 9, 1954. The band remained together only for a short time after the records were released before Nelson and Isbell quit the band and turned it over to Johnny Bush who carried the group a while longer before disbanding in 1957. Disenchanted by the music scene, Isbell quit playing music altogether in the late 50s. He currently resides in San Antonio, Texas.



Arnold Parker

Arnold Parker was born January 25, 1936 in Cuero, Texas. In 1953, at the age of 17, he joined the already popular Southernairs as their featured vocalist. The Southernairs had already established themselves as one of the most popular Country and Western dance bands in South Texas. By the time they recorded their first session for Sarg at ACA (on May 2, 1954), the Southernairs had already released records for Gilt-Edge in California and Humming Bird, a label based out of Waco and Houston. Their two Sarg records stayed within the framework of traditional country music that they had already established on their early efforts. The records received a fair amount of airplay in the area, but neither sold enough for Charlie Fitch to retain interest. They went on to record for Starday in 1956 and were booked as the opening act for Elvis Presley's final appearance on 'The Louisiana Hayride' (December, 15, 1956). In 1964, Parker and lead guitarist Ken Williams regrouped and called themselves The Mustangs. The reunited with Fitch and released seven singles for Sarg Records between 1966 and 1971.

Jimmy Farmer

Jimmy Farmer was an Elvis fanatic from Lockhart, TX. He was playing in a local group called the Parques when he approached Charlie Fitch in 1962 at the suggestion of his uncle, an engineer at KTSA in San Antonio. Fitch liked Farmer's *Long Black Train* and scheduled a session at Texas Sound Studios with Cecil Moore's band, the Notes, providing the music. Although critics often cite the track as one of Sarg's better efforts, it was released to mostly deaf ears on August 25, 1962. Farmer appeared with The Notes for a short period of time after the release of his record, but soon lost interest and never recorded again.



Herby Schoelzel

Herby Schoelzel was born in Fentress, Texas on August 28, 1928 and grew up immersed in music. His family moved to San Antonio in 1941 and by 1945 he and his steel guitarist brother, Eddie, had a local radio show there three times a week. Around 1947, they both joined Tommy Hill's early band, The Texas Hillbillies. When Tommy and Goldie Hill left for Shreveport, the group disbanded, and Herby and Eddie regrouped with another band, The Bar-M Playboys. The Korean War intervened soon afterward when Schoelzel was drafted in October 1950. He returned in January of 1953 with the intention of starting his own band and persuaded his former band mates to leave the Bar-M Playboys and join his new band, The Longhorn Playboys. The band made a name for themselves playing as far South as Corpus Christi and as far North as Fredericksburg, as well as the usual local hotspots, such as the Circle B in San Antonio. Their notoriety picked up considerably when they landed a regular Friday and Saturday night gig at the infamous Barn where soon after, they were approached by Charlie Fitch who arranged for The Longhorn Playboys debut recording session in Houston. Group originals *I Suppose* and *You Ain't Foolin' Me* were recorded at ACA on March 18, 1954. Released one month later, *I Suppose* was a local hit that summer, selling close to a thousand copies. They went on to release four more singles with Sarg, but none sold as well as their debut. Schoelzel began to have misgivings about his agreement with Sarg. They split acrimoniously in 1955. The band continued to play into 1959, but unfortunately did not record again.



Doug Sahm

Douglas Wayne Sahm was born November 6, 1941, in San Antonio, Texas. Considered to be a prodigy on steel guitar, mandolin, and fiddle, he made his radio debut at age five singing "Teardrops In My Heart" on KMAC in San Antonio. He became a featured player on the Louisiana Hayride country radio program by age eight. Known as Little Doug Sahm, he would often sit in at live performances of such greats as Webb Pierce, Hank Thompson and Faron Young. In December 1952, Hank Williams took Doug on stage in Austin, Texas, less than two weeks before Williams's death. Doug released a number of singles on various local record labels, beginning at age eleven with "A Real American Joe" backed with "Rollin' Rollin'" for Sarg Records. As a teenager, Sahm was offered a regular spot on the Grand Ol' Opry in Nashville, but his mother decided that he should stay in his hometown and finish junior high school. He fronted several bands during his high school years, including the Pharaohs, the Dell-Kings, and the Markays. Although he was a child prodigy in country music, he became a significant figure in blues, rock and other genres. Today Sahm is considered one of the most important figures in Texas Music. Along with Augie Meyers, he was the founder and leader of the 1960s 'British invasion' influenced band The Sir Douglas Quintet that scored an international hit in 1965 with "She's About A Mover." In 1973, Jerry Wexler of Atlantic Records bought Sahm's contract from Mercury and produced Doug Sahm and Band, a "supergroup" album featuring Bob Dylan, Dr. John, David Bromberg, and Flaco Jimenez. Sahm and Augie Meyers continued to record together for different American labels throughout the 1970's and early 1980's and eventually reunited with Flaco Jimenez and Freddy Fender in 1989 to form a 'Tex-Mex version of the Traveling Wilburys', The Texas Tornados, who went on to produce eight albums. In 1994, Sahm re-formed The Sir Douglas Quintet with his sons Shawn and Shandon and recorded the hard rock album *Day Dreaming At Midnight*. The same year he was also the centerpiece of the more R&B influenced album *The Last Great Texas Blues Band*. In 1999, Sahm inaugurated his own label, Tornado Records, in order to continue releasing his own material, as well as producing albums by other musicians, such as Ed Bursleson. Shortly after the inauguration, Doug Sahm died November 18, 1999, while vacationing at the Kachina Inn in Taos, New Mexico. Sahm's last album of original material, *The Return of Wayne Douglas*, was released posthumously in late 2000.



Adolph Hofner

Adolph Hofner was born in Moulton, Texas, on June 8, 1916 and raised on a farm in Lavaca County, TX. Hofner's father was part German and his mother was Czech. Growing up in a primarily Czech community, Hofner heard polkas, schottisches, and other forms of local dance music. When he and his family moved to San Antonio in 1928, he and his steel guitar-playing brother, Emil, began performing in local clubs. Their sound reflected several strands of the Texas musical mosaic. Adolph was a crooner, and Emil, like other early Texas swing musicians, emulated Hawaiian sounds. After the brothers heard the pioneering music of Milton Brown and Bob Wills, they began playing the jazz-inflected country-dance music that in retrospect was labeled Western swing. Adolph, whose smooth singing style earned him the nickname the "Bing Crosby of Country," first recorded with Jimmie Revard's Oklahoma Playboys, a major musical attraction in 1930s San Antonio. Hofner also cut some sides as a solo vocalist and performed on vocals with Tom Dickey's Show Boys. His lead vocals on "It Makes No Difference Now" became a hit in its own right and inspired Hofner to form his own band in 1939. At first the band was known as Adolph Hofner & His Texans, but when they began recording for Okeh and Columbia in the early '40s with the addition of fiddler J.R. Chatwell, they were called the San Antonians. Among their best-known tunes were "Maria Elena" and "Alamo Rag." The band spent the early '40s working in southern California, and during World War II, he briefly changed his stage name from Adolph to Dolph to avoid association with Adolf Hitler. After the war he began using his own name again, and in 1949 returned to Texas and in honor of new sponsor Pearl Beer, Hofner's band became the Pearl Wranglers. He claimed to have been the first to record the classic "Cotton Eyed Joe" (1941), which has since become a standard. They recorded for the Sarg label for many years and were fixtures of San Antonio music through the 1980s. He was best known in the Texas Hill Country and the Valley as a tireless performer who knew exactly what the people wanted come Saturday night and continued to perform up until 1993 when he was slowed by a stroke. He was a durable musical icon of south Texas who helped shape Western swing, and whose dual career as a swing bandleader and Czech dance musician showed the ways in which Western swing had roots in Central European dance traditions. Hofner died of lung cancer in San Antonio on June 2, 2000. His many honors include induction into the Country Music Hall of Fame, Texas Western Swing Hall of Fame, Texas Polka Music Association Hall of Fame, Country Music Association of Texas Hall of Fame, and Western Swing Society Hall of Fame.



Willie Nelson

Willie Nelson was born April 30, 1933, and raised in Abbott, Texas. His grandparents gave him mail-order music lessons starting at age six. He wrote his first song when he was seven and was playing in a local band at age nine. Nelson made his recording debut as lead guitarist for Dave Isbell and the Mission City Playboys released on Sarg Records in August 1954. The earliest known recordings of Nelson and his original compositions are a demo tape sent to Charlie Fitch in 1955 (later released by Sarg Records) that he had recorded at radio station KBOP in Pleasanton, TX while on break from his job as early morning deejay. Charlie Fitch passed on the young singer/songwriter opting not to extend a recording contract. Nelson went on to become an American icon. As a songwriter and a performer, Willie Nelson played a vital role in post-rock & roll country music. Although he didn't become a star until the mid-'70s, Nelson spent the '60s writing songs that became hits for stars like Ray Price ("Night Life"), Patsy Cline ("Crazy"), Faron Young ("Hello Walls"), and Billy Walker ("Funny How Time Slips Away") as well as releasing a series of records on Liberty and RCA that earned him a small, but devoted, cult following. During the early '70s, Willie aligned himself with Waylon Jennings and the burgeoning outlaw country movement that made him into a star in 1975. Following the crossover success of that year's *The Red Headed Stranger* and "Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain," Nelson was a genuine star, as recognizable in pop circles as he was to the country audience; in addition to recording, he also launched an acting career in the early '80s. Even when he was a star, Willie never played it safe musically. Instead, he borrowed from a wide variety of styles, including traditional pop, Western swing, jazz, traditional country, cowboy songs, honky tonk, rock & roll, folk, and the blues, creating a distinctive, elastic hybrid. He's recorded 250 albums, written 2,500 songs, and for half a century played countless concerts across America and around the world. He's been instrumental in shaping both country and pop music, yet his appeal crosses all social and economic lines. He remains a vital icon in country music, having greatly influenced the new country, new traditionalist, and alternative country movements of the '80s and '90s as well as leaving behind a legacy of classic songs and recordings.

Sources and Acknowledgments

Biographical information is based off of personal interviews with and documents maintained by Charlie Fitch, music historians and various Sarg recording artists. However, the producers would like to acknowledge the following bibliographic sources, and especially, the research and writings of Andrew Brown for his book accompaniment to *The Sarg Records Anthology* CD Box Set, which was an invaluable resource to the production of the documentary.

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Crew Bios

Damon Cook – Producer / Director

DAMON COOK graduated from the University of Oklahoma with a Journalism degree. He is now a documentary filmmaker based out of Brooklyn, New York. He began his career in 2001 as co-Producer of the now cult-classic, *Okie Noodling*, an award-winning documentary film that captures the offbeat clandestine sport of barehanded fishing in Oklahoma that continues to have encore PBS broadcasts. He was the Associate Producer of the critically acclaimed 2005 documentary *The Fearless Freaks*, a film chronicling the 25-year career of the band the Flaming Lips that screened theatrically worldwide and subsequently broadcast on the Sundance Channel. Most recently, he was the Associate Producer of *Summercamp!*, a film following the day-to-day drama of 90 kids let loose in the woods at Swift Nature Camp in northern Wisconsin that premiered at the 2006 Toronto International Film Festival and later aired on the Sundance Channel. He currently works freelance in all aspects of film and television production and has amassed nearly 40 broadcast credits on non-fiction/reality series or specials.

Dan Pringle – Producer / Editor

DAN PRINGLE studied Film and Video Production at the University of Oklahoma and began his career at the PBS affiliate station, OETA, in Oklahoma City. In 2002, he co-founded the multi-media production company Sunflower Press where he handled all aspects of production on various documentaries, shorts, music videos, industrials and commercials. He was the editor of 2003's *Making Arrangements*, a comedic feature film focusing on the frenetic world of a high-end flower shop. Most recently, he was the Assistant Editor of *Christmas on Mars*, a science fiction feature film from the Oklahoma psychedelic alternative rock band the Flaming Lips. In 2004, he relocated to Los Angeles where he now works in film and television production and post-production as a freelance sound mixer and editor.

Amy Cargill – Associate Producer

AMY CARGILL graduated from The University of Oklahoma and is a multimedia/film editor in Chicago, Illinois. Her credits include *Nice Bombs*, distributed by Seventh Art Releasing and *Garbage: The Revolution*, which premiered at Hot Docs!, both of which are currently airing on the Sundance Channel. She was recently part of the editorial team for *The Calling*, a four-part documentary series about religion in the U.S. to be broadcast in 2009 on PBS. Amy is currently the senior editor for *Tony and Janina's American Wedding*, Ruth Leitman's documentary film about immigration, executive produced by Kartemquin Films. Amy serves on the Board of Directors for IFP Chicago, works with the Chicago History Museum as a digital archivist maintaining the Studs Terkel audio archives, and runs a multimedia company under the name Normal Pictures Inc.

Credits

FRONT CREDITS

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A PRIVATE CORPORATION FUNDED BY THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

PRODUCED BY

DAMON COOK AND DAN PRINGLE

STARRING

CHARLIE FITCH

END CREDITS

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THIS PROGRAM VISIT WWW.ITVS.ORG

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DAMON COOK

EDITED BY

DAN PRINGLE

ASSOCIATE PRODUCER

AMY CARGILL

MUSIC COURTESY OF

SARG RECORDS

CINEMATOGRAPHY

DAMON COOK

BRADLEY BEESLEY

ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY

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BENJAMIN STEINBAUER

LOCATION SOUND

ERIC DAVISON

JAMES PAYNE

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT

JOHN WHITAKER

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JIM FOGLE

SUSIE HOFNER

THE INSTITUTE OF TEXAS CULTURES, SAN ANTONIO

DAVE ISBELL

JIM LOWE

CECIL AND ANNE MOORE

LARRY NOLEN

SHAWN SAHM

HERBY SCHOELZEL

JEFF STONE

AL URBAN

'THE SARG RECORDS ANTHOLOGY: SOUTH TEXAS 1954-1964', 1999
COURTESY OF BEAR FAMILY RECORDS, ARTWORK BY WOLFGANG TAUBENAUER

COVER PHOTOS BY BARON WOLMAN FROM *ROLLING STONE*, 12/7/1968 AND 7/8/1971.

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"LOOKIN FOR MONEY"

WRITTEN AND PERFORMED BY AL URBAN

"WON'T TELL YOU HER NAME"

WRITTEN AND PERFORMED BY AL URBAN

"WALKIN' FEVER"

WRITTEN AND PERFORMED BY CECIL MOORE

"DIAMONDBACK"

WRITTEN BY CECIL MOORE

PERFORMED BY CECIL MOORE & THE NOTES

"DON'T GO TELLIN' LIES ON ME"

WRITTEN AND PERFORMED BY NEAL MERRITT

"YOU DID ME WRONG"

WRITTEN BY O.S. GRANT

PERFORMED BY THE DOWNBEATS

"THE STORM HAS JUST BEGUN"

WRITTEN AND PERFORMED BY WILLIE NELSON

"SOMEONE YOU USED TO KNOW"

WRITTEN BY HARMON BOAZEMAN & THELMA CRISTOFOLETTE

PERFORMED BY HARMON BOAZEMAN & THE CIRCLE C BAND

"BABY, I JUST WANT YOU"

WRITTEN BY FLOYD TILLMAN & CAMERON HILL

PERFORMED BY FLOYD TILLMAN

"A REAL AMERICAN JOE"

WRITTEN BY RANDALL P. PHILLIPS JR., DOUGLAS WAYNE SAHM

PERFORMED BY LIL' DOUG SAHM

"I NEED YOU NOW"

WRITTEN BY JIMMIE CRANE & AL JACOBS

PERFORMED BY LARRY NOLEN & THE BANDITS

"BANDERA WALTZ"

WRITTEN BY EASY ADAMS

PERFORMED BY ADOLPH HOFNER & THE PEARL WRANGLERS

"GONNA BE BETTER TIMES"

WRITTEN AND PERFORMED BY AL URBAN

"I DON'T WANT TO BE ALONE"

WRITTEN AND PERFORMED BY AL URBAN

"I LOST MY LITTLE BABY"

WRITTEN AND PERFORMED BY CECIL MOORE

"MY MONEY'S GONE"

WRITTEN BY CECIL MOORE

PERFORMED BY CECIL MOORE W/ RAY'S TRIO

"OH, PLEASE"

WRITTEN BY O.S. GRANT

PERFORMED BY THE DOWNBEATS

"HILLBILLY LOVE SONG"

WRITTEN AND PERFORMED BY WILLIE NELSON

"ROCKIN' ROMANE"

WRITTEN BY BILL GIADN

PERFORMED BY THE MIDNIGHTERS

"YOU AIN'T FOOLIN' ME"

WRITTEN BY HERBY SHOELZEL, H. EDWIN & JOHN MAXWELL

PERFORMED BY HERBY SHOZEL & THE LONGHORN PLAYBOYS

"I GET SO LONESOME"

WRITTEN BY EDDIE BOWERS & WILBUR L. MAPLES

PERFORMED BY ADOLPH HOFNER & THE PEARL WRANGLERS

"ROLLIN' ROLLIN'"

WRITTEN BY RANDALL P. PHILLIPS JR.

PERFORMED BY LIL' DOUG SAHM

"THE TICKLE-TOE SONG"

WRITTEN BY EMIL HOFNER

PERFORMED BY ADOLPH HOFNER & THE PEARL WRANGLERS

"PIPLINER BLUES"

WRITTEN BY MOON MULLICAN

PERFORMED BY ADOLPH HOFNER & THE PEARL WRANGLERS

"THEN I FOUND YOU"
WRITTEN BY FREDDIE FRANKLIN JOHNSON
PERFORMED BY PECK TOUCHTON & THE SUNSET WRANGLERS

"LITTLE COQUETTE"
WRITTEN BY JOHNNY W. GREEN
PERFORMED BY NEAL MERRITT

"HIGH AND DRY"
WRITTEN BY BILL GANNON & BILL HOLFORD
PERFORMED BY LARRY NOLEN & THE BANDITS

"DOWN IN BRAZOS VALLEY"
WRITTEN BY JOE ADAMS
PERFORMED BY FIDDLIN' WILLIE & HIS OZARK PALS

"PISTOL PACKIN' MAMA"
WRITTEN BY AL DEXTER
PERFORMED BY ADOLPH HOFNER & THE PEARL WRANGLERS

"DON'T MAKE ME LATE BABY"
WRITTEN BY LUCIAN J. DAVIS JR.
PERFORMED BY EARL GILLIAM

"HILLBILLY LOVE AFFAIR"
WRITTEN BY LARRY NOLEN & WILBUR L. MAPLES
PERFORMED BY LARRY NOLEN & THE BANDITS

ADDITIONAL MUSIC

"COUNTRY SONGS AND ANGELS"
WRITTEN BY AL URBAN
PERFORMED BY AL URBAN (LIVE)

"MILK COW BLUES"
WRITTEN BY KOKOMO ARNOLD
ANDERSON PERFORMED BY WILLIE NELSON (LIVE)

"SHE'S ABOUT A MOVER"
WRITTEN BY DOUGLAS WAYNE SAHM
PERFORMED BY THE SIR DOUGLAS QUINTET (LIVE)

"PLEASE TALK TO MY HEART"
WRITTEN BY JIMMY W. FAUTHEREE & JOHNNY MATHIS
PERFORMED BY LARRY NOLEN (LIVE)

"TWO OF A KIND"
WRITTEN BY AL URBAN
PERFORMED BY AL URBAN (LIVE)

"I'M A LONESOME FUGITIVE"
WRITTEN BY CLARENCE S. ANDERSON & ELIZABETH J.
PERFORMED BY CECIL MOORE (LIVE)

"I'M BEGINNING TO BELIEVE MY OWN LIES"
WRITTEN BY AL URBAN
PERFORMED BY AL URBAN (LIVE)

THE PRODUCERS WISH TO THANK

CHARLIE FITCH AND FAMILY, THE COOKS, THE PRINGLES, THE ENTIRE STAFF AT ITVS, AND ALL OF OUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS FOR MAKING THIS PROGRAM POSSIBLE

SPECIAL THANKS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

AMERICAN LEGION POST 177
ASLEEP AT THE WHEEL
AUSTIN CITY LIMITS
AUSTIN RECORD CONVENTION
AUSTIN RECORDING STUDIO
TREY BAILEY
STEVE BATINICH
BBC
KEN BENEDICT
RAY BENSON
BILL BENTLEY
DANIELLE BEVERLEY
NADINE BLINN
THE BROKEN SPOKE
JOHNNY BUSH
ANDREW BROWN
CHEETHAM STREET WAREHOUSE

MARLA COOK
MARTIN COULTER
ROBBY CRONHOLM
COW PALACE RESTAURANT
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JIMMY FOGLE
ABEL GONZALEZ
GONZALEZ CATTLE AUCTION
DOUG HANNERS
THE INSTITUTE OF TEXAS CULTURES
DAVE ISBELL
B. JEFF STONE
FLETCHER JOHNSON
DAVE KATZNELSON
KCTI, GONZALEZ, TX
LONG BRANCH SALOON, GONZALEZ, TX
LOTTIE'S, GONZALEZ, TX
JIM LOWE
LULING CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
THE LULING EAGLES
LULING MUNICIPAL GOLF COURSE
LULING PRIMARY SCHOOL
THE LULING WATERMELON THUMP COMMITTEE
JOE MARRONE
CHET MCINTYRE
ELIZABETH MEYER
CECIL MOORE
ANNE MOORE
LARRY NOLEN
THE O'NEAL BROS.
ARNOLD PARKER
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WOLFGANG TAUBENAUER
HANK THOMPSON
BILL THRASH
TIGER TOTE, LULING, TX
MARY TILLER
MICHAEL TOLAND
WINK TYLER
AL URBAN
CLYDE WALLACE
WATERLOO RECORDS, AUSTIN, TX
BROOKE WENTZ
JAMES WHITE
PATRICK WICKHAM
ROSETTA WILLS

JOE WOODS
PRICE WOOLRIDGE
DANNY YOUNG

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ITVS is a miracle of public policy created by media activists, citizens and politicians seeking to foster plurality and diversity in public television. ITVS was established by a historic mandate of Congress to champion independently produced programs that take creative risks, spark public dialogue and serve underserved audiences. Since its inception in 1991, ITVS programs have revitalized the relationship between the public and public television, bringing TV audiences face-to-face with the lives and concerns of their fellow Americans.

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