

Who are these fuzzy guys from Oklahoma?

Turnpike Troubadours to headline the 2013 Texas Music Revolution on March 9

By Mary Jane Farmer

THEY'VE PAID THEIR DUES. THEY'VE played in the bars where nobody listened, just drank beer and cried out for cover songs. They've given up their day jobs. And now, after a decade of growth, it's paying off for the Turnpike Troubadours, the band who admittedly looks back, way back, for its musical inspirations.

The Turnpike Troubadours began playing in and around their Oklahoma stomping grounds, in smaller bars and honky tonks, in what some might call having been paid to practice. Then something strange began to happen.

They noticed that their crowds began to become a little more attentive, and then that those crowds began to swell. Then, some of those fans began showing up at new venues. As the band broadened its touring circle, they created more fans in larger venues across Texas and Oklahoma. That touring circle now sends them across the U.S. and, in April, The Turnpike Troubadours will be making their second sojourn across the big pond to play in Sweden and Norway. A look at their tour schedule shows them burning up the turnpikes and highways in their big ol' bus — Arkansas to Central Texas, back to Oklahoma to Nashville, and then Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, round and round.

R. C. Edwards said the band is just as excited about another stop on their current calendar — the March 9 Texas Music Revolution at Southfork Ranch in Parker, presented annually by KHYI, the Dallas-based radio station.

The station's general manager, Joshua Jones, said he was already a fan of the band when, "I was in Nashville several months ago for a conference and they were the one single band that everyone in Nashville was buzzing about. I don't think they're going to be the next big thing in Texas and/or Red Dirt music... because I think they're going to be the next big thing in American music. They're going to be that big."

TMR lineup

EDWARDS SAID, "IT'S ONE of the coolest line-ups I've seen in a long time. These are my best friends and people we've seen on the road. American Aquarium is a band a lot of Texas people don't know yet, and Jason (Boland), well, that alone makes it an incredible line-up." And, he added, the Dirty River Boys have become good friends of theirs, on and off the road.

Several other bands on the TMR line-up have shared stages with the Turnpike Troubadours over time, and so many of them have also become good road buddies. Edwards said there have

been many bands who have opened for them, some are better than others, and some have played before them more than once, and they have always enjoyed getting to listen to them all, Edwards said.

Edwards wasn't aware of the entire Texas Music Revolution line-up until recently, and, like other music lovers, exclaimed with joy as he heard names of others who will be at Southfork Ranch ... that Chris Knight will be there evoked excitement, The Bigsby's (2012 Shiner Rising Stars) brought anticipation, and Uncle Lucius brought familiarity.

"We would never have thought it," said bass player Edwards. "These fuzzy guys from Oklahoma, guys that have no business being in this business... and it's kind of fun to do it."

Influences

EVAN FELKNER, LEAD VOCALIST for the band, said on the band's Website, "We all pretty much grew up with hardcore country music around us. I mean, sure, there was rock stuff in there, but the real old-school stuff, plus exposure to folks like Jason

Boland and Cross Canadian Ragweed, really affected what we were playing." Felkner added, "We're really a product of both our influences and our environment. It (their sound) wasn't something that we sat in a room and dreamed up in one day."

One of the older bands Edwards could compare The Turnpike Troubadours with was the '30s originated Light Crust Doughboys. "We play the same type of scenes they played, we travel the dance halls and venues like they did, and a lot of sounds we do is that Texas swing." Fiddle player Kyle Nix contributes greatly to that compelling Texas sound, and, Edwards said, "It all comes down to people getting out and dancing and having fun when they hear it."

Drummer Gabe Pearson played with Rodney Parker & 50 Peso Reward before he got on with board the Turnpike Troubadours. Ryan Engleman, as their lead guitar player, rounds out the group and all five men contribute to the vocals.

In a virtual round-table question-and-answer session, singer-songwriter Robby White asked the band about their early influences, "Those boys' music is deeply rooted, and obviously inspired by old school American music. What sparked them to look backwards to find those inspirations?"

Edwards explained, "Your first influence is going to be whatever your folks had laying

around, folk, bluegrass, and we grew up in a time when Jason (Boland) and (Cross Canadian) Ragweed, and the Great Divide were making this kind of music popular. Then you see all the people who influenced them, and that leads you back from Jason Boland to Todd Snider to John Prine to Townes Van Zandt, and you end up getting a good recipe to find out why you like what you like. The bluegrass feel, it's what people have been doing for a couple hundred years.

Yeah, it's deeper roots.

Another curious songwriter was Grady Yates, soon releasing his newest CD himself. His questions revolved around the advisability of printing out hands-on CDs in today's music world technology. "Are they still viable, or only used as merch (merchandise) at a live show?" Yates asked. Edwards' reply was, basically, 'yes' and 'no.'

The biggest change in the music industry over the past 10 years has been in technology, with so many people downloading their music from the Internet. But, he added, CDs are necessary in the merch line at live shows, even though they don't sell as many CDs as were sold in years gone by.

"And now vinyl is back," Edwards added. "It's where we all started." It's so much fun to hold up a vinyl record at a show."

Sometime, in the virtual or the real world, people can ask questions without quite as much

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depth, but one of those posed in this discussion indirectly asked how the band perceives its influence on its fans and other musicians.

They take that as a serious responsibility, Edwards said, always remembering how those who came before them influenced them, and how some with whom they will cross professional paths in the future will also inspire them. KHYI's Big Gus Samuelson described the band members, "They are among the nicest people you will ever meet in this industry, good people." Edwards liked that compliment when he heard it, but called themselves just people who love doing what they do, and loved the people they work with.

Another music business professional, Joe Standifer with Overdrive Entertainment, who

worked with the band at a 2012 gig, queried,

"What's the one thing that made you realize that this could be something bigger than you first thought?" Edwards replied, "It's hard to say just one thing... it can't be just one thing. We all played in other bands, and it was this one that made me believe in this band. It was just a feeling that we could do something good."

Over the years, The Turnpike Troubadours have recorded three CD projects, and their creative process changes each time. Edwards answered Greg White's (SG Studios) question about that process thusly: "They (the CDs) have all been slightly different. Evan will write or I will write or we will write together. Then we will bring that to the group, get a melody in place, and see if it works really good for the band. Most of the times, before we record, we've played the songs live, until by the time we get to the studio, we may have played a song for a year. So it's arranged already. Other times, it's brand new and we will arrange it in the studio."

Zane Williams, also playing TMR, was curious if the band could "ever hear themselves on mainstream country radio," or even if they're even trying to go that route.

Edwards responded again, saying, "Up here in Oklahoma, we don't have as many stations dedicated to Texas music as there are in Texas, and so mainstream stations are the ones playing it here. And that's how it is around the rest of the country, with a few exceptions. We're happy to have any mainstream station play us." He roundabout-said that they would consider recording elsewhere, too, definitely-saying "as long as the music sounds like we want it to."

The Turnpike Troubadours will be the closing band on the two-stage, eleven-hour Texas Music Revolution line-up.

For more on The Turnpike Troubadours, go to turnpiketroubadours.com and for info on the Texas Music Revolution visit KHYI.com. ■



One of the older bands they have been compared to is the Light Crust Doughboys: Turnpike Troubadours