

## DON RICARDO'S REPORT FROM THE HIGH RHINE... JANUARY 2015

I thought I would copy and send along a review of our *Gulf Coast Tales* CD we released independently last year. This comes from William Michael Smith writing in the summer 2014 edition of *Texas Music*. William Michael has a keen eye for bullshit— and a keen ear—which is a useful thing for a Texas music writer to have. When I wrote asking for a link to the review, he said the magazine did not provide links. I thought that was remarkable enough in itself:

“Some years back Houston-born singer-songwriter Richard Dobson published a memoir titled *Gulf Coast Boys*, a poignant but raucous look back at chaotic road trips with Townes Van Zandt’s traveling circus; tours on drilling rigs and shrimp boats; local bars and foreign ports; wild, rough men and wilder, rougher women. Dobson’s similarly titled album *Gulf Coast Tales* is a friendly companion to the book; in fact, some songs seem like condensed poetic versions of stories from it. Dobson’s reedy Texas lilt is perfect for these tall tales and taller truths. Standouts include “All of this Was Mine,” a song based on a Galveston Daily News story about a survivor of the 1900 Storm, “Corpus Christi Harbor,” which details a hurricane party on a work boat, and “Down on the Trinity River,” wherein Dobson and his gal hole up in the backwoods of East Texas and survive like isolated country folks, living without electricity, shooting, catching, or growing their food, seeing no one for days. Dobson wisely pads the album out with four delicious covers: Sergio Webb’s “Eastern Steamship Line,” Jesse Winchester’s wistful Biloxi,” Rodney Crowell’s “Leaving Louisiana in the Broad Daylight,” and Ian MacColl’s Pogues anthem “Dirty Old Town, which Dobson observes might have been written about Dublin, Ireland, but suffices perfectly well as a depiction of Beaumont or Texas City. Filled with Dobson’s old-Texas gravitas, the album casts a loving spotlight on the Gulf Coast and its lazy way of life. Recorded in Elgin, Texas, by Texans for Texans, you can almost feel the presence of Townes and Fromholz in the room when Dobson intones, “The sun goes down like whiskey.”

I had a grand time performing the album in Elgin with the full studio band back in November, taking the show down to the Old Quarter on Galveston Island, and in a trio with Franci Jarrard and Lynette Perkins for a Catfish Concert Series show in Austin. We spent more time in the Hill Country town of Llano this year, working on songs with author–songwriter W.C. Jameson. Encouraged by our collaborations so far, we’ve booked studio time for next spring. I also started a couple of songs with Mike Blakely, my other author-songster friend who lives down the road by Lake Buchanan. I enjoyed three days of quiet and solitude there on a deer stand, and took a doe in the fading light of the last afternoon.

As we have in years past, Edith and I drove to our friends Thomm and Eva Jutz’s place outside Nashville for Christmas. Sergio Webb and his wife Julie, his mom and sister came over Christmas day, and old friend the “Road Mangler,” Phil Kaufman. Speaking of old friends, we enjoyed a good visit with Guy Clark, with Cathryn Craig and Brian Willoughby, Charley Stefl and his wife Janice, and Hugh Moffatt. There were more people we’re sorry we missed. As always, we ran out of time. I did get in some productive work with Thomm, however, finishing three songs in as many sessions. I even wrote one of my own, though I haven’t yet found music for it.

Saying goodbye, we started the long drive back to Texas New Year’s day, making it far as South Little Rock. Using a map we picked up the next morning at the Welcome Center in Texarkana, we left the Interstate and followed State Hwy 151 down through East Texas, stopping the second

night in Palestine. We drove on to Elgin the next day, arriving in the early afternoon on January 3<sup>rd</sup>. To think there was a time we used to make this drive straight-through! Of course, we were younger then, and had stuff to keep us awake.

The last few days went by with chores, laundry and packing, servicing the car, and a final trip to Austin for lunch with old friend and music colleague George Enslie. We had a goodbye dinner with our hosts, Stephen and Franci, a slow-roasted deer shoulder. With the best of intentions, we went early to bed the evening of the 7<sup>th</sup>, but sleep eluded us. Lyse drove us to the airport in Austin early the next morning, where to our surprise we were allowed to bypass TSA security. I guess we've now reached the stage where we are no longer considered to be credible terrorist threats; I didn't even have to take off my boots.

Edith's brother Rudolf met us at the airport in Zurich, and my ears took in the familiar sounds of *Schweizerduetch* as they chatted on the drive home. Back to our aerie atop the house called *Zum Ochsen* in this old town by the Rhine; back to the book where I've put Tom and Sarah on their way to Galveston and fate awaiting. Leapfrogging over backstory I can't yet supply, they have checked into a hotel in Houston near the train station. Tired from their journey, she takes a luxurious bath down the hall. The year is 1899 and there is a sink in the room where he washes up. She comes back from her bath and clicks the door shut, and they get after it.

I wish everyone peaceful and productive times in this still new 2015. Some interesting shows are coming up ahead, and the new calendar will go up on the website along with this letter. As always I urge everyone to support independent art and artists. Thanks, and looking forward to seeing you down the trail.

Richard J. Dobson  
Diessenhofen am Rhein, 22 January 2015

[www.richard-j-dobson.ch](http://www.richard-j-dobson.ch)

Books and records available through [www.mytexasmusic.com](http://www.mytexasmusic.com) . They also have signed 1<sup>st</sup> Edition copies of *Gulf Coast Boys*. Books in both print and Kindle are available through [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)