

Oak Cliff History

Stories of Important

Happenings and Events in Oak Cliff's Past

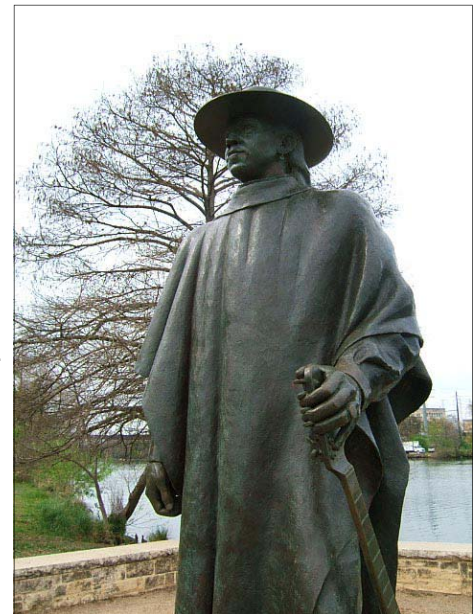
Stevie, Rock on!

Alan C. Elliott

Stevie Ray Vaughn adored the guitar. Inspired by his older brother Jimmie, he picked up a guitar at the age of seven, and (seemingly) never put it down again. Classmates remember him as far back as elementary school (Lenore Kirk Hall Elementary in the Oak Cliff section of Dallas) walking the halls and playing an air guitar.

One day during Stevie's junior year at Dallas's Kimball High School, September 18, 1970, news flashed on the radio reporting that Jimi Hendrix, the super-sonic electric guitar rock superstar, had died in London. At the news, Stevie Ray's world crumbled. He made his way to the principal's office, upset and angry, and asked that a memorial assembly be held to honor Jimi. According to Stevie, the principal called Hendrix a dope head, refused the suggestion, and ushered Stevie out of his office.

After leaving high school without graduating, Stevie devoted all of his time to his music and moved to the musical heartbeat of Texas (Austin). By 1975 he was playing in a band called



Statue in Austin, Texas

the Cobras. The group became well known and popular at local nightclubs giving Stevie the chance to develop his style in the presence of the Austin music culture.

In 1977, Stevie left the Cobras for a new gig with blues singer Lou Ann Barton named Triple Threat. The group enjoyed local success, but were not a break-out band. Stevie tried again. He started a new band called Double Trouble. In 1979, Barton left the group. (She remained in Austin and became known as one of the “finest purveyors of raw, unadulterated roadhouse blues.”) Double Trouble continued to play the Austin circuit with

A local tribute to Dallas's favorite blues artist can be found at the Hard Rock Café on McKinney Avenue. Look for the Stevie Ray Vaughan memorial wall to the left of the stage.

Stevie as the lead singer. In 1982, they received an invitation to appear at the Montreux Jazz Festival in Switzerland where they played the venue with stars including Charles Lloyd, The Steve Miller Band, Mink De Ville, Dave Brubeck, Jimmy Cliff, David Bowie and Jackson Browne. After the group's impressive set, David Bowie asked Stevie to play on an upcoming album and Jackson Browne offered free recording time for the group in his Los Angeles studio. Stevie accepted both offers. He played on Bowie's *Let's Dance* Album released in late April, 1983. His group then used Browne's studio in L.A. to record their first album, *Texas Flood*.

Double Trouble's *Texas Flood* reached a notable number 38 on the charts and found significant playtime on rock radio stations. With one success under his belt, Stevie tried for two. Double Trouble's follow-up album in 1984, *Couldn't Stand the Weather*, was an even greater success, reaching number 31 on the charts and going gold. Their third album, *Soul to Soul*, released in 1985 reached number 34 on the charts. Combined, the three early efforts by Double Trouble successes catapulted Stevie Ray Vaughn from a regional artist to national blues star.

Success can be difficult. Stevie buckled under the growing pressure to produce and sunk into alcoholism and drug addiction. He pushed himself to produce a fourth album, *Live Alive* in

1986. In the fall of 1986, he checked himself into a rehabilitation clinic.

After a month in rehab, Stevie emerged with renewed energy. He came out with a conviction to stay straight and even refused drinks containing caffeine but his creativity remained intact. The album *Step*, released in 1989 quickly soared in the charts and became Double Trouble's most successful effort to date earning a Grammy for Best Contemporary Blues Recording and going gold in six months.

In 1990, Stevie recorded a new album called *Family Style* (that included his guitarist brother Jimmie who had played with the Fabulous Thunderbirds) and set out on another American tour. On August 26, 1990, he played a concert that also included Eric Clapton, Buddy Guy, Robert Clay and his brother Jimmie Vaughan. The show ended with a powerful 20-minute rendition of "Sweet Home Chicago." Buddy Guy would later recall, "It was one of the most incredible sets I ever heard Stevie play. I had goose bumps."

After the concert Stevie boarded a helicopter bound for Chicago. It crashed seconds after takeoff, killing Vaughan and four other passengers. At age 35, Stevie's stormy ride had come to an early end.

Vaughan's departing album, *Family Style*, soared to number seven on the charts after its release in 1990. Since then a number of unreleased songs, remastered albums, and tribute records have hit the charts honoring the unique Vaughn style that continues to influence Blues and Rock music today. There is an old saying that "The good they seem to die young." Stevie Ray Vaughn's career was cut short and yet this emotional, talented, determined, and passionate Texas guitar plucker is now considered to be one of the most influential guitarists of the 20th century.

A memorial statue of Stevie Ray Vaughan, dedicated on November 21, 1993, is located

on Town Lake, near the site of SRV's last Austin concert. On the anniversary of his death fans often place flowers and personal notes of remembrance at the base of the statue.

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