

Three second-generation Austin musicians reflect on making music, their careers and their famous fathers.

Quick pop quiz: What do the following music acts have in common?

The Wallflowers, Arlo Guthrie, Nelson and Rufus Wainwright. ● If you said they're all second-generation sons of celebrated musicians, step into the spotlight. (The Wallflowers' front man is Jakob Dylan, son of Bob; Arlo is the folk-singing offspring of Woody; Nelson is the '80s pop duo comprised of the twin sons of pop pioneer and teen idol Rick Nelson; Rufus Wainwright is the offspring of singer-songwriter Loudon Wainwright III.) ● If you think they've had an easy ticket on the Starlight Express, think again. ● Whether trying to crack the national Top 40—or just trying to break into the Austin music scene—being the son or daughter of an established music star is no free backstage pass to stardom. Your name may get you in the door, but without the talent, chops and tenacity, your moment in the spotlight will be short-lived. It's a double-edged sword that can swing both ways: cutting a quick path to success, or

RISING SONS

slicing off a musician's own artistic legs before he even breaks out of the gate. Some—like Jeff Buckley (the late son of '60s folksinger Tim Buckley), Norah Jones (daughter of Indian sitar master Ravi Shankar), and the Dixie Chicks' Natalie Maines (daughter of Austin musician and producer Lloyd Maines)—have equaled or even surpassed their parents' accomplishments. Many more have had a brief moment of glory, only to disappear in less time than a 3-minute single. Some wildcards (Lisa Marie Presley, anyone?) have yet to make their mark one way or the other. ● In the last few years, Austin has given birth to a bumper crop of second-generation musicians who have inherited the mixed blessings of their fathers' names. It's tough enough being the offspring of a national or worldwide icon (just ask Julian Lennon), but being the progeny of a local legend in a music Mecca like Austin can be equal parts daunting and rewarding.

TEXT BY STEVE UHLER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEVEN NORYEKO



THE KEGS ARE PRIMED and the crowd gathers early for Colin Gilmore's in-store mini-show at Waterloo Records. As employees hand out free beer, a line of fans and curious customers begins to snake around the CD bins, stretching nearly to the cash register.

Climbing onto the tiny stage, the 29-year-old singer/songwriter nods to his crunched three-piece band, taps out a count with his boot heel and launches into a short but vibrant set of cuts from his new solo CD, *The Day the World Stopped and Spun the Other Way*. Coincidentally released the same day, his dad's new Flatlanders CD receives extensive national press, but this is not the first time his father has upstaged him. For the record, however, many critics are giving *The Day the World Stopped* higher marks than his dad's latest.

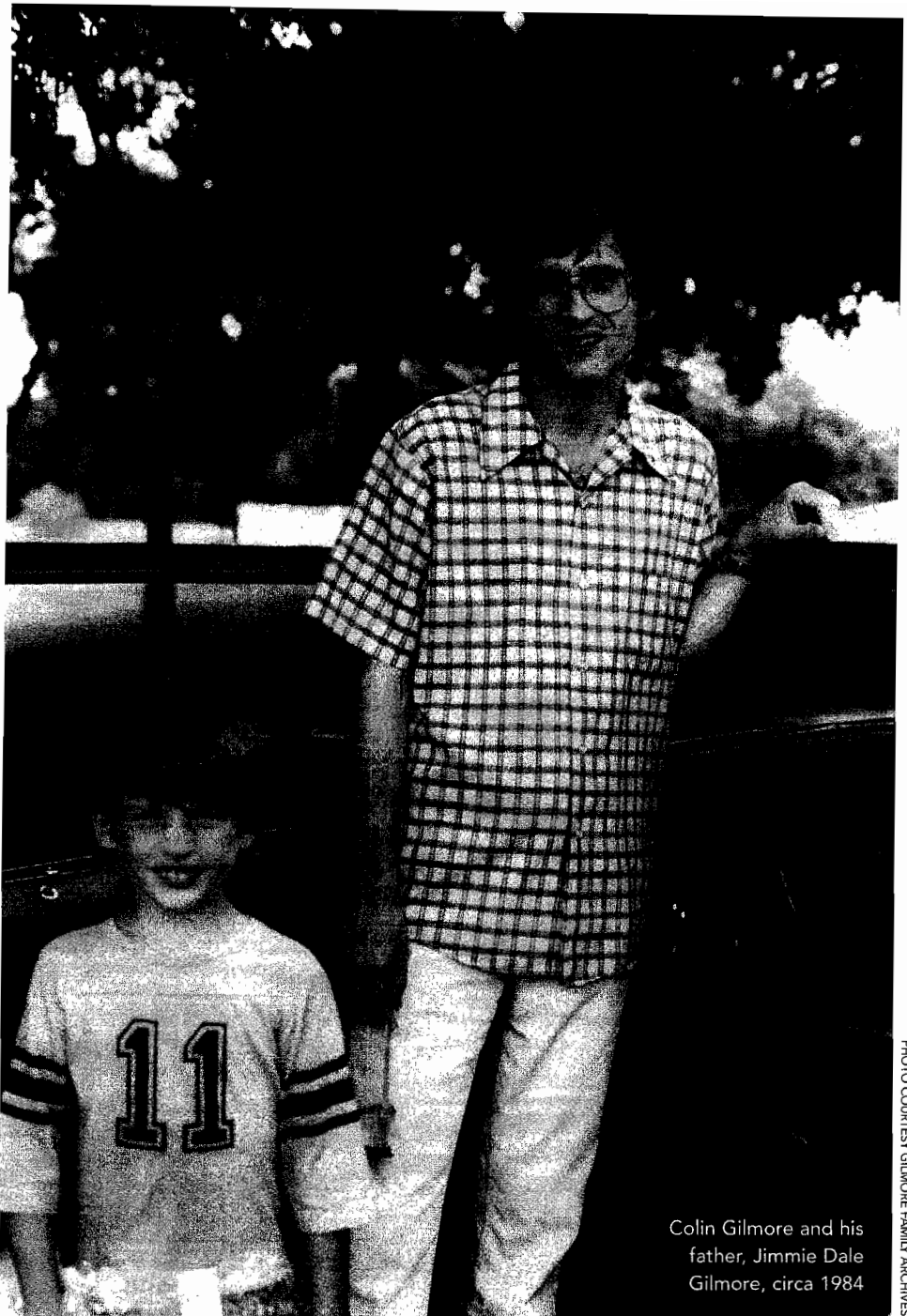
Colin's music—an amiable hybrid of rockabilly, country and rock—begins to attract passersby from outside, and the growing crowd gives him a hometown boy's welcome. By the end of the set, the beer line transforms itself into an autograph line, and Colin obligingly signs CDs and accepts compliments. With tousled hair, the flannel-clad Colin bears a more than passing resemblance to his father, singer/songwriter/Flatlander Jimmie Dale Gilmore. Colin's voice carries a soft echo of the old man's familiar nasal twang, but the music itself is both sunnier and edgier than his dad's signature plaintive ballads.

"When he first played me any songs he had written—he played maybe three or four—they were *all* really good," Jimmie Dale says, with a hint of envy in his voice. "I don't know if he'd been writin' bad ones and then throwin' 'em away, or if everything he's written has been good, but he was just a full-blown, strong songwriter."

Colin draws on a Lone Star [beer] after the show. "People are always like, 'Oh, you've got a famous dad,'" he says. "But that's more of a thing the press latches onto. Recently Cory Morrow played a show and I sat in with him. It was a huge audience, all young Texas music fans. He introduces me, 'Hey, this is Jimmie Dale Gilmore's son.' And the crowd was like: 'Huh? Who?' Most young people don't know who my dad is. He's respected amongst a certain crowd, and for the most part that crowd has been one that got to know his history. He's got a huge following in England and Australia and New York."

A young fan heading to the bar gives Colin a supportive squeeze on the shoulder. "Great show, man," he says. Colin smiles, eyes shyly sideways.

Colin has been performing locally under his own name for about two years now. "I moved to Austin when I was 14 and have been making music one way or another ever since. I remember my mom singing to me a lot when I was little—Lucinda Williams, Townes Van Zandt, Patsy Cline. And I'd go see my dad, of course. When was 8, I got into Michael



Colin Gilmore and his father, Jimmie Dale Gilmore, circa 1984

PHOTO COURTESY GILMORE FAMILY ARCHIVES

"NOWADAYS, IT'S A LITTLE TOUGH BEING HIS SON, TRYING TO BREAK OUT WITH MY OWN SOUND."

— COLIN GILMORE



Jackson. *Thriller* was my first album. Loved it. Got into the Cars. Then in the '80s, my older sister turned me on to punk when I was about 12 or so.

"When I was young, I'd go to see my dad at Threadgill's. I've watched him go from somebody who was relatively unknown to somebody who is respected around the world. For the most part it's been good having him as a dad. As a musician and a lover of old music, he introduced me to so much stuff that I otherwise wouldn't have gotten into at such a young age. Nowadays, it's a little tough being his son, trying to break out with my own sound. But it's really not that hard for me because our styles and influences are quite a bit different. We have some similarities, but I'm definitely into a lot of stuff that he's never been into."

Being the progeny of a famous musician carries its own unique set of baggage, but so does the local musical topography. "I absolutely love Texas, and I'm very glad that I grew up here," Colin says. "I always feel like I have a home in Austin. I'm a writer from Texas. But I think the term 'Texas Music' at some point becomes an advertisement—a very limiting advertisement, too. A lot of my influences are from London, New York, California. So if I call it 'Texas Music,' I'm partially laughing

under my breath. I'm glad to be from here and to have so many great writers around to hang out with. But at the same time, I know that if I say 'I'm a Texas musician,' people are gonna start thinkin', 'Oh, are you like Stevie Ray Vaughan, or more like Pat Green, or Willie Nelson?' People that I don't really sound like."

One of the perks of being a second-generation musician is the pleasure of occasionally getting to perform onstage with a local legend, who just happens to be your dad. Especially in your own hometown. "It's an excuse for us to hang out together, for one thing," Colin says. "We have a lot of the same tendencies when it comes to learning music. We both tend to be scatterbrained once we get onstage. We'll both get up there only somewhat knowing the song, but it comes together somehow. We think alike in many ways, and it's good to discover that as we go along."

"Colin has a real soothing influence on me on stage," Jimmie Dale says. "He always has. He's got that calm kind of center. I've always been a little more edgy about the world."

"My dad's really got his own thing going. He's helped a lot, but in his own way. He's just not the kind of person to say: 'Oh, I'm a famous guy. Let me pull some strings.' He's turned a lot of his fans on to me. But fans, for the most part, don't automatically like me or dislike me because I'm his son. It just gives them a chance to hear me whereas otherwise they might not have." He pauses, smiling. "Someday, I hope to do the same for him."



Django Walker and dad
Jerry Jeff Walker, circa 1982

PHOTO COURTESY WALKER FAMILY ARCHIVES

F MEMORABLE MONIKERS bode well for artists, 22-year-old Django Walker is twice blessed. His surname is inherited from his father, Jerry Jeff; his first name was bestowed in a moment of divine inspiration in homage to the great 1930s jazz guitarist, Django Reinhardt. "A lot of people in the music world, other musicians, they'll come up and say: 'Oh, Django. Badass name. Do ya play like him?' And I'm like: 'Well, no, actually. If I could, I probably wouldn't be here.' He was the most amazing guitar player I've ever heard. But as far as my fans, most of 'em don't know. They're like: 'Oh, cool name. Is that your real name?'"

Django's style is distinctly different from his dad's, "a sort of folky, jam-bandish rock 'n' roll," as he describes it. His live gigs are consistently upbeat, and he rarely takes out the acoustic guitar that first-time audiences invariably expect to see, preferring his PRS electric. Being the son of the writer of "Mr. Bojangles" has had its perks. "The pros are we

get onto a lot of things that other people don't get onto in music," Django says. "We get a lot of good spots at festivals, a lot of opening slots for other bands just out of respect for my father. But it's up to us to get out there and impress. The cons are that a lot of people come out with low expectations or bad-mouth you without even knowing anything about you. Just because they don't like my dad, maybe, they automatically don't like me."

Is it a challenge to leave your own distinctive artistic mark when you're the son of a famous musician? "Oh yeah, definitely," Django responds emphatically. "Just from the simple fact of people coming out to the shows and expecting to hear something, and they don't hear that. I'm going to have to deal with stuff like that. It's just going to be my job to be good and keep going out there every night to perform. It's kind of a kick in the butt."

Django's memories of his younger days are sketchy but affectionate. "I was born here in Austin. Pretty much lived here my whole life. The real early days, I don't remember so clearly, but I look back at pictures. There's Guy Clark in our backyard; there's Willie; there's Steve Fromholz and Rusty Wier, just hanging out. It's sort of weird to look back on, these people who you go out to see and whose songs you play in your sets, just hanging out at a barbecue in your yard."

"I can remember being 5 or 6 years old, hanging out with my dad at Willie's picnics, shows, music festivals, just being around it, riding along in the car and going to concerts when I was 10 or 11. Then when I was 16, I got to go out on a West Coast run with my dad and managed the tour. I did the settling up at the end of the shows. I checked into the hotels. I arranged the itinerary. I loaded the equipment. I did everything. I was just thrilled and enthused about music and wanted to learn everything I could about it.

"I got to get up and play a little behind him onstage sometimes, too. I started really learning guitar in Spain, when I lived there for a year. I didn't speak any Spanish, so it was just me and the music, one on one. I listened to a lot of music back then for the songwriting—a lot of Townes and Guy Clark and Jack Ingram. But I wasn't just into Texas music. I used to listen to Notorious B.I.G., rap, just any kind of good music."

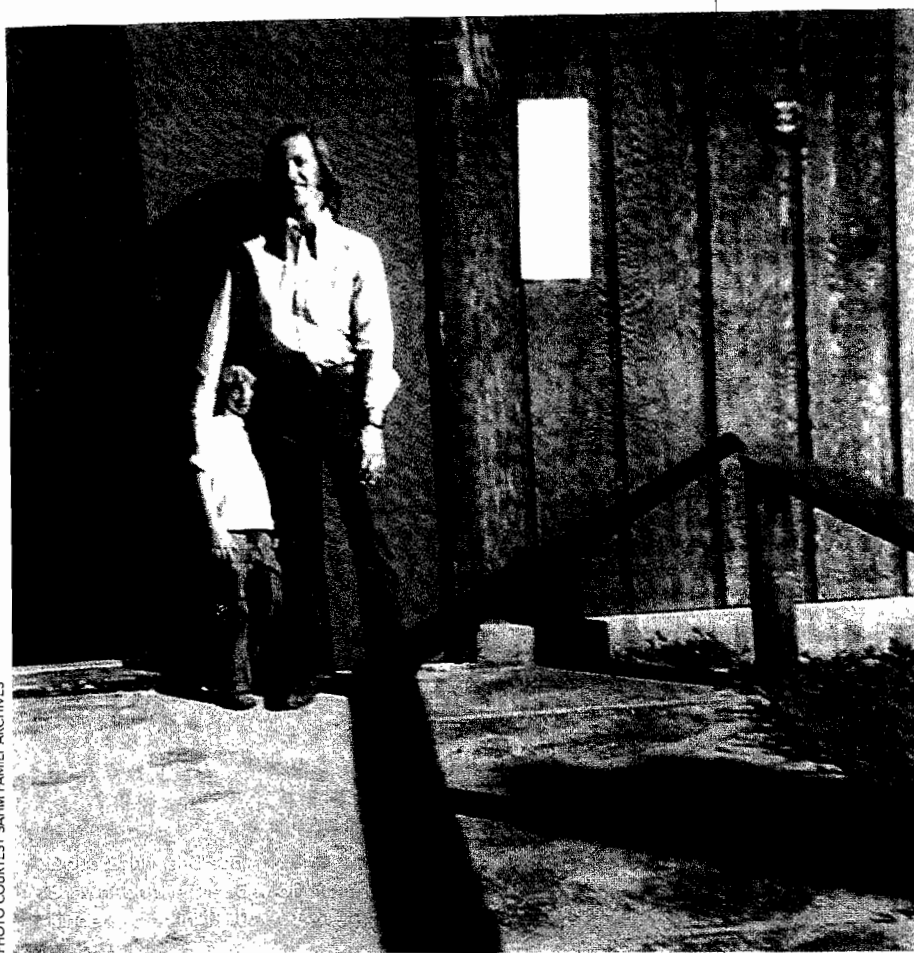
How does Jerry Jeff feel about his son's career choice to follow in his footsteps on the road? "He's proud of me and really supports me. When I get kind of down, he keeps me focused. He's like: 'Hey, keep your head up. This stuff happens. Just keep on bangin' away and it'll work.'"

When asked about playing onstage with his father, Django beams. "Oh, I love it. Every time I get a chance to get on stage with dad, I do. I'm a fan of my dad's—I cover three of his songs in my shows. *Night After Night* is one of my favorite CDs of all time, by anyone." Jerry Jeff reciprocates the feeling. "What impresses me most," he says proudly, "is when everyone from bar owners to fans of mine who've taken their kids to see Django rave on and on about what a nice guy he is. They love his album and his shows, but mostly his humility and his great personality."

"I CAN REMEMBER BEING 5 OR 6 YEARS OLD, HANGING OUT WITH MY DAD AT WILLIE'S PICNICS, SHOWS, MUSIC FESTIVALS, JUST BEING AROUND IT, RIDING ALONG IN THE CAR AND GOING TO CONCERTS WHEN I WAS 10 OR 11."

—DJANGO WALKER





BEFORE THE FLATLANDERS, before Jerry Jeff Walker, there was Doug Sahn, cosmic cowboy extraordinaire and leader of the seminal '60s Texas group, the Sir Douglas Quintet. With hit single, "She's About A Mover," that both reinvented and defined the Tex-Mex, garage band genre, Doug had a long and many-storied career before his death in November 1999. Much of it was shared with his son, Shawn Sahn, now 38.

"The old Armadillo World Headquarters was our daycare center," Shawn recalls. "We'd fight over the couch. I remember hangin' a lot at Shoal Creek—we lived just behind the road. We'd just run around and groove, listenin' to Greezy Wheels and Willie and Doug. And doin' things like playin' free shows at Thanksgiving with him and Jerry Garcia and Leon Russell, and feeding people and just sayin', 'Hey, come out and groove.' You know, that's Austin to me. That old school."

Shawn's self-titled solo CD was released in 2002. "Honestly, I made it for Europe," he says. "I don't know why. At that point in time, there was so much going on in my life, dealing with everything post-Pop passing away, that making a record at that moment wasn't exactly what I was thinking. But I'm really proud of it. It was kinda my tribute to Pop. I didn't wanna call it a tribute because I didn't want it to seem like I was jumping on anything, but I knew what it was. The people who loved dad, they know. And that's who it was for."

"I loved making music with my father. We were very, very close and always spent time together. I traveled with him since I was a child. When I got older, we turned it into music and all our little trips. We got to do a lot of things that a lot of fathers and sons never

get to do. I've toured with my dad all over the world, played with some amazing musicians. That stuff means a lot to me. These are things that weren't about tryin' to be flavor of the month or tryin' to sell records like Britney Spears. This was about playin' the real music, grooving with people you love, playing with the best musicians and taking a little bit of that Texas vibe everywhere you went. It was about 'all the right, groovy things,' as Pop would say."

Simultaneously loquacious and laid back, Shawn often lapses into memories of his dad, even when the subject is his own music. Shawn's musical career started literally from birth. His "public debut" was on a celebrated cover of *Rolling Stone* in 1968, posing with his father. Shawn didn't set out to carry on his father's legacy: "Anyone who knows me and my father knows that I started at the bottom of the rung, man. I was the roadie. I didn't make any money. I was just a kid who was lucky to be there and glad to be there."

There was a long period of heavy metal music, when his band opened for such groups as Tesla and Ted Nugent. A highlight was opening for Metallica at the old City Coliseum. "Yeah, that was a classic," he recalls. "I remember thinkin' the whole time: 'Hey, if I just keep movin', I won't get hit by all the beer bein' thrown.'"

The more time he spent hanging out with his dad, the more Shawn fell into the groove of making music together. "It was in the last decade or so, once that phase was over, that I kinda realized, 'Hey, me and my dad have something that I've been looking for all along.' And we began writing together, which took our father and son relationship to a whole other level. I loved playing with Pop. We had a million little things goin' on, especially toward the end. My dad and I turned the later-day versions of the Quintet into our own little project, and other times, we'd just play together, just the two of us. By the end, we were basically becoming inseparable.

"I'm carrying it on in the sense that everything I honestly learned, I learned from Pop," he says. "My dad changed my views of success a lot. My views of success were like everyone else's: If you were a musician and successful, you had to live in a castle and feed young groupies to sharks. But I look at a guy like my dad, in a business that chews people up and spits 'em out in a matter of seconds, had a career his whole life since he was 10 years old." His voice swells with noticeable pride. "That's success."

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— SHAWN SAHM



Passing the musical torch from father to son is a Texas tradition with particularly deep roots in Austin, but one that these rising sons embrace with appreciation and a deep sense of familial responsibility. It's tempting to think of their respective family music traditions as one long, ever-evolving ballad—an epic, multi-generational song that literally writes itself and spans decades in the making. The fathers that came before may have laid the foundation of the tune, but every good song needs a second verse. ★