

Studio 5 ... Where Worlds Collide | Allan Besselink

Written by Allan Besselink
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I've become a "Seinfeld" fan since it's been in syndication. I didn't really enjoy it when it was first on TV, but now I fully appreciate it. Have you ever seen the "Seinfeld" episode in which George Costanza is trying to keep his "worlds" - his love life and his life as "one of the guys" with Jerry and Kramer and Elaine - separate? He's concerned that his "worlds will collide", thereby ruining a good thing.

I bring this up because a similar thing has happened to me recently - an episode in which two very divergent parts of my world collided in a very surreal fashion.

It all comes down to one particular address that brought it all out - 1109-B South Congress. For those of you who know me well, that's my new office address - within the walls of the South Congress Athletic Club. This brings me to my tale for today ...

Truth be told, I moved to Austin because of my love of live music. This was the center of my musical world - "Texas Music" as I call it - an amalgam of blues, country, soul, zydeco, and many other genres. Being a music lover (and musician) I found that this was just "the place to be". Most of my favorite musicians - be they Stevie Ray Vaughan, Eric Johnson, or a whole host of others - all called Austin home. In the day, it was THE place to be as a guitar player ... so needless to say, it was the place for me.

Let's go back to the immediate "pre-Allan" era of Austin. On March 4, 1990 (if I have my dates correct), Don Harvey and Wayne Nagel opened the Austin Rehearsal Complex. It was a place for Austin musicians to create, play, jam, and simply "be Austin music". They had 10 studios (or rehearsal spaces) in all. I'd heard about it shortly after moving here, and it seemed to be the focal point for many of Austin's brightest artists.

Not far from there is the Continental Club ... a place that I had heard of and explored in my early days in Austin. It's one of the seminal clubs of Austin live music lore. This was the place in which I think I first experienced the true brotherhood of Austin music, in which musicians will show up at others' gigs and "sit in" with them, creating more than just a wonderful aural experience for the listener. It would be a "happening" - that's the only way I can describe it. One night, (I think it was on one of my trips to Austin circa 1988-1989), I went to see the Booze Weasels (gotta love the name) at the Continental Club. This band was known to me because of one David Grissom - who would go on to play with Joe Ely, John Mellencamp, and Storyville.

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[Side note: The Booze Weasels also had drummer Davis McClarty, bassist Jimmy Pettit and guitarist David Holt - Joe Ely's backing band in a nutshell]

During the set, Joe Ely jumps up and plays with them ... as does none other than Charlie Sexton. This was musical nirvana for me. After the gig, in the wee hours of the morning, Charlie Sexton comes out and starts playing the piano next to me ... and asks me about where I was from ,etc. "I've played in Toronto" he says ... as his fingers tickle the ivories.

I moved to Austin in August 1990.

Segue to the Austin Opera House - but a few blocks away from the Continental Club. I saw Ron Wood play there, along with Robert Cray and, oh yes, the legendary "second" gig of Austin's very own ARC Angels. And if you know anything about the ARC Angels - well, the band consisted of Chris Layton and Tommy Shannon (of "Double Trouble" fame), Doyle Bramhall II, and this guy named ... yes, Charlie Sexton.

So here's where the story takes a twist. The ARC in ARC Angels was derived from, yes, the Austin Rehearsal Complex - a place in which they would jam and develop the inner workings of the band. And ... the ARC was but a very short walk from the Opera House. Little did I know at the time.

Fast forward to 2007. My office moves to a new location - 1109-B South Congress ... and a client remarks to me, "Did you know that this used to be a rehearsal complex?". Nope, I didn't. So I asked the owners of the gym ... and yes, it was the legendary Austin Rehearsal Complex - in another lifetime. For both of us.

And suddenly my worlds collided ... and it was a surreal thought. Almost 17 years ago, when my world was so deeply influenced by the music of this city, the ARC would have represented, in some ways, the heart and soul of those who's music I admired. I think the ARC was alive for about 10 years in all. The Opera House - well, it went on to become Arlyn Recording Studios - in which just about all of my favorite bands (including Eric Johnson and the Tragically Hip!) have recorded albums that have influenced my world. Now, the center of my professional world exists

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in the former heart of my musical world. Little did I know.

The other day, I got a copy of the original ARC pamphlet. Looks to me like the gym itself is Studios 4 - 10, and I am in "Studio 5". I'd love to know who worked out of there (so if you know anyone who knows, please tell me!). Suffice it to say, the pamphlet goes on to list the likes of Chris Duarte, David Grissom, Doyle Bramhall, the Fabulous Thunderbirds, Ian Moore, James McMurtry, Jerry Jeff Walker, Malford Milligan, Mojo Nixon, Omar and the Howlers, Ronnie Lane, Soul Hat, Stephen Bruton, and Will Sexton as clients. Now that is a list of Austin musicians!!

So here's the added twist - my first day in my new location was none other than July 1 - Canada Day!

Add another twist - my run coaching takes me to Auditorium Shores twice a week - within view of the Stevie Ray Vaughan statue. It's another reminder of why I am where I am. And another way in which my two divergent worlds found synergy - in a strange way. As the Grateful Dead said, "what a long strange trip it's been".

I don't know how much you believe in "destiny" or things like that, but these things make me wonder.

I think George Costanza may have been completely wrong. I am very grateful that my worlds have collided. No matter how surreal it is to me, it's a daily reminder of the "why" for being in Austin. And for that I am very thankful.