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# TEXAS LIVE

November • December 2011

*All Things Texan*

## 15 Christmas Events

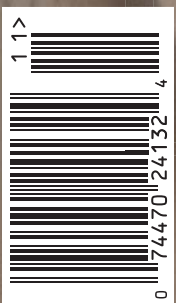
You Must Experience  
This Holiday Season

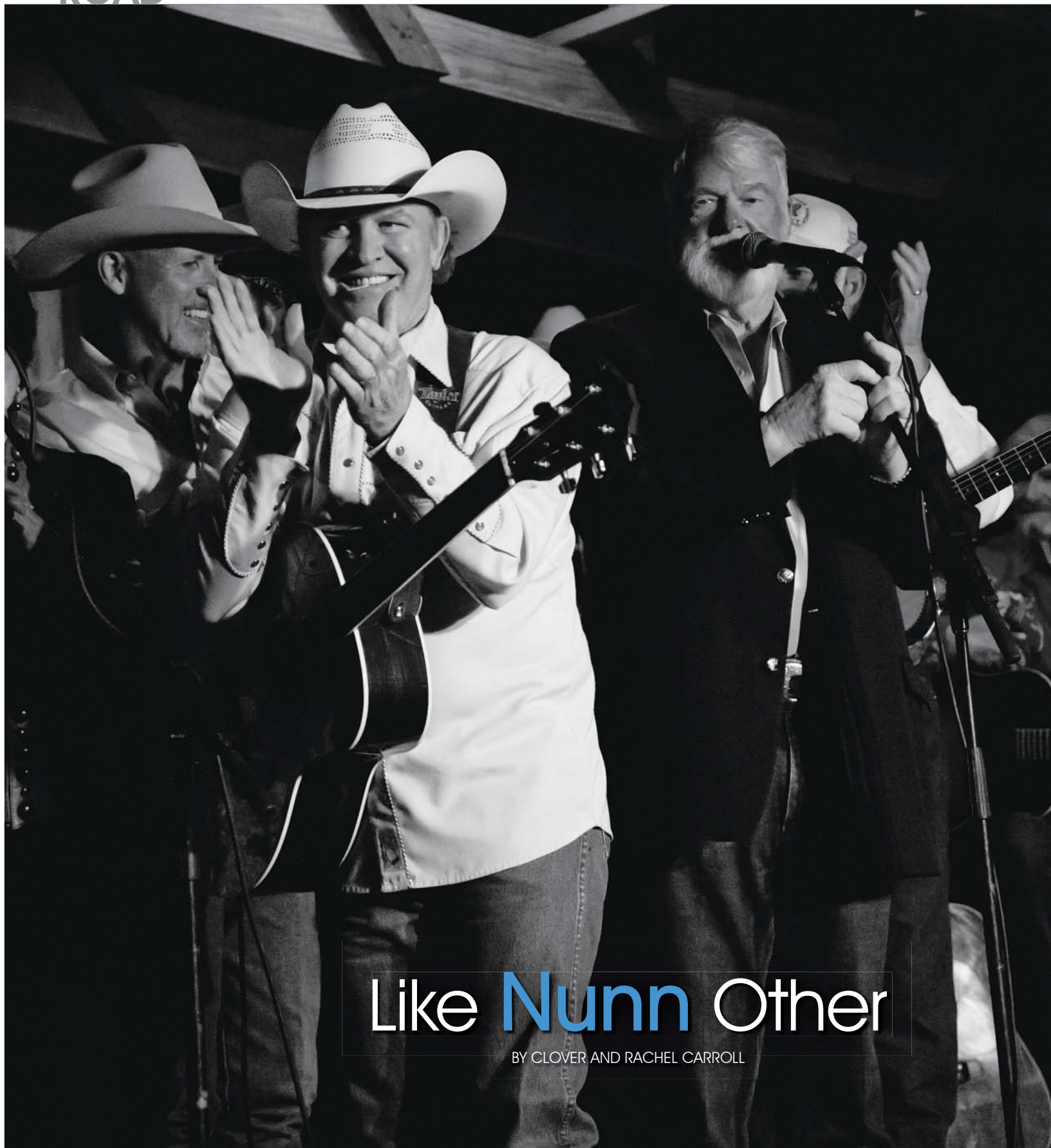
## *Merry & Bright* A Holiday Home Tour

**The Homesick  
Texan Cookbook**  
Serving the Bold Flavors  
of the Lone Star State

**6 Minutes**  
A Bastrop Family Shares Their  
Last Moments at Home

**Like Nunn Other**  
Music Legend  
Gary P. Nunn Takes  
Texas to the Country





# Like Nunn Other

BY CLOVER AND RACHEL CARROLL

Gary P. Nunn joins Red Steagall and other country western artists at a charity event in Victoria, TX.

Legendary music icon Gary P. Nunn has been leading the way in Texas music for over 40 years now, inspiring independent Texas artists to greatness. Songwriter, singer, musician, producer—Nunn is a musical entrepreneur. He helped pioneer the original Texas sound of “cosmic country” that began in the 1970s and continues to pack houses today, traveling internationally, “Taking Texas to the Country” as the title of his latest release proclaims.

If you ever have the pleasure of spending time with Gary P. Nunn in a music “jam” you’ll notice two things: he’s a down-to-earth guy, and he’s a stellar musician. It’s as if the music pours out of him, and whether he finds a seat at the piano, picks up a guitar, or takes over the bass, it doesn’t seem to matter. The joy of the song is in his face, and he is just happy to be a part of the music.

Knowing this side of Nunn, we weren’t surprised at his warm welcome when we arrived at his home in Marble Falls, where he and his wife Ruth have carved a sweet ranch out of the Hill Country. The long back porch, graced with Ruth’s songbirds, overlooks open pastureland that sweeps down to a creek bed. As we stood admiring the view, Nunn pointed at a distant point on the horizon, “That’s where I do a lot of my thinking and writing...come on, I’ll take y’all down there. You’ll love it.”

It was like being home with family as our crew all piled into his pickup and headed out across the back pasture. We left the truck at the top of a bluff and picked our way down a faint path beneath the live oaks, which opened up to a white-rock creek bed. Resting on a smooth slab of limestone, legs dangling over a deep green pool below, we relaxed in the warm sunshine with Gary P. Nunn as he shared his life’s musical journey with us.

His family moved from Oklahoma to West Texas when he was in junior high. Although he excelled in athletics, his true



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love was music. It didn’t take him long to wrangle up a band in his new neighborhood, an early sign of what was to come.

After high school, Nunn enrolled at the University of Texas to study pharmacy...and play a little music. He soon formed a band with the late Rusty Wier called Lavender Hill Express. Their popular sound presaged the “cosmic cowboy” movement that was just beginning to stir.

A few other folks had also recently landed in Austin in 1967—a handful of musicians by the names of Willie Nelson, Michael Murphey, and Jerry Jeff Walker.

As all of these artists converged in Austin, each brought a unique brand of

delivery and word craft to the listening rooms and coffeehouses. And as they shared ideas and influenced one another, a kind of music revolution began. Critics began to call the sound that emerged “cosmic cowboy” and “redneck rock.”

It was the only way to describe this new kind of Texas music—a tapestry that wove threads of Tejano, rock, blues, and cowboy together in a way that attracted fans from all points of the social spectrum.

Venues like the famous Armadillo World Headquarters and The Cactus became havens for fans hungry to hear more of this new Texas sound. Nunn soon became such a key figure in that music scene that at >>

## Down the ROAD

one point he was playing bass for Willie Nelson, Michael Murphey, and Jerry Jeff Walker all at once. His talents on keyboards and vocals were also heard on many of the legendary albums from that era.

In 1970, he helped form “The Lost Gonzo Band,” a group that embodied the fresh progressive country style. They played with Jerry Jeff Walker for four years.


During this time, Nunn traveled to London with Michael Murphey to record Murphey’s Cosmic Cowboy Souvenir album. One day in his hotel room, lonely for Texas, he wrote “London Homesick Blues.”

As Nunn recalls, “I just wrote it to kill time, and as a humorous exercise in writing a country song. I never thought that anything would ever become of that song. No one is more surprised than me at what it became.” The song was recorded on Jerry Jeff Walker’s Viva Terlingua album and was an instant success. Now a signature Texas country song, “London Homesick Blues” was the theme for the PBS Television concert series Austin City Limits for nearly three decades.

Another touchstone event occurred for Nunn in London when he met an English music publisher who inspired him to start his

own publishing company back in Austin. At the hub of a hotbed of talented writers and artists, he began to connect them through his network of fellow musicians. During his time with Walker, Nunn recalls, “I was fortunate enough to have some good songwriters come my way, and I channeled some of their tunes to Jerry Jeff. And they became some of his more popular songs, even today. I seem to have always had a knack for finding a tune.” Nunn is an impressive songwriter himself, with songs recorded by stars like Willie Nelson, Rosanne Cash, and many others.





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Nunn's songwriting and musical contributions have inspired a younger generation of musicians to keep up the independent spirit. In light of that, the State of Texas has twice named him an Official Ambassador to the World, once by Governor Mark White and more recently by Governor Rick Perry. In 2004, he was inducted into the Texas Hall of Fame, and he is also included in the West Texas Walk of Fame in Lubbock, an honor he shares with Buddy Holly, Waylon Jennings,

Bob Wills, and Roy Orbison.

Today this talented musician continues to oversee his own record label and song publishing companies, manage his own career (with the help of his wife Ruth), and play most every weekend at top music venues throughout Texas and beyond.

Whether it's the water or the air in Texas, there is something special going on in the Lone Star State. Tennesseans claim that Texas would have never been established

without them, but Texas has been paying them back for the past 100 years in musicians and songwriters such as Gary P. Nunn, hailed by All Music Guide as "a Texas music institution." •



*Down the Road is a production of The Ranch Road Show, a touring production where music, hometown life and the arts meet at the rural crossroads. [www.ranchroadshow.com](http://www.ranchroadshow.com)*