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ALERT

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## SWAN songs delight Norman: Songwriters club provides popular creative outlet

By Doug Hill | For The Transcript

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Richard "Daddy" Love is a co-founder of the SongWriters Association of Norman and continues to organize it as a labor of love.

Doug Hill / For The Transcript



The SongWriters Association Norman is well into its second decade of developing local talent.

This year, it is led by one of the original founders, Richard “Daddy” Love. He’s dedicated to SWAN’s mission of staging live performance songwriter showcases that provide novice musicians what may be their first experience before an audience.

Additionally it’s an opportunity for anyone in the community to hear talent from someone who might be their next door neighbor. Some things about SWAN have changed since its inception in 2008, and other fundamentals remain the same.

“Back then, Michael Bendure and I got with the Norman Arts Council and set SWAN up under their wing,” Love said. “It was a new organization, so we had to figure out how it would work and explain it to them.”

Regular weekly get-togethers were necessary to achieve an interconnected group dynamic.

“You get to know individuals better for a more cohesive feeling,” he said. “SWAN is a very supportive group; it’s not like playing your songs in front of a bunch of strangers. There are others who have been right where you are and understand it. Playing one of your songs in a public setting is a big step.”

Although SWAN’s participants have performed in a variety of venues over the years — including outdoors during Norman Music Festivals — Michelangelo’s Coffee and Wine Bar, 207 E. Main St., has been a longtime host for the organization’s open microphone shows.

Typically, performances start at 7 p.m. the third and fifth Tuesdays of the month. There is no audience admission charge.

“SWAN is genuinely supportive of its members and their growth in songwriting,” Love said. “Lyrics and melodies are part of that, along with how to present those through performance. We educate them and provide experience.”

Love is the leader of Daddy Love Band, a blues, rock and folk trio based in Norman. He has been a singer/songwriter for decades.

“We teach people how to use the equipment necessary to perform such as complete setup of the public address system,” he said.

SWAN members come and go. Some are new to Norman, and others have been around since 2008. They sign in before Tuesday shows, and a performance lineup is worked out. Sometimes as many as 19 musicians are on the bill.

“Sometimes they move on in their careers and get in bands after being in SWAN,” Love said. “There’s always been an inflow and outflow of talent. Usually there’s at least 10 people present to showcase their songs. We hustle just to make sure everyone gets a chance to play. People playing the first original song they ever wrote for the first time before an audience has remained a constant.”

Love observes artistic and technical improvements among SWAN members, which gives him a great deal of satisfaction.

“When we had been around for three years, I was overcome by how much better we were as a group,” he said. “There was a noticeable difference after having multiple opportunities to play their songs. We made a lot of shows in Norman’s other bars and coffee shops better because of the musicians’ association with SWAN.

“To me, a song isn’t done until you’ve played it in front of people. You have to get an audience’s reactions to know if you’ve hit the mark. You may have gotten your message’s validity across more than you’d ever thought.”

Don’t expect to hear James Taylor or Joni Mitchell songs at SWAN recitals. Original material written by members is the focus. Sometimes a musician will perform a song written by a SWAN peer, which can be a unique learning experience.

“Our members are encouraged to write more and better songs by being in an atmosphere of other people doing the same thing,” Love said. “It inspires you by the song topics people choose and different perspectives people have and how they present it. Showing up with a new song to perform at SWAN is a deadline. If you’re just singing it alone at home to the mirror, there’s no deadline.”

Personnel from Oklahoma bands including Heartbreak Rodeo, the Whiskey Gingers and Annie Oakley have rotated through SWAN’s ranks.

“Some of them were as young as 13 when they played their first song with us,” he said.

It's especially younger participants who have the power to inspire Love's own drive to write more and better songs. He cited a singer/songwriter who started at age 9. When they were older, they opened for Wanda Jackson at the Oklahoma Rodeo Centennial Opry in 2018 and won the Jimmy LaFave songwriting contest in Stillwater that same year.

"Oh, wow, they're 12 or 13 and awesome," he said. "Ken Pomeroy is an example. I was amazed at how worldly her songs were for someone so young."

Love has always encouraged an affirmative culture within SWAN, rather than a competitive or authoritarian one.


"Positive reinforcement is what we provide," he said. "We like to see the change from, 'Am I a songwriter' to 'I am a songwriter.'"

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