

# *The Beaumont Enterprise*

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## **Tune Into Texas**

By Vanessa Everett



Songs by Willie Nelson, at left, Delbert McClinton, Stevie Ray Vaughn, Asleep at the Wheel, featuring Ray Benson, Marcia Ball and Clarence atemouth' Brown are on the on't Mess With Texas Music' CD.

*Photo Illustration by Bryan S. Welborn*

Brown, 79, said learning music in school gives children a foundation for music study later in life and, he added, it keeps them out of trouble.

Brown himself didn't have music in school. "I got mine from my father," he said. "I got the fiddle from him and all the other instruments I learned teaching myself."

He plays fiddle, guitar, mandolin, harmonica and a little piano.

Bruce Orr, co-founder and executive director of the Texas Music Project, said the idea for the compilation came from a friend about a year ago.

The nay-sayers told Orr and his supporters that the artist and record labels wouldn't let their songs go for no pay.

The sixth song on the "Don't Mess With Texas Music" compilation features the slow, thick blues of Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown.

The Orange native and legendary blues-country-jazz artist didn't even know his record company had allowed the song, "Guitar In My Hand," to go into the compilation. But he doesn't mind a bit.

"I'm mighty grateful they did," he said in a telephone interview from his home in Louisiana. "Baby, I was raised in Texas. Orange, Texas, is my hometown."

You see, the "Don't Mess With Texas Music" compact disc is a grassroots effort by the Texas Music Project to raise funds for music programs in schools across Texas.

Brown is one of 21 Texas artists who allowed their songs to be used on the CD at no cost. The CD will be sold at various stores, and the proceeds will go to pot of money that schools can apply to for grants.

But he was naive enough to try, he said.

He first called Willie Nelson, who agreed to act as chairman and lend some weight to the project. Texas education groups, such as the Texas Commission on the Arts, offered their support to it and soon, the compilation was in production.

"The only way it was successful is that there is a great need coupled with a strong idea and it delivers great music," Orr said. He said he expects to make more than \$300,000 in the first year of CD sales and corporate contributions.

Schools can apply for the funds in the spring, he said.

Local music educators know exactly what they'd ask for if they were trying for one of the grants.

Marcia Stevens, fine arts supervisor for the Beaumont Independent School District, named three things on her wish list.

She'd purchase more instruments to loan to students who cannot afford to buy their own.

"There are so many students who have a great interest in music and a lot of talent, but they don't have the resources to go out and buy a \$500 instrument," Stevens said.

She also wants full-time music teachers at each campus. As it is, elementary music teachers have to split their time between more than one campus.

A private lesson program would be beneficial to the children as well, she said.

Other music educators echoed the same needs.

Martin Jones, director of choral music for Jasper Independent School District, said he'd like to be able to provide private lessons to students.

He'd love to offer orchestra too, but few small districts have the money for that, Jones said.

The Jasper district has cut music teacher positions in the past several years, he said, but the programs are staying "pretty even."

Mike Westbrook, band director at Port Neches-Groves High School, said "there's never enough money."

The music budgets there were slashed by 10 percent last year and again this year, he said.

He would love to replace some of the older instruments that he has to repair so often, he said.

Renee Kloes, choir director at Nederland High School, said, "I feel like we're living in a charmed zone \_ we're doing with less, but we're still managing."

She did admit that it would be nice to have computer equipment to help teach music theory and composition.

The front of the "Don't Mess With Texas Music" CD jacket has small yellow letters that say Volume One.

"Oh yeah," said Bruce Orr. "There'll be another CD. We're just beginning."

He isn't the only who likes long-term initiatives.

Gatemouth Brown believes learning is one thing that should take a real long time.

"When you create something from your heart, there's no ending to it," he said.

"I'm still learning every day."

Texas' lineup

21 artists with Texas connections are featured on the "Don't Mess with Texas Music" compilation:

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