



## **NEWSLETTER – JANUARY 2017**

**Article 1: The Legacy of the Kerrville Folk Festival  
– A Miraculous Conception**

# ...A Miraculous Conception



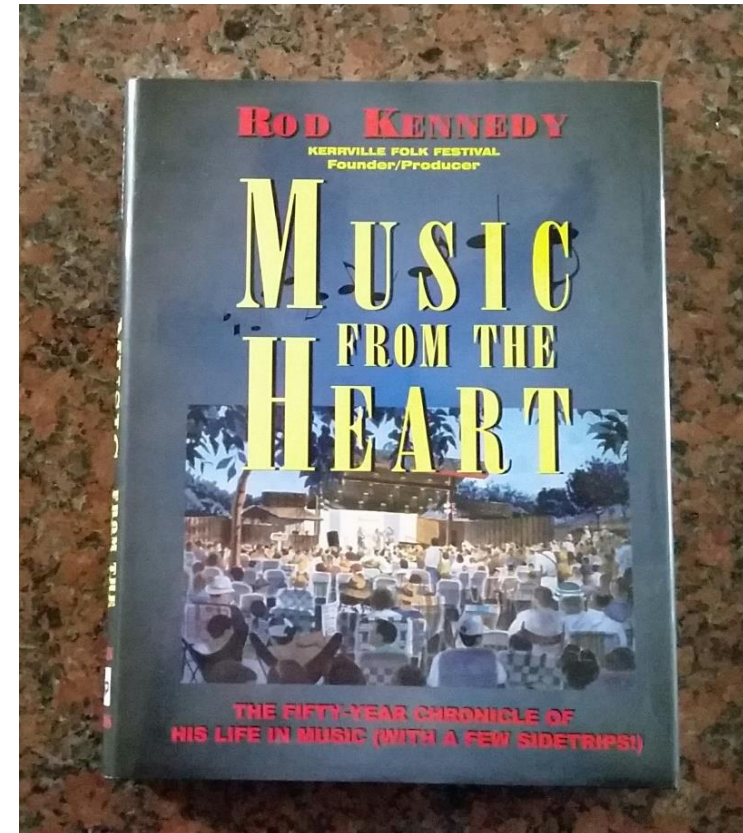
The KFF is the longest continually running music festival in the United States. When you really think that through, you realize that -- perhaps it was not an immaculate conception -- but certainly a miraculous one.

Kerrville is located 70 miles from San Antonio and 115 miles from Austin — in other words, not an easy commute for audiences, and yet they come.

# ...A Miraculous Conception

At its inception, the KFF was the only festival that focused on the backbone of music – songwriting. Here it is, in Rod's own words, from his book, ***Music from the Heart***:

*Somewhere along the way I developed a penchant for loving, supporting, producing, and promoting music that was outside the mainstream of commercial popular taste. In fact, I feel a driving need to supplement the massive pop culture of America with music that gives me both emotional and intellectual nutrition.*

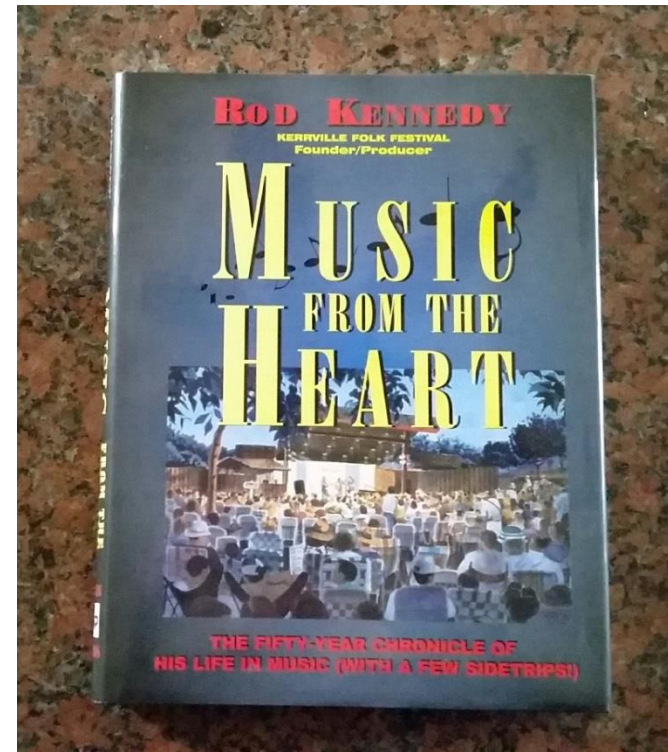




# ...A Miraculous Conception

*... I have focused my attention on building audiences for original artists who write and perform their own music that says what they want to say, rather than what the industry thinks they should say.*

*...I hope that this view of America's music business as I've seen it will give those who love original songs some additional perspective, and that my story might build another bridge for the artists in the book and those yet to come so that they can continue to contribute to our culture their music, music that is sorely needed to remind us of our humanity ... **music from the heart.***



# ...A Miraculous Conception

In May 1972, three weeks before the first KFF, Rod Kennedy spent four days and nights touring with Peter Yarrow. The two had never met. Rod wrote,

*... I envisioned that he was a bomb-throwing, left-wing liberal with little regard for our court system and the law. This prejudiced view was typical of that held by many of my conservative friends.*

*It was, therefore, an eye-opening revelation to discover a remarkably patriotic and passionate defender of human rights. Peter was a man of fervent passion for the causes of people who were receiving what he perceived to be unequal treatment under the law. He was an ardent advocate for equal rights at every level. Instead of a bomb-thrower, I found a sensitive, eloquent, dedicated, and well-informed activist who believed in using the American political system to communicate his viewpoint....*

# ...A Miraculous Conception

*When he found out I was producing a folk festival at Kerrville, he asked to be included. I was excited about his interest, but told him about the low artist fees. Peter replied that he didn't care about the money and that he would like to come for all three days.*

*At the stage doors many nights after the concerts, there were young songwriters waiting for us to listen to their songs, and Peter always took time to listen.*

*Following the third night of these impromptu listening sessions, Peter asked me if we had any system built into the Kerrville event for unknown songwriters. I responded that over half of the booked songwriters at Kerrville were only regional artists. Honing in more clearly, he said, "No, I mean unknown writers who have no advocates, who have no one to connect them to a larger audiences."*

# ...A Miraculous Conception

*.... By the time the five touring days were over, we had come to many human and musical understandings, and the New Folk concerts were ready to become a reality at Kerrville.*



This photo is the finale at the 1972 Kerrville Folk Festival. Pictured, Allen Damron on guitar, Kenneth Threadgill, Cotton Collins on fiddle, Peter Yarrow on guitar, and Rod Kennedy, clapping, on the far right.

# ...A Miraculous Conception

*...Almost everyone was a volunteer; none of us drew paychecks for the long weekend's work, and the musicians were paid something like a hundred dollars for their appearances. We all knew, however, that money was not what it was all about, and all of us loved the endeavor.*

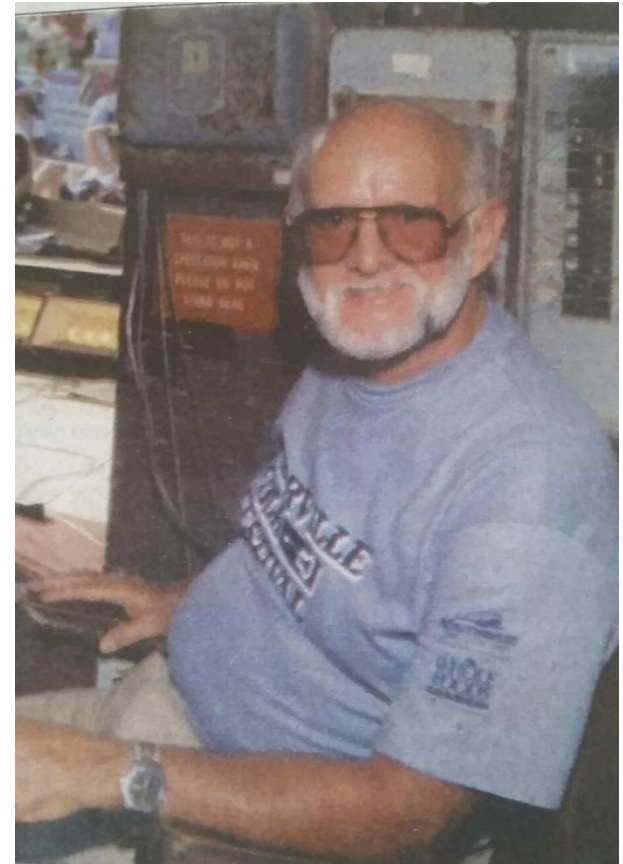




# ...A Miraculous Conception

Also from ***Music From the Heart***, here are words Peter Yarrow wrote about Rod Kennedy;

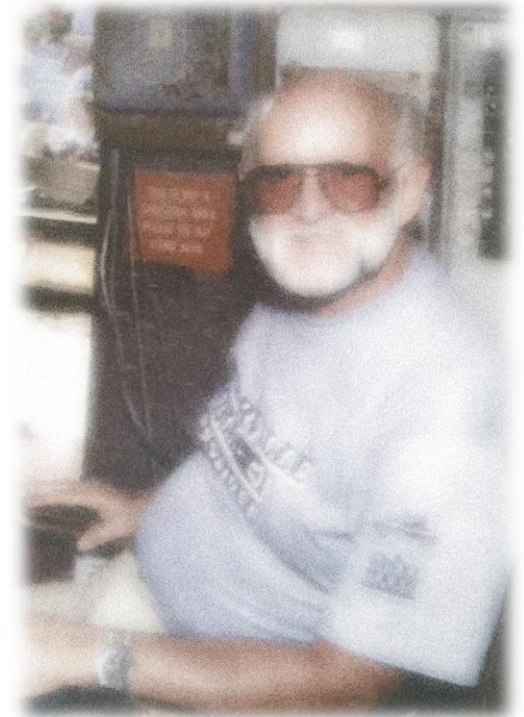
*Seated on a high, cushioned stool at the edge of the Kerrville Folk Festival stage, Rod Kennedy is beaming. His joy is visibly rapturous as he listens to the music of a new artist that he picked from literally hundreds who apply each year to play the festival. Now, she joins the legions of those who have built the remarkable reputation of what is arguably the most effective platform in the country for recognizing, encouraging, and discovering new talent.*



# ...A Miraculous Conception

*... it is a snapshot, one that I've witnessed literally hundreds of times, that is part and parcel of the ultimate product of his demon-like devotion, unshakable conviction, and interminable hard work. ...*

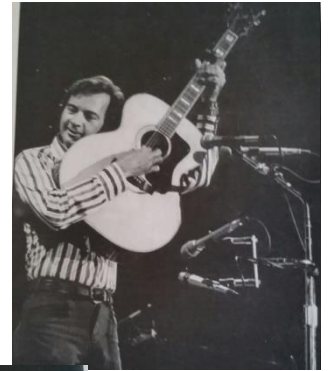
*Taste and an absolute, bottom-line respect for the art and the heart of the music are not easily replicable. Others may extrapolate the spirit and the construction of Kerrville to create another festival that will resonate with the Kerrville model, the paradigm of Rod's extraordinary achievement. But such attempts will ultimately have to stand or fail based on the passion, taste, and determination of the creators of any new effort. ...*



# ...A Miraculous Conception

Rod re-capped that historic first festival in 1972 with these words;

*As I looked back on the whole festival, I was impressed with how warmly the audience received every performer. The older, traditional artists were each exceptional, and only the enthusiasm for the contemporary songs topped their welcome. Each of the contemporary performers displayed such respect and appreciation for their older counterparts that there was a vibrant, almost overwhelming sense of unity all weekend long. ... We were all regretful that it had to come to an end, but grateful to have been a part of so many magic moments.*

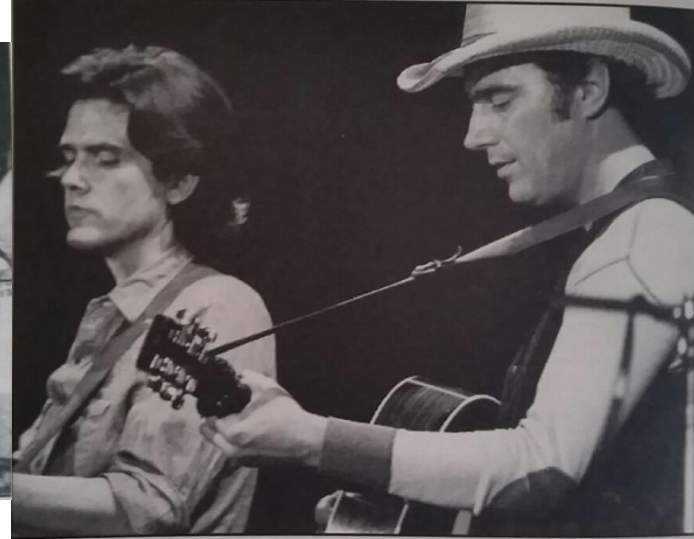
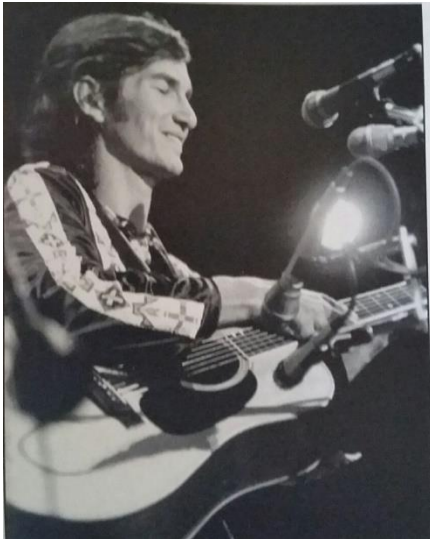


Allen Damron,  
Carolyn Hester,  
& Michael  
Martin Murphy  
– KFF 1972



# ...A Miraculous Conception

Later, Rod wrote about the 1973 festival;



Townes Van Zandt; Happy audience; Guy Clark & Jerry Jeff Walker @ KFF 1973

*We had done it again, and the songwriters really captured the audience. These talented songwriters, who usually had such a tough job to find an audience, had found one at Kerrville, and I intended to put more emphasis on the original songs and get us outside in a bigger space...*



# ...A Miraculous Conception

These excerpts provide an eloquent accounting of the birth of this phenomenal community we simply call, “Kerrville.” From these auspicious beginnings ...

Loves have been found and lost,  
Families have begun that are now 3 generations deep,  
Dreams have been given breath,  
Life paths have unfolded,  
Frivolity, freedom, and fun have been found.



Transcendence, transition, transformation, sobriety, God in many forms, tolerance, and most especially, songwriting are all celebrated. It all seems to follow with perfect synchronicity when viewed from the perspective, “... and this is how it came to be.”

The Kerrville Folk Festival is a miraculous birth of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and you, friend, are a part of it.