

Interviewee: Danny McVey

Interviewer: Norie Guthrie

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Interview Transcript

Norie Guthrie: My name is Norie Guthrie from the Woodson Research Center, Fondren Library, Rice University. I am interviewing Danny McVey. Today is March 2, 2017 and this part of the Houston Folk Music Archive oral history project. Can you talk about your early life here in Houston?

Danny McVey: I sure can, um, my name is Danny McVey as you said. A native Houstonian, uh, grew up in the east end of Houston, went to Jackson Junior High, Austin Senior High. I think this, uh, sound guy thing started probably when I was in junior high and became the AV geek, uh, working for Mr. Cheeseman, going around setting up projectors for science classes. Uh, for some reason I think that was kinda where really the addiction for technical backspace stuff kinda started. And then from there I lived a half a block away from the high school band called the Protozoans and, uh, they, uh, would rehearse in the garage. So how could a, you know, a 12-year-old, 13-year-old kid not be drawn magically to music in the neighborhood. I'd go there and sit and listen and just be fascinated. Um, went through school, did some, you know, high school did some plays, always still drawn to the technical end of it. Um, from that kind of, uh, you know, got into all the different business jobs as we all do to survive. Did some, uh, Petty Ray Geophysical kind of stuff, worked with Big Photo Dot Computers on the nightshift, and, you know, worked for Southwestern Bell for, uh, a period as a service rep, absolutely torture. And, uh, and, and such as that, till eventually I started working, uh, my mom and dad had both passed away in a probably short period of time, so I was an only child, so I kinda, you know, was on my own by my late 20s and then that's when I kinda started hanging out with my music friends and, uh, started oh, okay, you need a sound guy? I think I could maybe do that for ya, and started working with some friends that had a band previously called Dogtooth Violet, which was kinda, you know, a big kinda countryish type band, really good, good talented people in the late 60s, early 70s, and then after that band broke up it was a group they put together called Paradise, which was a major portion of that band and a couple of other players. That was my first band that ever said hey why don't you mix tonight? And I did my typical joke, yeah, I'll always try to talk to people. No, mix the sound. In those days mixing sound meant you had a very small board, um, didn't have what, what are nowadays called faders that can you fancily slide up and down.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: They were big ole turn knobs and they were like small six channel Tapco boards in almost every club. Um, and usually you would just mike the vocals and you would adjust the instruments, you know, with your ears. Okay bass turn up, guitar, can you turn down just a little,

things like that to kinda balance the sound. Um, that was in some clubs like Theodore's on Westheimer.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: Uh, Corky's, which was absolutely one of the greatest clubs, Les and Eileen, uh, Les passed recently, but Les and Eileen ran that club and it was family, you know, everybody that played there from Shake and Dana to Shake to Uncle Walt's Band to Blaze Foley, to, uh, John Vandiver, to Ron Crick. Some really, you know, and Townes Van Zandt, some of the most amazing people going to this little bitty house in Montrose. It maybe probably had a legal capacity of about 80 to 100 people and it was wonderful. So and that's probably where I got my most of my start. I started working with Michael Marcoulier and then full time and stopped working for the phone company, and kinda, you know, tried to make it in music. And music, you know, is a great thing sometimes. You can, but it's usually always feast or famine, you know.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: Some weeks, yeah, we got four gigs! Next week, we don't have any gigs, so.

Norie Guthrie: Um, so you were saying that you, uh, you worked with Paradise as one of the first bands, and so, uh, you said you're kinda doing some kind of, little bit simpler kinda sound engineering when –

Danny McVey: Right. I mean literally when I started with them it was basically just kinda playing with the sound in a bedroom that we were all crammed into for about a year until they finally got comfortable enough to play out.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: Um, and then it was, you know, mostly I was really just kinda, I was in a little better shape and health and with equipment and stuff. And then it kinda got, well why don't you try to help make sure our vocals stay up and sound good, and so, okay, you know, I, I mean really it was like first time it was all over for me. I was just, you know, instantly addicted. This is fun, I like doing this.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: Corky's the same kind of situation, a small six channel board, pretty much kinda the way it was at that time. You, you did, it was more, uh, I still to this day kinda call it old school mixing where you get the vocals where they're, you know, at a certain good level and they sound good, and then you try to make all the other instruments kinda, just changing their volumes, balance.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: And then the first thing where it got real fancy, you would throw in a kick drum mike and that way you can get the beat and with the mix and it would, sometimes that would not always be prevalent enough.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm. Okay. And so could you talk a little bit more. Well, trying to think about this, um, so you can, the, was there kinda like a, did you learn how to do this really quickly? Did it kinda come about slowly?

Danny McVey: It was, it was really amazing. I think that just one, I just kinda accidentally naturally came to it, don't really know why it was, but, but, what truly brought me from just being a guy that knew how to turn on vocal mike and maybe adjust the EQ on it a little bit –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: – and turn up bass, turn down mids or highs, that's basically, you know, your three channels in the early days. But by each of those, if you have a vocal that's too bass-y you might want to put a little bass out, his vocal will sound good. It's, it's just a matter of listening – and then I had a lot of just really wonderful guys that were either house guys, they kinda took me under their wing. Probably the, there were, the first person that really did that was a lady named Madeline Sealy that mixed at Liberty Hall.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: And, um, she used to let me come up and sit in the sound booth with her, and Liberty Hall was just, um, one of the greatest early places from everybody from Dr. John and the Night Trippers, where he literally came in wearing skins and a big bag of, uh, glitter that he'd throw out on the audience. And he had his gris-gris ladies that would sing these really beautiful high parts and Bruce Springsteen played there, um, Jerry Jeff Walker played there 'til 3:00 in the morning or 4:00 in the morning once, uh, notorious any way. Um, uh, you know, a lot of that stuff, Michael, um, Michael Martin Murphy, sorry, I had to get his full name right, used to play there as well. So it was, you know, it was a, a phenomenal place. I, I have to honestly say that I don't know for sure if I was as fascinated by Madeline and the sound as I was the, the look of the two microphones in her tight jean's back pocket. I'm just gonna be honest. Um, but truly that's, that's probably where I got my first start at seeing what really sound was about.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: I think Mark Speck was the owner of the sound and that was Daccus sound and they did the Texas Opry House later, and they were sound for Liberty Hall. They were kinda one of the early, you know, sound companies.

Norie Guthrie: So they, it was a much more sophisticated set up there?

Danny McVey: Well for the time.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: For the time it had a board that was like this as opposed to like this. And, and that's, and that was the difference. It was, in a, in a show like that where it goes into what, what you would call more, uh, slightly larger venues, something that you're gonna have 200 to 300 people crammed into, that's when you want to go and have a board big enough. So you start with your kick drum on Channel 1 –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: – and then you go snare, and high hat, and rag tom and floor tom, and that's your drum kit. So you gotta get each one sounding like it's supposed to sound and you go to bass guitar, keyboards, guitars and then usually that's where you get vocals or keyboards, you know, vocals are the last thing, because once you've got your instruments all sounding good, then we push the vocals up. If they sound good, great, if you can't hear them then that's where you have to start bringing the mix back down to balance it out.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Danny McVey: But by doing that everybody can hear the snare drum. Everybody can hear – and, and certain music literally requires certain instruments being noticeably louder. Uh, Cajun music for example, the, the snare drum in, in Cajun music, the way they want to hear it, is almost high as the vocals.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Danny McVey: And normally, you know, you wouldn't really do that, but with that music it fits beautifully and it gets the people out dancing –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: – and, uh, so, every, every kind of music has little things about it that don't make sense really with a lot of other music, but totally fit with the sound that the people really are, are trying to achieve and hear.

Norie Guthrie: Okay. Um, could you talk more about – well, you, you know, in the conversation that we had before, um, you had mentioned, um, having the, getting your first chance to actually mix sound at Anderson Fair. Wha, what was that experience like?

Danny McVey: That, that was absolutely to this day still is, is one of the things that I'm honored by. Tim Leatherwood is to me, he's a tradition of Houston. He's kept Anderson Fair going somehow miraculously all these years. Anderson Fair is, as far as I'm concerned, is, is the heart of Houston music. I mean I, I know the Sand Mountain there were other clubs before them, but he's got in there, he stuck with it, he is, he's such an incredible fixture, he's always Tim, and he, and, and Anderson Fair is such a unique building, because one, there's the back of the stage wall, it's got a big hump and you can't really tell 'cause there's curtains there.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: But when you go back in the dressing room you can go who in the world built this place? But he also has a little sound board that's kind of in a roost right at the back of the club. The first time I was allowed to, you know, was with the Paradise band, we went in there and of course Tim was friends with Pam and Joe and all the Dogtooth people. I don't think he really knew me that well at that point, but by I think just by luck of association, he allowed me, you know, the honor of mixing and to me one of the greatest clubs in the city. And then he kinda, I think he was enjoying sometime, 'cause he knew I was probably safe and I uuddn't gonna blow his system up, you know, it got to be hey, sure, no problem, you know, have fun, enjoy yourself and, uh, that, that, you know, that means a lot. Some guys, um, sometimes you hear, you know, thank you's, and well it sounded great tonight, whatever, but for the most part you don't really hear anything if you, unless you did something wrong. And that's, that's how a lot of things are, but, so, it's okay.

Norie Guthrie: Um, so after working with Paradise you mentioned that you worked with, um, the, Michael Marcoulier, Shake Russell, John Vandiver, Dana Cooper. Can you talk more about working with them over the years?

Danny McVey: Sure. Michael, Michael, um, had a band and, uh, uh, kinda, I was hanging out at Corky's at the time, just kinda got, you know, 'cause I knew some of the people and such, and, and, uh, Michael found out that I knew a little about sound and, you know, it's sometimes real helpful for a band that travels a little bit, not, you know, it wasn't like we were going to New York every week, we were going to Huntsville, or Nacogdoches or some place to play small college town.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: Um, but it, you know, it was, it was a little reggae, it was a little country, um, and, uh, he had Carson Graham and Bill Strong was his bass player. Carson was the drummer and Jimmy Raycraft, uh, who, was his guitar player. And Jimmy and I, you know, have since become, you know, best of friends. He's my roommate and we've known each other ever since then and, um, Jimmy and I were about to go to play Armadillo World Headquarters with Michael once, and we were at Corky's talking about it and he goes, yeah, it's gonna be fun, that's my birthday. And I went nah it's not your birthday, let's see your license. We both have the same day, same year, same city that we were born on.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: So how could you not be best friends? So, you know, uh, and so because of that we kinda developed a good friendship, but I traveled wherever, you know, Michael traveled, did sound for him, learned and grew myself, because a lot of times we'd go into some club in, on 6th Street in, and, and Austin and there'd be some, you know, house sound guy there, and you either go in and you act like you're a real stuff –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: – and they laugh at you and let you kinda sink on your own. Or you go in and make best friends and tell me what my rules are and then you, you know, sometimes you can learn a whole lot. And that was probably the thing that helped me the most was learning, 'cause every place was different, um, the Steamboat in Austin on 6th Street had a very unusual, because it was a long straight room, had a single sound system, uh, kinda one, just one speaker stack. Most of them there's always two that you'll see. But there, they just put one in one corner of the stage and shot it across the club and it worked great, because of the way the room was laid out.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: Um, we did shows there, opening for Stevie Ray Vaughn, and, you know, lots of different, you know, different people. Um, excuse me, with Michael, um, he was obviously, we were all good friends with Shake and Dana and John Vandiver, and that kinda just grew into kinda just a big group of friends all, you know, we'd open as Marcoulier for Shake and Dana and then John would come out probably between us and do one of his unbelievable shows. Um, and then Shake and Dana would come out, and then John would come back up, and Michael would come up, and Jimmy would come back up and it would be like a million people on the stage. And even some of those, I think I mentioned to you that, um, the mixed position for, uh, Steamboat Springs here in Houston, was actually in, in an air vent.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: The air vent also we shared with a print shop next door and so sound check at 5:00 o'clock as they were finishing up and cleaning out their chemicals, sometimes we'd get a little creative, um, but later in the night when it would just be, you know, we'd done our set and we were about to, you know, go forward and, you know, and then we, everybody would be back up. I would go up and we would share the mix, because one would be a big mix, there'd be like so many people singing and so many instruments, and, uh, Shake's engineer Don Lawrence and I would, we kinda would just, what do you want? Instruments or vocals? Well, I'll do instruments. Okay, and we would share, we'd tell each other, hey that sounds a little funky or that sounds good. One more wonderful learning experience, Don Lawrence has been with John Hagee's church in Cornerstone, I think, or something out in San Antonio for years. It goes with my 'ole joke of old sound guys either die or they get a church gig, so.

Norie Guthrie: Yes he's, you're really right about that.

Danny McVey: Some things can't be denied, I'm one of it, uh, 17 years in April at my current job at a church, so.

Norie Guthrie: Um, so you played at, um, not played, um, so you did the mixing at the, at the variety of clubs. Can you talk about some of those? You've, you kinda described what the, the difficulties of Anderson, um, what were, how did the other ones work?

Danny McVey: Well Anderson Fair was always wonderful because it's truly, and I've heard it referred to as this, I don't think I'm insulting anybody, but it's a hush bar. Where literally people

aren't shy about turning around and telling you, can you be quiet? Stop talking. Stop making all that noise. We're trying to listen to our friend here sing. And that's usually the case. To me that's, that's, I'm sorry, that's very cool. I mean I, I've had people that I've been with that I, that have been hushed and I'm just going, yeah, you need to, but, you know, either we pay attention or we can go outside, either way. So, and, and Corky's was a little bit, how can I say it? A hair wilder, but, but the, the incredible talent that would go through. Lee Roy Parnell also I think used to play there. Um, the talent that would go through there in a single month was phenomenal, and, uh, and I really still to this day believe, because it was, it was a family thing, when nights when you weren't playing there, there'd be a 50/50 chance you'd be there to see somebody else.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: And that, that, that's what to me is what a real music scene's about. Um, and it may be going on today, I'm just kinda, you know, a little older and I don't, I don't get out as much as I used to. It's, it's kinda rare. I get out some, but, but not like I used to, uh, full time jobs and going out until 2:00 in the morning, just aren't near as much fun as they used to be. Not, not saying I haven't done plenty, but.

Norie Guthrie: Um, can you describe Cork, you said that Corky's was in a house.

Danny McVey: A house on Hawthorne and Whitney in the Montrose area. About, uh, Hawthorne's like the parallel block to Montrose probably and a few blocks over. It was a real nice brickhouse, um, had a kind of a 15/20 car parking lot, not, not, joining it.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: Um, it had, um, a small room in the front, a main room that literally was maybe two tables deep and then a bar that ran a section of the room, uh, and then a back room I guess. That was where people could kinda go and be noisy and such. The main room though you pretty much, and there were speakers back there and for the sound, but you couldn't really see the stage unless you were kinda in the front part of the back room. Um, like I said, it was, it was a, it was a great place, uh, Les and Eileen treated everybody like family, um, Bruce, their manager, was this big, tall, giant wonderfully funny guy, and, um, he kinda ran the place. Um, I did have a night when, when I, uh, tested electronics, not on purpose, but I had a margarita in my hand and there was four light switches that you would change lights. So when you're mixing three microphones you can kinda get bored and those lights are fun.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: Um, but unfortunately my margarita was apparently way too close to that spot on the shelf. Fortunately it was close to the end of the night and I looked as it poured right down onto the mixing console. At that time, of course, I'm a musician/sound guy and I'm not making money to buy anybody a new board and I'm just like total shock and Les goes, well, you know, we'll call tomorrow. It'll probably dry out, it'll be fine, we'll get a hairdryer. And of course the first call the next morning, uh, do I need to like start borrowing some money, what's, what's

going on? No everything's good. We dried it with the hairdryer, it's working great. So, you know, life lessons.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: They're everywhere.

Norie Guthrie: Um, did you also, uh, do sound at Theodore's?

Danny McVey: I did, that was where I think that the story about mixing actually first happened –

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Danny McVey: – with Paradise.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Danny McVey: Uh, didn't really do much else there.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Danny McVey: Uh, Michael played there before I, I got with his band.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: But no, not really. I remember, um, that it was a neat small, it was one of those big 'ole timey two-story Montrose houses.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: Near Westheimer right near the beginning of it, what I call beginning of Westheimer. And, um, it was a big two-story house, but it was like all those there broken up and real small rooms, so actual listening room if it held 40 people it'd be a miracle.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Danny McVey: But it was, it was fun, you know, uh, a lot of gear we carried in.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: Uh, I remembered the piano player was using a Fender Rose piano that, uh, I used to think I was real strong, and I wasn't. I'd grab it like a, a bear and just try to carry it in and it weighed, it weighed a ton and thank goodness it wasn't the Leslie B3s which some people travel with, which are giant organs and they have a big heavy wooden speaker cabinet that goes with them.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: With a horn that revolves inside of it, which makes wonderful sounds, but I always feel so sorry for road crews when you see a B3 going, oh poor guys.

Norie Guthrie: And then, um, so there, Steamboat is one that I don't really know very much about.

Danny McVey: The Houston?

Norie Guthrie: Yes. The Houston one.

Danny McVey: It, it was over near the Galleria. There was a little, uh, there's a parking lot probably there right now.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: And there's a little curved street and it was right there and it was, uh, it, it was one of those places with no windows and you'd go inside and it was probably an office building or something, or at least I don't, I don't remember it being many real open windows to the place.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: They had a nice stage, um, I can't recall the owner's names, but, but it was all okay. We always did really good there, uh, it was one of those places just like Rockefeller's. If you, if you're doing good you can get 350 people in there and just be wow, this is great, you know, because it really looks packed. And –

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Danny McVey: – I'm just gonna tell you bands as well as sound guys feed off that energy. It's a, it's a real thing, when people, when you're up there and you're three songs into it and suddenly you realize the entire place is with you and dancing or, or singing along. That's kinda the magic of music and there really is, not to sound like a weirdo, but there really is magic to music. I'll make a T-shirt someday.

Norie Guthrie: Um, and then can you talk about Rockefellers, what that was like?

Danny McVey: I sure can. I, I have a funny Rockefellers' story or two. Uh, you might have to edit. Uh, Rockefellers was a, a absolutely beautiful building, uh, we had a wonderful friend there named Don Mackaniche who was like the monitor guy for years. Uh, and then another guy, uh, Tony Carrey, who later went to work at LD Systems where I worked, who was kinda the front of the house back during the period when we were there, which was probably late 70s to mid-80s, something like that. Absolutely beautiful building. The dressing room was the old bank vault. So literally when you went out onto the stage you opened the door and there was probably at least 6 foot of solid concrete that you walked past to go up onto the stage.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: Um, and, and it was a perfect presentation spot because the stage was really high. So not only could the people, you know, get a great visual from the floor seating, they had these wonderful little balconies that you could, you know, from the second floor, that you could literally be right over a band on a couple of 'em that were at the front. And then the rest were just all great seats. Um, a lot of, a lot of interesting times there. A lot of really great players and it, it was an absolutely wonderful room.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: It, it always sounded great, uh, one of those places where, you know, people like, you know, from Albert King, notorious for going out with a wireless guitar and playing out in the middle of Washington Boulevard. Uh, a lot of, a lot of unusual stuff like that.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: And every wonderful artist you can think of from B.B. King to you name it, has played Rockefeller's stage. Um, in the early days it was owned and, uh, building, it's probably been sold now, but it was owned by Sanford and Susie Criner, which are just two wonderful people that did, I think they actually had the Satellite Lounge for a while, it was there's as well. They owned a, a big portion of Washington Boulevard to my understanding from their family and such, and just great people, great people.

Norie Guthrie: So after, um, doing work with, um, Michael Marcoulier and Shake Russell, John Vandiver, Danny Cooper – actually to go back to that, you know, um, can you tell me, uh, a little bit about John Vandiver and your experiences with him?

Danny McVey: John was a, a, um, how can I say it? He was a, he was a, if, if it's one of the terms like a gentle bear, um, he was, uh, he wasn't like, you know, I mean I didn't know him enough that I could say oh yeah, we had these great in-depth conversations. Well, no, but, but we did enjoy each other's company, uh, we did a recording with, that's an absolutely still to this day, holds up from, out at Rivendale Studio with Shake, John and Michael, all, all three groups, Shake and Dana, sorry, Michael and John, and it's called *Coming Home*, and it is a truly, to this day still holds up a good album. Brian Tankersley was the engineer on the project, sound guys would know that I guess. Um, and I've worked with him since he went to LA, did some stuff and wound up in Nashville doing like Shania Twain recordings and did really good. Um, but John was a, a, just a wonderful guy, uh, the, you know, when him and Debbie, Debbie his, his girlfriend was just absolutely one of the sweetest ladies you'd know. She hung out at, um, uh, Corky's quite a lot, that's where I probably knew her more than even I did John, because she'd hang out with whoever was working the door. Those were kinda like all friends and stuff. And, um, and then of course, you know, the, the sad news of when John and Debbie were killed, which was, you know, a total, you know shocker for everyone. Um, you know, John to my understanding had kinda taken this guy in to, would help him work on his MGs and John had kind of a collection of older MGs that was his kind of passion. Uh, he lived out kinda had a little

piece of property out kinda Tomball area I always understood, but never went and apparently John did a little bit of extra-curricular activities to say, and, um, this person decided to bring some friends and come back and rob 'em and murder 'em, and, uh, very, very sad. Uh, shook up the, our whole community massively. Nobody knew what happened. Nobody knew if, was something more involved and if anybody else should be afraid. It was, it, and it was just one off evil plain and simple, just one off evil and a true loss. That, that man could go into Rockefellers completely packed house with nothing but his guitar and within half a song have the place in his pocket and, uh, uh, I, there's just like some, CDs out that, that his daughter's released.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: Uh, recently she started putting some more recordings that she has out online. I saw a picture of the whole crew, uh, in, on the stage in Rockefeller's all wearing white tuxedos, and, uh, and that was kinda cool. I don't think it had anything to do with the recording, but it was an absolute great shot. Um, and so, you know, that, that's, that is pretty much my John memories. He's, you know, a great guy taken too soon, as some are.

Norie Guthrie: Right. Um, after kinda moving on from working with Marcoulier, um, Russell, Vandiver, and Cooper, um, you started to mix sound for, um, some of Jimmy Raycraft's bands.

Danny McVey: Yeah. Jimmy was a guitar player for Michael, and, and Michael just got into, you know, some kind of more personal issues and stuff and, and things just got a little maybe too serious for Jimmy and I, and we were kinda hanging out buddies and stuff anyways, so it was kinda like, it's kinda like the, the our gang comment, you know, well we can have a play, we've got a barn. And Jimmy and I were we can put a band together, we, we know how to do that. And, um, I don't know that we necessarily did. We started with, you know, Michael's other members and, um, uh, Mike Roberts was part of the Potatoes Band and he was, uh, now plays with Shake and has for years, just a wonderful guy.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: And, um, so we did some stuff with him, we did, uh, uh, a project called Jimmy Raycraft and the Thin Men right out of the, um, let's see, I guess, was that, no actually that was after the Dishes project, so I'm jumping, jumping bands a little. So we tried some things called the Potatoes –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: – and different things right after Michael. And we would play at Touch of Texas up in Huntsville, 'cause we did a lot of shows up there. Touch of Texas was a very interesting club as well. It was literally on the town square, it might've used to been an old movie theater, uh, about two blocks down from the prison walls, which is, needless to say an interesting place to be trying to play music.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: Uh, the sound board was very strange. It was upstairs and directly above the band so to mix you had to make your adjustments, run out of the sound booth, run to the opposite end of the club upstairs and listen, and lean down and see if it sounded okay. And then whatever else, and you'd run back and make other adjustments. It was, it was different, but a great, uh, also a great place, uh, local Huntsville people. James Gray, I think, was one of the owners and, uh, just, you know, really good people, uh, Jimmy Don Smith and the Cold Cuts which were really unbelievable, kinda more blues type band, uh, would play there a lot and I'd mix sound for him probably a couple of times there. And, uh, you know, he, he was just one of those monster players, if he hadn't 've passed he'd probably been the, the other Stevie Ray Vaughn kinda guy and very, very talented.

Norie Guthrie: And so, uh, after the, um, the Potatoes, then there were the Dishes.

Danny McVey: Right. The Dishes kinda, um, was one of those things where we just went well this other thing's not working very good, but let's try something different. As you know with bands it's always, it's always a ever changing kinda gel form of some sort until, until something say solidifies. And, um, I, Jimmy and I both knew a girl named Barbara Donaho, and she was a guitar player, keyboard player, singer, uh, Jimmy knew a guy named Dickie Malone who was a bass player and Jimmy had worked with him previously in a very unusual rock and roll band called Spats. And, uh, so Dickie kinda came and then we tried some different drummers. One drummer was, uh, came over to be interviewed and he pulled up in an old vintage Ford, 60s Ford, gets out, carries his drum kit in. His drum pedal is, the pedal of a drum, a bass drum is normally metal and all this was cut out of a piece of wood, I guess to the shape of his foot, and in the resume that he sent us, he said he was a stand-up show drummer. So after we did a song or two and, you know, we could tell he had speed issues, meaning that he would start out at one speed and then, you know, the song he'd be, you know, moving a lot faster than anybody else.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: But he was telling the story about how he became a stand-up drummer. He said, well it's one, one, one, one day I had this new drum stool and I played and had a long show and I played and it started rubbing a sore on me. And I, finally I just stood up and I, and I kicked that stool away and I'd been standing up to play ever since. Fortunately he wasn't our drummer, but he was made for some really great stories. Uh, we tried, uh, another couple of drummers on our first and second gig, because we just wanted to get out there and play.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: You should always have your, your whole show together before you take adventures. We did one show, and we did a lot of Beatles music with The Dishes. Uh, the first show we did had almost every Beatle song, had an incredible reggae beat. Not quite what you're after, but different. Um, and then, uh, after that we finally discovered through a waitress at Corky's, her husband, Pete Falcone –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: – was a, a drummer and so we got talking to Pete, we all liked him, because he was just, you know, one of those guys if you could not help but like. You know, drummers will have constant straight, concentration points when their face goes, or their mouth, or their tongue sticks out, but it's what they use to do their concentrating. Pete's was just a giant smile. He could not play without it being a giant smile. That was his point of concentration. And, uh, so it turned into a real interesting project, um, we were given a warning at Corky's one night for doing, uh, a Harry Nilsson song, “You're Breaking My Heart, You're Tearing Me Apart,” so two words I can't say right now, but unfortunately we had a gentleman in the audience from the Texas Alcohol and Beverage Commission and on break he came up and said, guys I, um, could give you, uh, uh, a ticket for that, but you did it really well so just maybe not do it again, okay? And so we were smart enough to, you know not, not to do it again, but at, that band was pretty experimental and, and, uh, they were doing some, uh, “Johnny Are you Queer” song, which was kinda, was a little new wavy, a little, you know, kind of fun rock and roll stuff, and –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: – turned into a really major dance, dance show. We would pack Rockefeller's, we would pack Fitzgerald's, and, uh, just, you know, consistently sometimes, one or two nights a month, and, uh, and, um, you know, and then Nacogdoches we would just pack there. Of all places, College Station, there was a little tiny club there called Grins, Dr. G's and Morgan Stearns were the three names for the same place, and I'm sorry I can't remember in what order they were, but, but at this place was literally a hole in the wall, like a small house, but they literally would pack in – through the night we would have 300 people pay covers through the door. And it was, you know, just a whole lot of fun, you know, college towns.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm. Um, then I guess at some point you, when did you start working for, um, Beans Barton?

Danny McVey: Um, I started, well the Jimmy Dishes project probably broke up in 86, 87. Fantasized about going to chiropractic school and realized that that was gonna be financially just a bit of a challenge. So I took a job at LD Systems which is probably at that time, and probably still to this day, is the largest sound and lighting company in town. They do the sound and lights for Houston Rodeo, uh, they toured with ZZ Top, they toured with Stevie Ray back in the day, so, you know, they, they've, and they've done major stuff that probably have the most state of the art sound gear, you know in the country at this time. Um, so working there it kinda was like, you know, uh, it was a job, you know, it was full time, it was, you know, running the rental department and not, you know, kind of missing music, reality –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: – and Beans, you know, called up and said we sure we should come, you know, mix us. And I go, well let me give it a try. And the good thing about Beans at the time was he would always pretty much just, he didn't want to work odd nights, he was always I want to work Saturday nights 'cause that's when the people come out, but that's when I can recover on Sundays, that kind of thing. And so I went out started next to him, just, obviously Beans is one of these kind of people that you, you gotta admire him for so many reasons other than being the

musician, being the Mr. Mom, being whatever other great things the guy's accomplished, but performance artist, the real artist, uh, any guy can take a blank canvas at the beginning of the night and at the end of the night, auction it off for the Houston Food Bank. That's, that's, that's cool. I just, gets points.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: And, and it just, you know, is one of those things where Beans told me about halfway through it, you know, if you ever stop doing this I'm gonna stop it. I'm don't put that on me ever. But after about 24 years it got to the point where he really wasn't enjoying working in clubs as much.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: I, um, and then so he would try to want to go out and do like a show in a venue, uh, I think the last few he's done were in, uh, Frenetic Theater, like a dance type place in the east end.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: And really neat little venue, perfect place, but at that point with, with a full time job and the thought of having to arrange a sound system, have it there for the day for rehearsal, pray that it's there the next day when you show up for your job, was just getting a little too much for me. So at that point I kinda banged out, maybe in the last 2 years, and, uh, you know, kinda just, uh, I, I run a crew of ten people doing sound every day of the week where I work and, uh, so it, and an av, average of about 80 events a week, so I, I, um, I get all that pretty much, you know, I'm still, I'm still satisfied pretty much with that

Norie Guthrie: So if you think about kinda the comparisons how was it mixing for kinda folk-related acts versus rock fans?

Danny McVey: Uh, drums, drums. I, I'll just, I, I'll say it, I'll say it, uh, my, my absolute favorite television show right now of all things comes on the Rural Farm channel.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: And it's the Marty Stewart show. If you haven't seen it, figure out a way to see it. It's, it's absolutely wonderful and it's very kinda old school and he'll even bring out his wife, who's a pretty famous country singer, and they'll do a gospel song at some point and they'll have everybody on the show you can think of. But there are places where the drummer will walk out during a beautiful gospel song, or even a country song, with a snare drum on his belt and brushes

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Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: – and just give the feel of the rhythm, um, so that's really the main difference. You know there are folk acts that I've mixed, you know, that have, have drums and that's all great, but usually they're a little more reserved. With rock and roll, you know, your mix starts with the kick drum and you build off of that and you want it to, you know, you want people to – with rock and roll the, the kind of I guess, real difference is the kick drum and the bass guitar, you want to feel right here in your chest.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: As crazy as that sounds, when you do, you know that the mix is getting right for what people want to feel to dance.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: And that's pretty much the difference. Folk is listening, rock is, you know, hopefully you're gonna get people up and moving and dancing. And that's, that's, and, and of course obviously the volume factor, uh, rocks gonna always be louder.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: Uh, you know, leads are gonna be bring that lead out, let's hear it. With folk it's, it's, you know, so discretionary you don't pull something out a lot if it's already there and sounding really good. Like I think I mentioned to you about mixing Slaid Cleaves at the Mucky Duck.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: And the greatest thing about it was at one point he said Danny turn the monitors off. And he had a nice big 'ole style large diagram type recording microphone that was set up and the band formed a horseshoe around the microphone so when he'd sing he'd lean into the microphone and when somebody would take the lead, they'd lean into the microphone and that's, to me, that's, that's some real pure stuff, so.

Norie Guthrie: And then looking over, kinda that time period in Houston, in the 70s and 80s, um, what do you think has changed in the music scene?

Danny McVey: Um, I, I still like I said, I've been to probably up until the 90s, I would still, you know, go out, hear clubs, you know, sometimes mix it Dan Electro's, just because my friend Jim Mendenhall, he was the owner and one, another one that like was kind enough to, you know, allow me to mix.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: Uh, you know, to, when someone trusts you enough to go, hey I'm, I'm, I gotta tend bar tonight, will you cover me? You know, yeah, and, and it, and it's great to, through that I was able to mix, uh, Billy Joe Shaver on his birthday one year there. Um, the year, I think

previous to that, uh, I mixed him when his son Eddie was still alive, and his mom, or somebody in his family, had just passed away and, you know, we were just talking about it and then the very next year, I think, Eddie had passed, so, uh, you know. Like one more example, it's just, music is pretty magical, the opportunities that it allows you. I once did sound for Jerry Lewis at the Galleria, how crazy is that? Jerry Lewis. But turned out for my entire life I thought he wouldn't gonna be a really nice guy. I figured he would be not, and he was the nicest guy you'd ever want to meet, so, go figure.

Norie Guthrie: Um, are there any kind of ways that you could look over that time period and kinda, like kind of things that you can, something that made it special or –

Danny McVey: I think, I think that to me what, what made that, that time period special was there was a music community. Everybody knew each other, everybody kinda supported each other, um, yeah, and, and places like Corky's, yeah, musicians would just wave through, you're on the guest list, it was, you know, you're part of the family. I think that was really part of what made that time period so magical in a way, because people would not only, there'd be a great act like Uncle Walt's Band performing at Corky's through, just unbelievable. Um, and then in the audience you would see Shake and you would see this person and this other musician, and they'd all be just mesmerized by, you know, how good they were. And then the same thing on Shake's night, he'd be up there and the other people would be in the audience, same thing. It's, to me, that's, that's, that's where it really gets past just being, you know, going to hear somebody and, and such as that. There actually is a community, people see it, people know when there's other performers in the audience, and because of that I think that draws people into clubs, for that reason, so, I, and I don't know that, I mean I know that up until, you know, I kinda stopped in the last, I'll say 10 years or better, of really doing a whole lot of club stuff, um, I, that can very well be going on right now, and I hope that's the way it is, because to me it's, to me it's crucial. Everything as you showed me from the incredible archives that are here, everything that we do, even some silly poster, it means something. It, it, it's part of our history. It's part of what people did. Jimmy used to do these silly flyers that I'm sure I might have brought you some. That were nothing, but he'd take old magazines and do his own version of clip art and cut out little funny cartoon faces and stuff and turn that into the calendar for the month's events.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Danny McVey: And, uh, you know, things where you learned about making posters, uh, you know, we, how many posters have you seen that had so much information on it, and unless you're standing right beside it, you couldn't, you couldn't tell what it was. I still think some of the greatest posters ever made were the ones that Liberty Hall, Liberty Hall had, which were like famous posters with like red, yellow, green or something, just sections on it, but they had the artist picture, the location, the date, probably \$4.00 cover or something like that to see, you know, who knows somebody that nowadays you would pay a fortune for.

Norie Guthrie: Right. Well I want to thank you so much for coming in and, um, for talking about what you do and, um, the experiences that you had.

Danny McVey: This has been an absolute pleasure. Wasn't sure but I really enjoyed it.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.