

Biography

In the Lone Star State, where the squeezebox pervades the musical landscape, Ponty Bone is an authentic Texas accordion King. He's a master of the instrument who has played with some of the state's most influential artists and infused his instrument and talents into a myriad of popular and roots musical styles, in the process winning an international reputation.

For two decades Bone has led his band, The Squeezetones, to popularity throughout the Southwest, the rest of America and across Europe; and, over seven prior years with Joe Ely, he helped change the face of country music. He has shared the stage and studio with such varied musicians as punk rock stars The Clash, Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers, fellow Texas accordion King Flaco Jimenez, country-rock superstar Linda Ronstadt and English rock legend Ronnie Lane. He's even been name-checked in a book of short stories by noted playwright and actor Sam Shepard. And his resume of musical associations reads like an honor roll of Texas music: Ely, Jimmie Dale Gilmore, Butch Hancock, Terry Allen, Jerry Jeff Walker, Robert Earl Keen, Gary P. Nunn, Omar & The Howlers, both Bruce & Charlie Robison, Terri Hendrix and Timbuk 3, to name some but hardly all.

The keys to Ponty Bone's pervasive accomplishments are an all-embracing musicality and a magical touch that brings deep soul and feel-good vibes to all the music that his accordion graces. Whether he is playing a roadhouse, concert stage, cantina, folk festival, nightclub, college campus or backyard pig roast - just some of the venues where he has appeared - Bone is "the salsa that spices it up," as the Santa Monica Mirror puts it. That's because Ponty Bone is "the Real McCoy of soulful accordion playing," says his fellow squeezebox hero Flaco Jimenez.

The musical magic created by Ponty Bone sparkles and sizzles throughout his new album on Loud House Records, *Fantasize*. It's a disc that synthesizes such a rich variety of music that Spain's *La Hora Del Blues* ponders whether Bone is "the creator of a new style that has not yet been invented." On the disc, he draws from rock, blues, Tex-Mex, Louisiana Cajun and zydeco, R&B, country and even Caribbean music and gathers together some of the finest musicians in Austin, Texas, including his Loudhouse labelmate and old accomplice R.C. Banks. The results are both a master class in the musical universality of the accordion as well as a veritable party encased in a CD jewel box.

Although Ponty Bone has long been associated with such Texas musical nexuses as Lubbock and Austin, he actually hails from the accordion capital of the Republic, San Antonio. He began studying the accordion at five years old and later played the trumpet in his high school marching band. After graduation, Bone spent some time in Houston digging the likes of Lightning Hopkins in the local clubs and accordionist Clifton Chenier in nearby Louisiana before heading to Lubbock to attend Texas Tech.

At the time, Lubbock was home to a generation of musicians who later carved out a major niche in Texas music. Through a chance introduction to a teenager named Jimmie Gilmore, Ponty began to add his accordion to many a party and, eventually, many a night in a coffee-house or bar with this group, also including Angela Strehli, Lewis Cowdrey, Jesse Taylor and John X. Reed. Eventually, during a stint in Phoenix, Bone, along with his first wife Sarah, led the popular blues band *New Moan Hey* while also serving as a way station for their musical friends from Lubbock in their frequent travels to and from California.

On landing back in the Lubbock area in the early '70s, he started playing with Lubbock country music patriarch and visionary Tommy Hancock in his *Roadside Playboys* at the legendary Cotton Club. This association would continue over the

years as Bone also worked with Hancock's Supernatural Family Band and the group formed by Hancock's wife and daughters, The Texana Dames, who provide background vocals on Fantasize.

When Joe Ely signed a deal with MCA Records in 1976, he asked Bone to join his band. Over the course of five albums, countless tours here and abroad, and shows, consistent critical acclaim and collaborations with the likes of The Clash and Ronstadt, the Joe Ely Band forged a new brand of Texas country music with Bone's accordion as one of the signature instruments. Eventually relocating to Austin, the Ely Band became a beloved local institution alongside such peers as Stevie Ray Vaughan and The Fabulous Thunderbirds.

In early 1982, Bone stepped up to the plate to form his own band, the first version including his then-current Ely Band partners Robert Marquam on drums and Mike Robberson on bass. In a fashion similar to the way Ely and company had blasted open the boundaries of country music, Ponty Bone and The Squeezetones created an open range for the accordion. An instrument that is often unfairly portrayed, it gained new respect as the band played shows and festivals in Texas, Canada, Europe and Mexico, and released three albums to critical praise: Easy As Pie, My, My, My, Look At This and Dig Us On The Road Somewhere.

Fronting, and always with his accordion, one of the busiest acts on the Lone Star State circuit, Bone proved himself an able singer, songwriter and bandleader. He tapped the rich Austin talent pool for so many noted players that when a Squeezetones reunion was held at Austin's La Zona Rosa in 1992, some 70 musicians were invited to celebrate the band's legacy. And all along, Bone has continued to collaborate with his contemporaries from around the world on shows, sessions and side projects, his name becoming almost synonymous with Texas accordion.

Now, with Fantasize, Ponty Bone has added another capstone to his amazing musical journey and his 20 years leading the Squeezetones. The Austin American-Statesman has already picked it as one of the Austin Albums of the Year, while the disc is also stoking an initial buzz that reverberates from Texas to France, Italy, Belgium, Denmark, Holland, Germany and Australia. For as the Austin Chronicle notes, Listening to a new Ponty Bone album is like getting an invitation to a get-together that turns into a full-scale party." So slip Fantasize into the CD player and get ready to let some Texas-sized good times roll.

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