

Interviewee: Nick Gaitan

Interviewer's Name: Mary Manning

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Length of Interview: 1:23:48

Transcription Conventions:

“ . . . ” after a phrase that is not completed.

Repeated words/short phrases and fillers such as “uh”, “um,” and “ah” are usually not transcribed.

Pauses and laughter are not noted or transcribed.

[0:01] **Mary:** These numbers will start moving, and they're moving. Today is August 9th 2015, and I'm Mary Manning with the Houston Arts Alliances, Folk Life, and Traditional Arts program. I'm at the home of bass player Nick Gaitan of Umbrella Man, who has kindly agreed to share his knowledge and expertise about different genres of music he performs.

Now, did I say your last name right?

[0:22] **Nick:** Yes.

[0:26] **Mary:** Alright, so first question. Describe your first memory of hearing music.

[0:32] **Nick:** My first memory of hearing music, growing up in my house there was a lot of music. There was what would be soul music. Motown. There was country because growing up as a kid in the 80s, we still had a lot of the great 70s country players and some from before that were still around, but you had Willie, you had Waylon, you had George Jones, you still had Emmett. Everybody was there, and then you had these huge ... Not only country music, but the pop music of the time because I was also growing up in the MTV generation. We got to see things like Michael Jackson's stardom after Jackson 5. We got to see all the 80s music be created. My first memory of music I can remember being ... As long as I can remember, music has been in my life. Just always been around it.

[1:30] **Mary:** Describe how music was a part of your family or your community.

[1:35] **Nick:** Okay. Both. Again, family ... I mean, weekends ... Music was always in the house, like I said, but there was weekends where Mom and Dad were cleaning the house and they'd crank the stereo and it would be José Alfredo Jimenez. It would be Motown tracks. It would be be Marvin Gaye. It would be The Guess Who. It would be anything from 60s music, 50s, and then 40s even, but there was always music on in the house. That's how it was a big part of my family.

[2:12] Also, other than my parents, when my parents were off at work and we were kids there in the summertime with my brother and my sister, we were left ... They were older than me, so they were able

to take care of us. We didn't need babysitters or anything like that. They were grown up kids already. Teenagers, even. We would listen to different music with my brother. We were listening to classic rock. We were listening to metal. We were listening to all that, so in that aspect, that's another angle of music in my family and how that connection is made.

[2:45] During the late 80s, early 90s Tejano explosion, I remember even another branch of music being part of my family was going down to Guadalupe Plaza and watching any and all the Tejano bands that would go play there. That's right there on Jensen and Ann Street, and the house my mother grew up in was on Ann Street, right across the way. We were going to visit our grandmother, then we'd all kind of take ourselves over there, go enjoy the music, and end up coming back. Sometimes we would have garage sales out of the garage down there and we'd catch all that traffic.

[3:28] Music is like the glue to everything, is what I see (.) Now, the community. Yeah. Community, when I think of music and community, I think of elementary school and I think of assemblies that we were a part of and I think about how they were showing us well, this is Black History Month. This is Hispanic History Month. Every hyphenated American History Month there was, there was music and dance for that. That's how I see ... Because our community were all of those colors and I love that about growing up in southeast Houston. We are 45, 610, 225, and I10 every which way. Then the streets are black, white, brown, yellow. I mean, everybody's here. Again, the celebrations, the school involvement ... My elementary school was just like that. It was very diverse. Some groups larger than others, but so much was represented in culture and I think we were lucky to have that. That's what I think of when I think of music in the community.

[4:25] I also think about Quinceañeras. I've never stood in the Quince. I've never stood in a Quinceañera. I was always busy doing one thing or the other or just afraid to death to dance. I never did. I enjoyed going to them because I enjoyed the bands. Music again. I enjoyed watching people dance, but myself at that age that you stand at Quinceañeras, I was never brave enough to dance for some reason. That's what I think of when I think of music in the community because again, it was the glue. It gets people to come out of their shells when they're young.

[5:10] A kid almost feels sometimes growing up, hearing something new, they almost feel ... The best word I can describe it as is they feel almost embarrassed to like something. That's when they come out of a shell, when they actually embrace it and just taste that joy from it and then they can embrace something further.

[5:30] **Mary:** Tell me about learning to play music.

[5:35] **Nick:** Learning to play music. I remember exactly when that happened. We had this organ. It was an organ that you would find at a garage sale. Of course, my mom and ... As far as I can remember, we were running around stopping at garage sales and doing that. I kind of hated it as a kid, and now it's all I do.

[5:57] I don't know where this organ came from, but it was this black ... No, it was a brown. It was a dark brown plastic organ that when you turned it on, there was a fan inside, like an actual fan so the organ

would breathe to give it that organ sound. I guess it was reed operated. We would always have to put a thick book, a dictionary or something underneath it to pick it up. My sister ... The first time I ever remember playing music was my sister showing me how to play Silent Night on the keyboard. I haven't thought about that in a long time.

[6:35] That was the first piece of music that I learned and that's when I started to actually pay attention to it and I had it practiced and I had it down. My parents were impressed because I was little, messing around with this piano. Granted, kids start way younger, but I don't even remember how old I was, but I remember my parents bringing my grandparents to my room and saying, "Play it for them! Play it for them!" That was the first time I played anything.

[7:04] The next time ... Well, the time where music became a part of my life ... Well, became a bigger part of my life than just casually - than just to my ears, I guess - was in junior high. My brother brought a cassette tape home and he might have been in high school, in the later years of high school. Yeah, I think that's what it was, unless it was out of high school by then. He brought home a cassette tape and it was about 92 or 93. No, it was 93. 93-94, that was the school year. He brought a demo home from an old friend of his that he just ran into who happened to be in a band. All of a sudden it just occurred to me, you can just be a regular old guy in a band and just start a band if that's what you want to do.

[8:02] I was thinking, well, all it takes is having an instrument. Then another light bulb went off and I flashed back. Grandpa gave Mike a guitar when we were kids and it's been in a closet for a long time. Of course, I got to thinking, all right, well where am I going to find strings? Just kind of went through the process of how am I going to obtain everything to do this?, what I just heard on this cassette tape, and end up on a cassette tape myself.

[8:29] That's what I did. I went to school talking about the guitar and everything and kind of just like I would start anything. Anything I get into, you start poking around, finding opinions about it. Well, I have this guitar in a closet. This is an old one, and this and that. Well, I got the guitar. I found the strings at a pawn shop on Lawndale, and I was happy. I was happy and thrilled that pawn shops sold guitar strings. I was like, who would have thought?

[8:57] I grabbed a set for five bucks, I remember, and slapped them on and didn't know how to tune the guitar or anything. Then I started figuring it out. Of course, we didn't have YouTube. The internet was just taking off in 93 -94 as far as on our side, the user side, to actually have videos and this wealth of information we have now. God knows, we learn a lot of stuff from YouTube now just on the fly. Just casual, how do I do this on this car? How do I disassemble this?

[9:35] What I did ... It was a funny coincidence. Here I am with a guitar. Here I am with some ... Put some new strings on there, and a friend from down the street on the next block ... Actually, his big brother played guitar. He knew how to tune the guitar. He showed me how, and then he showed me a couple of Nirvana songs. That got things started.

[9:58] Then I started poking around, because I've always been into magazines. We would go to the store - Fiesta, Safeway, whatever it was - I always want to pull a magazine of whatever I was into at the time. Then I found Guitar World. Cool. Picked that up, started learning how to read tabs.

[10:13] I'm self taught more or less, but early in those stages, I stayed ... My Uncle George, my dad's younger brother, he played guitar back in the day. I say back in the day. They were playing in the 60s. They were a a garage band called the Reverbs. That was my Uncle George's deal. He played with my Dad's cousin, James, I believe. Well, he showed me a few chords. He showed me the chords to the "House of the Rising Sun," and he showed me the chords to a Birds song. "For Your Love." I thought that was real cool. I took those chords and started to learn the song the way the Animals played it, for the "House of the Rising Sun."

[10:59] Meanwhile, I'm picking up song by song, but ... Oh, I skipped a step. Somewhere back there, somewhere between my Uncle teaching me a few chords and picking up the strings for the guitar, somewhere in there, coincidentally enough, my old friend Cesar comes to the front door and knocks on the door and tells my mom, "I hear Nick playing around on this guitar. I just found this book in the street." Somebody lost a book. It was the book to how to learn to play rhythm guitar. It's funny because I looked at that book and I was like, I've been seeing this picture of this book cover. It's so weird. All right, got it. I learned all of my chords there. Well, all your major and minor chords. The first things you would learn to need to play a song.

[11:40] That was started in junior high. By about ninth grade in high school I had my first band and we were playing talent shows and stuff. I even played a gig on Telephone Road when I was 15.

[11:55] **Mary:** Tell me more about your early performances.

[12:00] **Nick:** Okay. The first time I played on a stage with amplifiers, full drum kit, and everything, was at Milby High School in about 1996. No. '95. It was '95 and I was in a band. I was in a band with a friend named Wally, Arlo, Pete, and myself, and we called the band Sol a Sul. The singer of the band had picked that band name out. Of course, all I knew was how to crank my guitar up, play a few chords. I knew a few songs. Sounded like a 15-, 16- year-old kid with a guitar, you know? Not a very good one. Played on a pawn shop guitar. Several, of course.

[12:47] My early performances ... This is way before any of the stuff I've gotten going in the last 15 years. This is just the earliest, earliest memories of performing. The Milby High School talent show. We played one song, of course. We got beat by a group that came and whipped us and just whipped the cumbia out. I mean, they played it like the big boys. They took it home, and it was funny. We went home like [inaudible 13:17], but we had a good time.

[13:20] The next one, the next gig was in a place called the APV Room, which was in Allen Parkway Village. These apartments that used to be over there ... I believe they've built over the second Jeff Davis Hospital, the hospital my mom was born in. We played a gig there, and I didn't realize how cool that was at the time because I was like, what is this? I know this area. I know downtown. We drive through here all the time. Whatever. We were in the APV Room and as I said, when I would speak to friends, "Where

did you play?" "APV." "Oh man! I know that place!" All of a sudden, that's where a lot of punk rock shows and stuff go on. I thought that was cool. I played there once, and we just went on to our regularly scheduled program of high school or whatever we were doing.

[14:15] Another significant gig in my earliest of performances was this benefit we played for a guy named Lee Ramirez that was a Milby High School student who had been killed. He'd been robbed and killed, and his family and friends were throwing a benefit for him. It was right here somewhere on Telephone Road between 610 and 45. Somewhere along that stretch right around the middle where the bars are, we played a benefit. There was local younger bands playing, some other guys that I still see around that were older than us then that had been playing. Of course, we all got together and tried to raise money for the family. I played that day with the same band that I was in high school with, and that's when I met a friend of mine named Pete [inaudible 00:15:07]. That night I met a friend who I'm still friends with. He's a local musician as well. Just a great energy, a great friend.

[15:18] That night I remember because I met several people, but ended up meeting one of my best friends. It's a gig I won't forget because it was this young guy lost his life. We were all rocking for him. We threw down and then when the night was over, we all had curfews and stuff and got back home.

[15:40] Then there's a big blank space. There was no performing after about 10th grade in high school. I just wanted to finish high school and get to college. I had my guitars. I wasn't a bass player then. I was a guitar player. I didn't own a bass.

[16:01] Fast forward to about 97. I'm getting into college in the fall. I'm hanging at Notsuoh downtown, when it was just opened. It was kind of like a homeless chess club. We would go there because it was the only place open late. I wasn't into drinking beer much then. We'd go hang out on Market Square then we'd get over there to Notsuoh and drink coffee all night and get all geeked up on coffee and read poetry and stuff. I was into this spoken word thing at the time. Of course, I've been writing all my life. Whatever, if it was just notes to myself, poems, songs, whatever is in my head, I'll write it down.

[16:41] Those times were fun because I was concentrating on poetry, things like that. I was feeling real cool in that. Kind of left my guitars alone. Music was ... I was thinking to myself, I kind of got bummed out on myself thinking ... Well, guitar players are everywhere and I'm not very good at it. I'm not going to give up but I'm going to try something else right now instead of this other thing.

[17:07] 18, then 19 comes along. Trying to move out of my parent's house at the time just because I want my own place, you know. I did. I moved out with a friend named Damian [inaudible 17:18] who had a spot down on Edgebrook. Wasn't quite in the loop, but it's all right. It was a place out of my parent's house. I didn't have a bad life at home. I was just a 19-year-old kid who wanted to take my Trans Am and wanted to go not answer to anybody. I wouldn't do anything screwed up. I would just kind of do whatever came along. Had some fun. Thought I could handle it, so when I met him is when I moved in with him. Then we had another roommate who happened to be a guitar player in a local band, Los Skarnales. José Rodriguez. He's one of the founders with Felipe Galvan.

[16:43] I just happened to buy an upright bass about six months before we moved in, so I had this thing I was carrying around. It might as well have been furniture. I was trying to learn it but didn't know how to approach it. I would go walk to Brazil coffee shop on West [inaudible 00:18:18] on Thursday nights and sit at the table, the closest I could get to the bass player and watch his action. Watch his hands. Watch everything. Listen, you know. That's how I started to learn, and I started picking up ... I was a library worker at the time so I was able to pick a lot of Charles Mingus and other different jazz artists, but Charles Mingus was a big influence on me.

[18:00] I happened to get an audition because he just casually mentioned, "You know, we're looking for a bass player." I said, "Well, you know I just got this thing. I'm still learning, man. You guys are already rocking. You're big time." He says, "I don't know. Learn a few songs and come to the audition." I thought, "Wow." I needed something new. I was 18 and bored as hell. I was living out of my parent's house, sure, but how much fun can you have? Yeah, sure, you can get drunk. You can do whatever, but after a while, what else are you going to do? I needed music. I needed music and I needed to shift gears. I said I know I can do this. I know I love it. I love it a lot. I said let's do it. I got some of their music, I started learning the songs, and made the audition. That was the beginning of the rest of my music time.

[19:40] **Mary:** Tell me more about playing with Los Skarnales.

[19:45] **Nick:** All right, so August of '99, I'm in this apartment with these two guys, these friends of mine. It's great. We're having fun living together. I'm managing to survive with my library job. I'm at the library, so before the internet got really cool, I was able to find all the books I needed and songs I needed and info I needed. I mean, I must have fallen in love with Jackie O and Frida Kahlo and ... I would dream the Dewey decimal system. I was in there always reading. I enjoyed that job so much. Same time that I got picked up by Los Skarnales. We were rehearsing at nights. I was getting the groove, getting to learn that instrument, my upright bass. I didn't own an electric bass until nine years later. I went straight from guitar to upright.

[20:35] The first thing I did was get booked on a tour with Skarnales. It was a summertime tour, and we were going to go coast to coast within a month. We were going to hit the west coast, hitting everything from Houston on west to Los Angeles. Play the Roxy. Play a little bit in California, then shoot back over to the east coast where there was Chicago, New York, and everything else. All in this one 15 passenger van. There might have been eight of us. I have the pictures. Maybe a few more. That was the first major tour and I was so green. I was six months into carrying my bass around. I would still panic when I got a little chip or scratch in it. Little did I know there was going to be a lot more breaks coming in my future.

[21:22] It was August. It was hot. One of the first live dates that I would say that I've played, the first live date on a stage that was a show that people were paying to come see and all of that, was the [inaudible 00:21:38] Tour. It was kind of like a Warped Tour Latino. It was in San Antonio, Texas, and let me tell you who was there. Just off the top of my head, there was us. We were the openers. They put us on so early, hardly anyone got to see us. They actually told us after our sound check, the song that we played? They said, "Well, that's your first song, so keep going."

[21:00] We were there, of course. I saw Chris Perez. This is after Selena's death, so this is about '99. She died five, six years before that. It was cool to see Chris rocking with his own band. SPM was still out of jail. He wasn't in jail yet. He was out and still performing and he had all these security guards in the black military kind of get up. The boots and everything. There was a band called Bersuit. There was Todos Tus Muertos. That was a band from Argentina. They're like Rasta/Argentina/Reggae/dance hall with ... It's all over the place, but it's really cool. It's some hard world music. It's really so rhythmic. You get influences of Jamaica, the Americas, Africa. Everything is tied in there.

[22:54] That was a cool deal for me. I got what I wanted. I wanted to play. Now I'm playing. What's next? All right. The tour is next. We get on this tour and we start heading West. Never in my life have I gone anywhere or traveled, outside of San Antonio to see the Alamo. As a Texas kid, you see the Alamo. If you see Corpus because you have family or something there, but we didn't. We didn't go to Laredo much. My Dad went to Laredo when we were kids a couple of times when maybe his Aunt died or something - a family type situation - but we didn't go to Laredo much. Not when I was little.

[23:23] Everywhere that I've gone, music was starting to take me at this point. This is a great age to travel. I might be broke, but I'm seeing the country. We made it. I mean, grapefruit four for a dollar, and get a jug of water. I got to see ... First, it was Houston. I hit San Antonio. Then we went to ... It was my first time I saw El Paso. We crossed from El Paso. We went into Juarez. I got to see Juarez. This is great. I got to play there. We got out of Juarez. We went to Las Cruces. We kept plugging west and we were hitting just about every city, so lucky me. I wanted to travel. I wanted to play music. I wanted to play upright. All the wheels were rolling now, so that's it.

[24:17] We just ... After that, just keep getting better at it and keep learning. It's not like ... There was lessons to learn in this because this is a whole different category of situations, but when you're that young and eager to play, sometimes your focuses and your priorities like getting paid and stuff, they're not always like they are when you get a little older or you have to actually ... You're running your own machine. Business is a whole ... There's an enjoyment side and the curiosity of the young person going to see the country. All these books I had read about the road and hitchhiking and traveling and touring. For everything that we love from rock stars to beatniks, I mean, like everybody, you're just like, "Oh man. I got to see this land from coast to coast. I want to be under that blanket of stars. I want this." So there I was getting it.

[25:14] Across to Arizona. Slept in the back of a pickup truck crossing the desert at night, and that was a really cool experience. Waking up almost freezing cold in the morning before the sun was out too hard. We landed in Los Angeles. All my life, I've thought about Los Angeles and the musical sort of ... Music, Hollywood, all the curiosities. Everything that everybody has ever built it up to be, I was in the middle of it. Of course, we walked around. We played the Roxy, which was cool for me because I was big on Jane's Addiction. I love ... That was one of my favorite bands growing up and to this day. But also Roxy is just in the musical culture. You hear about it. Everybody has played the Roxy. Everybody that you love has played the Roxy. It's kind of like the West Hollywood joint, The Troubadour, where Lenny Bruce and of course everybody else who has done some great stuff has been there.

[26:18] This tour ... I'm learning a lot. We're playing a lot of gigs. I'm learning about so many other bands that had never been on my radar. I'm learning about this new side of the musical culture that we're all a part of, and it's not just people that are into music. It's people that are into cars over here, but they happen to tie those events into music. It's people that are into clothes and other subcultures over here. We were playing ska music that had a pachuco twist to it and we had swing in there. We had reggae. We had it all. We mixed it all up.

[26:54] We were meeting bands that were all part of those branches of this larger picture. It's a big music community that we don't even all know each other, but we are after the same dream. We're after the same thing. It's all for passion. Everybody that loves music is going to chase it. I got to hit Mammoth Lakes. There was a few other cities involved, so I got to see beautiful California all at once. Went up to San Jose, met some other guys in a band named [inaudible 00:27:23] and a band named Monkey up there. We made friends with those guys and toured with them a bunch.

[27:35] That's when the tour shot off to the East Coast. That was the first time I got to see Chicago and the first time I got to go play in New York. We played at CBGB on a Monday and that was cool. It was still on Bowery. It wasn't a Vegas bar or whatever it is now. That was a cool thrill. A couple of people that I know that had moved to New York actually showed up. I felt really proud to have played New York for the first time and actually known somebody in the crowd. There was a video floating around the internet for awhile, but it seems to have gotten lost. There was one song up there.

[28:07] After that tour, the last date of that tour was a rained out date. A paid rain out date, so that wasn't that bad, but it would have been cool to play because it was at Celebrate Brooklyn festival and we were supposed to play that. It didn't work out so we decided to get on the road and 33 hours later, we're back in Houston. I completed my first musical tour. After that, of course I stayed in Los Skarnales until 2006, about Halloween I think was the last gig. I've been so many miles with Felipe Galvan and we were ...

[28:50] At one point, Jose Rodriguez had left the band and me and Felipe were sort of booking and managing. I would take on pretty much the booking and handling money and getting things like that done, getting the performers lined up, making sure we had a band because we had a high turnover. I went through four lineups, or five, while I was in there. It was hard at times, but all we had to do was teach a new bunch of guys the music and get rolling again because the gigs were coming in faster than we could do whatever. We had to just have it ready. At one point, we went to California as a four piece. The band has never been known to be ... Maybe their beginning, they were a three piece or a four piece, but since then, they've always been a big band.

[29:35] At one point, we went through a small rock and roll lineup. By the time I left that band, by the time that the lineup I was in ... The last lineup I was in was ... I was there, Robert Rodriguez was playing accordion. He was a young player that we brought in about 2002 ... 2001 or '02 when we were still playing the Satellite Lounge. Ryan Scroggins, who was an organ player, came from Texas City, who was playing reggae organ and ska with Secret Agent 8. He played with a few other bands. We ended up picking him up. There was Patrick Wheeler playing drums. There was ... The last guitar player that we



had played with in that lineup was Jeremy Peña who is now in the Bandulus. Out of that band ... Let's just call it the night that that lineup split up, that I left the band, there was Scroggins who has the Trenchtown Texans. I have Umbrella Man. Patrick plays with Scroggins. Jeremy plays with the Bandulus, and Robert Rodriguez plays with Umbrella Man and his own band, Mas Pulpas

[30:45] It was kind of like an explosion. Once that lineup kind of went, other bands formed from it. I like to think of it that way because there was so much energy and there was no bad terms, necessarily. It was just time to chip and go create. We were all becoming our own frontmen, or having our own ideas that we wanted to follow and that's what happened there. You had five frontmen in a band. It was bound to be too many chefs in the kitchen. After that, I was out of Los Skarnales and had already had thoughts of starting this band, which in my head was a Gulf Coast concept which became Umbrella Man, influenced by Jazz and regional music.

[31:34] **Mary:** Tell me more about this concept of Gulf Coast music.

[31:39] **Nick:** Okay. When you're a kid and ... Let's see. I'm flashing to my childhood and the sounds and sights I would hear. In our communities ... In our area ... From here to Galveston to wherever your family hangs out and takes you and all that. We're very familiar to our neighbors, our immediate neighbors culturally speaking. Not political boundary lines, but our own cultures that we do this, they do that, but they are us. We're never strangers to Zydeco. We're never strangers to Cajun. We're never strangers to anybody because everybody is here in Texas. That accordion sound you hear may be Tejano, or it may be Polish, or it may be German, or it may be Czech. That's the beauty of it.

[32:32] The Gulf Coast concept that I was thinking about in my later days in Los Skarnales was well, the music we grew up with, the music that was around us, whether we listened to it or not, it was going in our ears. We were hearing it somehow.

[33:20] It was always larger than life. There was always a big old sound system blasting this band that was playing, whether it was over here or whether you're in your downtown on a Tuesday hearing it at Party on the Plaza and you're not old enough to get in there, you can still hear it for blocks around. That music, along with growing up hearing Zydeco and Cajun - it just sounds familiar. It sounds like the cousin of something that we grew up listening to, and it is in many ways.

[33:50] All of these familiar sounds that we hear, these familiar cultures, I thought to myself, well, I play in a band and if I chose the instruments and they ended up being exactly ... As I said, I would love an accordion because once it started playing and once Robert joined Los Skarnales, because it was something that Felipe and I thought, "Well, we got to bring an accordion into this, man." We're doing all this stuff. We should really get a Tejano accordion player, and there was Robert. I met Robert in U of H and got to talking to him about playing in a ska band. He was straight up Tejano back then, but he's feathered out into all kinds of genres. Him joining Skarnales was then, the next move I was going to make was like, I want this part of the sound. If I'm leaving, I want this guy to run with me because I felt like we could just kill together. A bass and an accordion? We're a band already right there. Two people that sing? Forget it.

[35:00] Of course, we had our hands in other projects at the time, but getting him to come with me and joining Umbrella Man, he ended up joining later on. He was doing stuff at the earliest parts of it, but later on, he ended up joining. That's such a part of the sound. Accordion, pedal steel, or just steel guitar, and of course your drums, and an upright bass. To me, that's what the Gulf Coast sounds like in many ways. That's what I was going for. If these instruments can guide us anywhere, it's going to keep roots music. No matter what we do, it's going to sound like it's got one foot in the root. I can write a song about a modern-day thing, but playing with these instruments, it's always going to sound like home, like our region, the regional sound.

[35:50] The internet, people argue that there is no regional sound anymore. They question that. Maybe it's not a controversial topic, but I think people say ... I've heard it in discussion. I've heard it in different forms or just casually Facebooking or something. Somebody says, "Do you think the regional sound is non-existent anymore because of all that we have access to?" I think it's very much there. I think you'll hear it. It's not FM radio telling you, necessarily. We have different messengers these days that remind us that the culture is there. There's nothing gone about it.

[36:27] Of course, you can have a band in Tokyo playing Zydeco and they play it to the 'T' and they sound authentic or something like that, or a ska orchestra, but that's the beauty of collecting music. Bob Marley used to come over to the U.S. and take American records back to Jamaica. Ska was created on American R&B and Jamaican mento. Music has been traded just like food, just like anything else that you take in with the senses, I believe has been transferred. The internet, yeah, it made it easier to obtain these things, but it was doing that long before the internet was the power of communication.

[37:10] **Mary:** Describe some of the different genres of music that you play in Umbrella Man.

[37:15] **Nick:** Okay. We'll start with Tex Mex and still kind of on the accordion topic. Tex Mex, we play everything whether it's just a two-beat polka, whether it's ... There's always a little Tex Mex in there when we throw the accordion in even if we're not flat out playing a polka, just a straight up Tejano polka, some other things, they're just going to have that flavor in there. Tex Mex is a big part of that. English and Spanish and/or both and we can do that.

[37:52] Then there's swamp pop, which is a music that came out of southwest Louisiana and I consider that to be a big part of my influence. I'll play a few swamp pop songs, or I'll play songs in a swamp pop sort of way because I just love that sound. There's something about that that just always makes me want to move. It seems to always make people want to dance, too. I enjoy singing it. It's always some love song. It's usually like "Mathilda," what a lot of people consider the swamp pop anthem, by Cookie and the Cupcakes out of Lake Charles. That song is a huge influence. It's just a greatly written song. It sounds beautiful and there's so many versions of it, from here to eternity. There are a lot of artists out there that have played it and done interpretations of it.

[38:48] The other genres come in like Cumbia, which of course is just a branch off of our Tex Mex roots, but we also ... Cumbia ... I like Cumbia and Tex Mex. I like Cumbia and Vallenato and stuff, but we don't play any Vallenato, so I couldn't say that we do. Our Cumbia sound more like the Tex Mex Cumbias.

Then we do some rockabilly. That comes from the influence of a lot of the country singers that I grew up listening to, and rockabilly. Rockabilly is from country music.

[39:25] We like to play things sometimes harder and faster that would otherwise be a slower song, or we like playing them slow, too. We'll get down playing some of the old standards by Willie or anybody, and when you're playing country, you play country. You play rockabilly, something I heard Webb Pierce playing country, but I'm going to step it up a little bit, amp it up, going to maybe do some slapping and there's going to be that accordion in there, so it takes a different twist already. Some people call it ... They say, "I love it when you all play that Cajun stuff." That's talking about when we play country music and the accordion is in there heavily. Those are a few of the genres we play.

[40:11] I would say some of my stuff even lends itself to jazz a little bit, but not any specific type. Just kind of a laid back sort of smokey room type feel, more atmosphere than anything. I call it jazz because I can't think of another word for it.

[40:35] **Mary:** Tell me about writing songs.

[40:38] **Nick:** Oh, cool.

40:40] **Mary:** What inspires you?

[40:42] **Nick:** Yeah. I'll tell you about this one song. This one is actually a song with a story. It's because all of the components are there. It's pretty cool. I was on the road with Billy Joe Shaver for not quite a year at the time. We were playing Cheatham Street Warehouse in San Marcos. He told me that ... We were just kind of hanging out waiting for our time to get up there. He told me something about cameras being in the room. There was going to be a PBS deal or something like that, and if I had a song that I wouldn't mind singing because he wanted to give us a piece of that. He's always been cool that way.

[41:20] I said, "I have the perfect song. Thanks for asking, man. This is really cool." I got so excited because I was really proud of this song. The song ended up being ... At the time, that night, the song was still called "Dark Eyes." The gig started. We're playing Billy's songs and somewhere midway, he says, "I want to introduce you to my bass player, Nick. He's going to sing a song for you." He let me play Eddy Shaver's guitar. His black Fender guitar that night. Eddy's been passed away for years at this time, but it was so cool.

[41:58] Anyway, I picked up the guitar. I played this song. Billy loved it. Billy loved it. Then when we got on the bus and we're leaving the gig, he says, "When did you write that song?" I said, "I wrote the song like two weeks ago." He said, "That's a good song. What are you calling it?" I said, "I'm calling it 'I Found My Weakness in You.'" I don't know. I said, "I'm calling it Dark Eyes." He says, "But what's that thing you said?" I said, "I found my weakness in you." He says, "You should call it that." He says, "I don't want none of it. Just call it that. I would call it that if I wrote that song." He goes, "I think I wrote that song." Joking around with me. We laughed. He talked about the song for a while. If it made an impression on him, I felt like I was doing the right thing because he's one of the best songwriters ever. Period.

[42:48] Now, that song was written in about ten minutes, which was a cool thing for me and that's a fun part of the story. I have a studio above the Continental Club, 3700 Main at Alabama. I have a studio up there. I lived in that apartment for seven years. I moved in the day that I played with Los Skarnales, that Halloween gig. It's weird how all of these things tied in together, but here we are years later.

[43:20] I was waiting on a ride. It was hot outside and it was raining, so it was one of those days where the mugginess is just extra. Humidity is just bad and everything just feels nasty. I walked upstairs to my room and got a call from a friend saying, "I'll be right there. I'm about to pick you up." I forgot where we were going, I don't know. To eat or something or there was something going on. I have this song in my head and I could not let it escape because if it escaped, I was going to be pissed and I wasn't going to have this badass song that I wrote. It was written in my head almost.

[44:00] I sat down and I'm waiting for the ride and I said, "I just walked up from the station", which I did. 26 steps up from the rain, because when I was running, I was counting them for some reason. The sun was hot. "It looks like the sun is coming out now. I still hear the whistle from the train." Because the Main Street train was already gone for years now and my windows were always up because I just liked those sounds of the city. I've always been hooked on that. Hissing buses, trains screaming, singing, whatever craziness is going on out in Houston.

[44:35] Then I shift gears mentally on that song and I remembered a few girls I had met or something, they were just people that ... Nice girls I ran into or so, working down there, working the bar, playing, or selling records at Sigs or any of that. "I see all of these lovely ladies walking. Sometimes they stop and talk to me, but out of all of these ladies talking, I found my weakness in your dark hair, baby, and your dark eyes, too. I like the way you shake it and don't stop until you're through. I like the way you say you love me like it's true. I found my weakness in you." That's just the first verse and the chorus.

[45:24] The second part says "You can call it what you want now. Guess I was born to be alone. I got no money in my pocket, but I walk like a king without a throne. Night falls on old 3700 and that Houston skyline shines on me. Down there they got it any way you want it, but I found my weakness in your dark hair, baby, and your dark eyes, too, like the girls in southeast Houston and many times I've been a fool. I like the way you say you love me like it's true. I found my weakness in you." That's pretty much the main words to that song. That song has been good to me. Like I said, when I got feedback from Billy Joe Shaver on that song, I was like, man. I got to write another one of these. I don't know if I quite have yet, but I guess I should ask him.

[46:25] **Mary:** That kind of feeds into one of these questions here.

[46:28] **Nick:** Cool. Yeah.

[46:30] **Mary:** Who were your influences and how did you learn from them?

[46:34] **Nick:** Oh. Alright. Influences are these constellations of energy, I think, that come in because some are very direct and some are very like a combination of some things that I do. I feel them. It's weird, because I feel them when I'm playing on stage. I'm like, hmm, I could sing this in this style and I

almost ... I don't want to be so dramatic and say I channel that, but it's like sometimes I'm thinking like, we'll jam this like Willie would or we'll jam this like whichever Willie. Willie Dixon or Willie Nelson. You know what I mean? It depends on the context.

[47:13] Upright bass? My influences started with Charlie Mingus and at the time, I was big into the Reverend Horton. Watching Jimbo Wallace, who is a Houston guy, too. I think he grew up in Pearland. The biggest bass influence on me overall was Willie Dixon. I was introduced to Willie Dixon ... If you've been alive and you listen to any blues, you've heard Willie Dixon songs before you even know who Willie Dixon is and that's just the way it is. My friend Shawn Super, who is a dear friend of mine who is also an upright bassist, who was the first upright bassist I got to watch play live when I was kind of poking around deciding what I was going to do after guitar.

[48:02] It's just like, man, this guy is smooth. He turned me on to Willie Dixon. He says, "You probably know this guy's songs", just like I said, "But let me show you his stuff recorded in 1947." I said, "Man, that sounds about what I want to learn. I want to learn some jump blues. I want to learn how to slap that bass. I want to learn everything." Willie Dixon has been the single most influential bassist on me on the upright bass.

[48:28] Charles Mingus, right up there. Guys that I could watch that are still with us ... I got to watch the Crickets bassist. Is it Marshall Lidell, before he died? I got to watch him at the Continental Club. I've been blessed enough to see a lot of ... See a few of them. I can't say a lot of them. There are a lot of good ones out there. At the time I was playing, starting to play here in town locally, I don't think there was ten guys playing upright that weren't on the jazz circuit. That was a different circuit than the sort of punk rock/rockabilly/ska, all of that. Those guys... We were playing Fitzgeralds and stuff 15 years ago. They were playing higher level gigs, I'd call them. It was definitely more money, I'm sure.

[49:27] Other influences. Songwriters wise. Willie Nelson. Huge, just all my life. The sound has always been there. Billy Joe Shaver. I got turned on to Billy Joe Shaver years before I played with him. The magnitude of the effect and the depth of the understanding or just the learning of it, the process, couldn't be deeper than you being his bass player, though. Riding alongside him, hearing him just when we talk, when we play, watching him do gigs that you thought he was feeling bad at, but he never puts on a bad show. That guy has been an influence hands-on as far as being in his band, running with him across the country, running with him across the ocean. He's 75 and he's got 30-somethings and 40-somethings, and he's keeping up right with them. Learning from him, that's strength, that's persistence, that's being stubborn in the face of that dream, but it's also being a great songwriter. You can't fake that. You can't fake that.

[50:45] I have a lot of people that I look up to. I look up to several people and he's definitely one of them. As influential as could be. I've just been lucky to be in his band, to pick up that influence, because we can get influenced by strangers that will never meet us. I've happened to meet a few of my influences and been lucky to sit around with them and talk with them. Willie is another one. I got to hang out with him, of course through Billy, because they've been friends for a long time. Those guys are

friends. They text each other and they're throwing jokes back and forth and were talking about upcoming shows together and things like that. Those two influence me a lot in the songwriting part.

[51:24] Other guys like - and women, too - that have influenced me ... There's a young lady out of Berkeley, Esperanza Spalding, who is a killer bass player. She's killer on the vocals, too, while she's playing bass. Anybody that does that ... Because that's what I do. I play my bass. I sing. Leading the band, too. You can't do it all in one motion, but you make it work, and of course you have your songs down. She's another one I like. Esperanza. I got to see her play live. I never got to meet her, though.

[52:04] Guitar players. They're out there. I've been influenced even by local people who I've got to ... I think the experience, the energy you get from meeting somebody and just getting in with that soul, that's when the magic happens. Largest influences, though, I'd definitely have to say have been Billy Joe Shaver, Willie Nelson, Willie Dixon, oh man. The list could go on. My record collection would tell you. (.)

[52:40] **Mary:** Describe the settings in which you've encountered music outside of bars and clubs.

[45:46] **Nick:** Okay. Let's see. (.) I don't know. (.) How do you mean?

[52:56] **Mary:** I don't know. It could be like a lot of Zydeco players play in Catholic churches.

[53:02] **Nick:** Oh, that. Yeah. Yeah.

[53:03] **Mary:** [inaudible 00:53:03].

[53:07] **Nick:** Oh, like festival settings.

[53:09] **Mary:** Festival settings. That would be another one.

[53:10] **Nick:** Outside of the bars. Oh, yeah. Okay. Well, festivals are one side of that. Now festivals have always been my favorite. I love playing at a bar. I love playing a bar. I would play a bar all night, but festivals usually is a very pleasant setting. Unless the sun is beaming right down on you, then it's just straight up hell, you know? It's not even fun.

[52:30] The last festival I played was in Ventura, California. There was so many badasses there. Big Sandy and his Fly Rite boys. Jesse Dayton from here in Houston. Members of X, John Doe was there. Man. It's cool because a showcase in a bar, you have - at the most - three bands or so. At a festival, you're dealing with several stages. You're dealing with a whole different vibe than in a club. I like festivals. What I like about them most is the energy and I just like being outside, just being pleasant. Nice weather. You get lucky. Most festivals they plan around good weather. Fall. Playing in the Fall is my favorite. Outside. It's so pretty. Summer, you'll get some good festivals in the summer, but they're usually hot as hell to play and you're dying.

[54:29] Let's see. Other than festivals, outside of bars and clubs, where else? I've played music at a funeral for a stranger. I was just a hired singer to sing some Gospel songs for the person's family. I've done that. That's definitely a way out of the bars and clubs. It was only about five songs, but it was a full gig and had that full gig intensity. I don't know if I could do that at a relative's funeral. I don't know if I

could sing at a relative's funeral without breaking down. Even my family at the time, I was like, "I got a gig at a funeral, y'all." My Dad says, "I know you. Are you going to start crying or something? You get all sentimental and stuff." "No, no. I'll be okay." I'll detach myself. I wasn't attached in the first place. It will be all right. It turned out to be a real positive experience. It was cool. After that, I knew I could do it.

[55:30] Outside of bars and clubs, I've been a teacher. I've taught kids guitar. I've taught kids bass guitar. That is a newer thing in my life as far as maybe a couple years and I've never taken it on completely full-time. At this point, I would still consider it casual. My experience with that has been positive. I've been a teacher before, also, for a community college. I was a community college English teacher. The teacher part, it's fun for me. It's rewarding. You definitely make a difference in people's lives. You make a difference in those who especially want to learn. You can really make a difference. Now if somebody wants to learn music, it seems they can. I never tell anyone anything is hard. If you want to learn it and you're passionate about it, you should be able to do it. That alone should light that fire.

[56:25] The other things that I've experienced outside of stage, bars, festivals, and teaching and music has been the other sides of music. The business side as far as just booking for people, where you're hands-off as far as performance, but you just kind of ... You're a curator of sorts. You're plugging a band. You make sure everything else is going on around ... You learn that stuff from setting up your own shows. You know everything that needs to be there. You don't want any slip-ups. You don't need any rookie mistakes. You know? What do you mean you didn't bring microphones? That kind of thing. You make sure all of that is covered. You make sure you're dealing with people who are able to carry these things through. I've been on that side of music.

[57:10] I've been on the merchandise side of music. I've dabbled in those. These things either make you a lot of money or they don't. It just depends on what's hot. It's always good to know your market, to know your target audience. I think those are the several ways outside of bars that I learned music, and they all tie in together, too. You can flip all of those over and you could have kids, teenagers, whatever, come up on stage with you if you're playing a show at a festival or some kid-friendly thing. I'll just bring this kid up. We did it in San Antonio a few times. You take your merchandise into a bar, because that's where you sell the stuff, at your shows.

[57:48] Of course, people hear about you at festivals and they end up at your bar shows. These are all two-way streets. The inside-the-bar music thing is just a hub, I believe. It involves all of those things. I have had more people come up and say, "I saw you at International Festival." "I saw you at this place." "One time I was in San Antone and I saw you at this bar." I really love when that happens, when they saw you out of your city, and they come back and find you in your city.

[58:15] I found my name in a book one time, too, from one of our bar shows. It was a Tuesday night that I thought was just a flop. Somebody was doing weird travels through Texas and they happened to stumble upon us and we ended up in the book. Things like that happen. Music reaches out and grips every little part of life. It's the glue. I stick by that because it's true for me. It makes a lot of things come together. It keeps them together.

[58:44] **Mary:** Tell me more about the business of being a musician.

[58:40] **Nick:** Okay. Alright. I'll give you a good little situation, an example of a situation. I've been full-time music where it was only music that I've done, but I still call it full-time music when I have my hands in other things. Like if I'm booking for ABC Bar, selling buttons out of my house to accommodate all of the bands that need their merchandise, placing these orders, making merch for other people, things that I can do, then it's all full-time music, but your not full-time performing. I've been on the side where all I did was play on the weekends and through the week, I could have sat around and did nothing, but I just thought that was a way to lose money more than anything. I don't like being broke too much, so I pick up other side jobs.

[59:46] The life of a musician depends on the choices you make, too. It's easy to get caught up in a bar scene and you're playing every week. It's easy to fall to anything just out of boredom. Boredom and curiosity can just kill. These things aren't ... There's nothing hidden and there's nothing that isn't common sense, you know? If you're a full-time musician and you're drinking full-time, something is going to hurt in the morning or you're going to wake up and you're going to have a hangover and you can't get to what you were going to do, or if you have that other job ... There's a weird balance. There's a strange balance. I guess there's nothing weird about it. It's just, you're in control.

[1:00:32] I've been the guy that wakes up at 5 p.m. and gets up and goes to my bartending gig and goes and bartends. Then the next night, I'm doing the same thing, waking up at the same time, going to my music gig. The hustle is always on, but you just got to feel good doing it. Making money as a musician is a whole other thing. You practice, practice, practice. You try to get in and play and you try not to end up with jokers that tell you they want you to play for exposure and stuff. Even worse, you got guys that will promise you money and pretend they're not going to pay. I've had a few of those.

[1:01: 14] I say a few because it's only been a very few. Words about that stuff get around quick. It's almost gotten ugly. It never has. I've been able to collect on the few occasions. Twice in Austin, out of all places. The music capital of the world pays the least. I was just pissed. People try to rip you off. We weren't going to make a lot of money in the first place. What we were asking for was just enough to get us by. Get us gas, get us fed, and get us home. We didn't expect your gig to make us rich, but now that you're trying this, we're going to turn this one on you. We ain't calling the cops.

[1:01:59] These days it seems we play around town enough and we network and have enough different variations of our musical projects that we're not always Nick Gaitan over here, Umbrella Man over here, Los Pistoleros over here. We have enough ships, in different musical acts that we have, with my circle of friends and musicians that work together that we hire each other, where I could play all week long and chances are I'm not going to repeat what you've seen. I'm not trying to burn myself out on everybody to where no one is going to come out to the shows. Granted, I do a weekly show with my own band. I jump in and do some other shows with maybe a duo or something like that on another project, and it changes. Sometimes I won't even have the bass. I play the guitar. I switch it up to keep myself ... I would say to keep it relevant, to keep it interesting, to keep myself ... I'm not going out there for nothing.

[1:02:54] Without music, I would die. I would not be happy if I didn't perform music. If I didn't play music, is what I mean. But performance up there, yes. I like to make money at what I do well or what I



have people enjoy. Of course, there's always a cause. There's benefits. There's that. These things come up. When this is what you do and this is all you do, then yeah. There's an arena for that. There's a place for that. There's people for that. There's pay for that. It's not always easy. Coming up, you learn that. That's the first lesson you learn in music, is what do I have to do? Then you start jumping on festivals. Okay. These guys pay a little bit. All right. Then you start filling places up, start getting paid more.

[1:03:40] Then you start figuring out, well, now I have to fund my own CD. Then that old saying that everybody knows, you have to spend money to make money, it's true and true and true again. It still is in music, too, because all you're doing is spending money. At some point, you fill that hole up and then you're able to move up a little bit hopefully. Some of us. I don't know where the rich part comes in, but I'm not waiting on it. I'm happy. This is a job to me, but it's a job that is tied in with my passion completely.

[1:04:18] **Mary:** You spoke a little bit before about audience members and your experiences with them. You had spoken about running into somebody who had seen you play in other cities. Can you talk a little bit more about -

[1:04:35] **Nick:** About audience stuff?

[1:04:37] **Mary:** Yeah. [inaudible 01:04:36] performance and audience and that type of thing?

[1:04:42] **Nick:** Yeah. Audience is a big deal for me. You can be frightened to death. You could be ready to go. There's so many feelings. There's this whole range of dynamics, this whole spectrum. I love seeing people dance. When I'm playing and doing what I'm doing, and the people are not just there standing and staring ... Standing and staring is not so much a bad thing because sometimes people are really into it and they're just kind of watching. It's not that we're doing any cool dances or anything. We're just jamming out, but when people are dancing, they're fully engaged. That's the lock. To me, when there is a dance floor full of people and the band is playing, that's when it locks in. Both are engaged. It's not so much separate involvement in these two other things. We might as well be dancing with them. That's the way it feels. That's the non-verbal communication with the audience.

[1:05:44] The other thing is just people, you can see them just gleaming sometimes because they're loving it. You see people smiling. You see people's heads bobbing. All of those things feed in. They're like little rays of light or something that make everything really cool, that make you say, "This is what I love about this." The other thing is when you're on the floor and you're not on stage and people come up. Before and after are different things. Of course, they may know your band very well and say, "I can't wait for you guys to play." They come talk about music with you. They talk about what it is that they like, something that both of you can put your hands on and dig on.

[1:06:30] Then there's the people that have you seen you in other places, like San Antonio, Austin, and, "I've seen you here and man, you all were great and I was looking through the local paper and I saw this place and I didn't even know this was here." I get that a lot and it's so cool because that's the way life is. You're in this place for business or you happen to be there. You stop for the night and you got bored and you wanted to go do something, so the the first thing to do is go grab a local rag that has all the music

joints in it because people do like to just go out. They just want to people watch. They want to drink. Whatever it is they want to do, there's places for it.

[1:07:43] Music is always ... There's more music out there than you can ... What do you say? Throw a stick at, I guess. These people show up to these joints and if they happen to know us, they pop in. We get a lot of those. I look at them through the big top windows. Sometimes we're jammin. The accordion is just reeding out and I'll look through those windows and people do a rubberneck check because they hear this happy music and they come on in. They see these people dancing and freaking out and then they come in. There are several types of interactions that I enjoy with audience members.

[1:07:43] **Mary:** What would you say about playing music that we haven't already covered in this interview?

[1:07:53] **Nick:** Let's see. I would say this. Okay. When I think of a musician, I think of somebody who is capable ... Everybody is different, but a lot of musicians are capable of so many other things. These gifts of music come with other side gifts. They evolve if you feed them. Of course you're in public, so that's another gift, being able to talk to large groups of people and having some ... If you say something and they respond to it, then you've engaged.

[1:08:31] Again, it's all about the engagement of the energy. I've taken not only just being a musician ... Because I can lock myself up in a room and be a musician all day long and all of that, but there's so many other things that feed music. My life feeds music. Much like when I was a UH student, I was touring what I would consider full-time. I guess it was half or three-quarter time, really. Going to school half or three-quarter time and living life with relationships and whatever, friends and everything else going on in a 20-something-year-olds life. I applied what I would learn in school to everything that I was living. It wasn't just taking life out of a textbook and thinking, well, this is life right here No, I was out there living while I was learning.

[1:09:18] Music is the same way. If I was only plugging around on my guitar and bass and just writing songs and stuck in here, yeah, I might have a lot of stuff written or I might have nothing, because out there is what feeds in here. When I'm out there in the world, I get inspiration from people, things I see, things I hear. Anything. Things I feel. Music just comes through all ... It creeps into all the senses. All those places inside of us, inside of our hearts and minds. We apply those and then the songs come out or a poem comes out or whatever piece of art. Sometimes I wish I was as brave as a painter. He can drop something on a canvas and make everyone go, "Woah!" I guess songs can do that, too.

[1:10:10] **Mary:** Is there a question I should have asked you?

[1:10:15] **Nick:** I don't know. I covered ... There is one thing I did leave out a little bit and I think it's important. This is how my family and my roots have tied in to my music. I sing about Houston a lot. There was something I really liked as a teenager or just growing up and listening to music. You grow up hearing, 'I'm going to Kansas City. Kansas City, here I come.' You hear songs about cities. You hear songs about streets. I always thought, you have these great songs written. Then we start hearing street names mentioned. I'm thinking of Jane Says from Jane's Addiction. [inaudible 01:11:04] she walked up on St.

Andrews, and during one of my first trips to Los Angeles, I'm like, "Huh. That's St. Andrew's right there. Wow." Things like that end up in my songwriting. Several of my songs in my collection of work, I'm mentioning street names. I'm mentioning Second Ward, things like this, because this is where my family comes from.

[1:11:27] That's where my family ties in. It's not only me growing up in the house and Mom and Dad playing music on the stereo. It's my Dad born in Laredo, raised in Houston, Clayton Homes. My Mom born and raised in the Second Ward behind Guadalupe. They met at the Pan American nightclub. They were dancing. They were young kids before my Dad went off to Vietnam. To me, these things give me a pride in my roots. I think it's just a beautiful story of my family even before we were even thought of or around when my folks were dating and dancing. Pan American nightclub is significant to me. Second Ward. East End. Just Houston in general. All of that finds its way into my music. If I'm not speaking about it directly, it's in there. I feel there is a sound and a feeling with that. I think that is a very important thing I left out because I got to talking about other things.

[1:12:29] **Mary:** You described many important moments in your musical career. Which experience has had the biggest impact on you?

[1:12:40] **Nick:** My Dad always said something to me. He would always tell me, do you realize that even as a young kid, every goal you've ever set up and you said you wanted to do it, that you did it. He said, "I watched you. You've done them all." The freshest one for me was the night of December 17 last year. I was on The Late Show with David Letterman. I was up there with Willie Nelson and Billy Joe Shaver. I've always been the type of kid to bring my report cards home to my parents and hand them over just to make them proud. Sorry.

[1:13:38] **Mary:** It's okay. Take your time. (.)

[1:13:56] **Nick:** This is cool. So my Dad, I got to share that with him. (.) Damn. I got to ... (.) Sorry.

[1:14:14] **Mary:** It's all right. Take your time.

[1:14:18] **Nick:** Let me get straight. He passed a month ago.

[1: 14:20] **Mary:** Oh, sorry. Do you want me to turn this off for a second?

[1:14:25] **Nick:** No. No. It's cool. Let's roll with it. Let's go raw.

[1:14:26] **Mary:** Okay.

[1:14:28] **Nick:** Yeah. So he got to see me on TV with Willie Nelson. That was a big deal. All of these major stepping stones, all of these major events, they've all held so ... They were so significant. That one was just the home run. It was the last big thing he saw me do. It doesn't take away from any of the other ones, but that was just the last big knockout punch that I could just go, "Hey." I would call him over anything. If I wrote a cool song. Anything. "Hey, check this out", or "Hey, I did this", or "Hey, I just got interviewed." I would tell him about this. You wouldn't believe they're recording me so we could do

this. "Oh man. Son, that's great." He watched it live, and we enjoyed it. That was December. We enjoyed him for another seven months after that.

[1:15:40] Those things, all of those things tie in. They're all significant. Those moments. They're big moments. That was huge. There were smaller moments that other beautiful things have happened that you don't think that are happening, but somebody is there. I'm playing one night at the Continental Club in Austin and out in the crowd, there's Quest Love from The Roots. I'm like, "Wow. Man. I'm never going to forget this." Or the one day that you're playing there and you hear that Krist Novoselic from Nirvana is in the audience and you're like, "Well, damn. All right." The time that Billy Joe Shaver said, "I think I wrote that song," about a song that I wrote or that time you got off stage and you just really can't believe that you were just on stage with Willie Nelson at Farm Aid and Neil Young just walked by.

[1:16:40] Everybody that you've ever looked at or listened to or anything in admiration and you got to actually have a real conversation and you're not this ... There's nothing wrong with music fans. That's why this whole thing is happening, but there's not that barrier in front of you where it's like, "Oh man. I love you so much." You actually get to sit down and have a normal human being conversation and throw a joke around or have a drink with somebody or a smoke or whatever it is you do with said person.

[1:17:12] Every one of those moments, or those moments that you realize the band you're in or the musicians you're in, you've all evolved and have grown together. There's magic all over the place. I think that's why people get hooked on this life. You can make a real positive thing out of it. You can also completely ruin yourself. There's a lot of boxes to open around, and none of them have locks on them. When you're a performer and people like what you're doing, it seems that there are less locks and restrictions for anything. You pick your horse you're going to ride.

[1:17:52] I think there is a delicate balance like in every way of life. Life is so fragile and it's no less fragile when you're feeling like you're on top of the world or when you're feeling like you're good at your game and you're doing everything right and all of that. You can still screw yourself up in a matter of 24 hours if you really want to be ... I think somewhere in the composition of human beings, we have this curse of self-destructiveness and compassion. Somehow, there's that little area where you cross those two spheres that anything goes. That's kind of a wild card area. It can make you crazy. It can make you sane. It can make you self-destructive, or it can make you really stop and realize, like, wow. All it takes is if I just do ... You can achieve anything you want. I think that's the beauty of the musical life, is you make things that you hear inside and you put them out for people to hear.

[1:19:03] **Mary:** You talked a little bit about bandmates.

[1:19:06] **Nick:** Yeah. Yeah. Bandmates are important. These are guys that you share every aspect of the life with. The guys you travel with. The guys you play with. Sometimes it's a different set of guys. Sometimes you have one band that just plays with you and then you record with a whole other band. In my case ... In our case, I should say, or the band that I lead, I book us. I make sure these guys are getting paid. All of that. All business aside, because yeah, you got to take care of them. They're good. That's why you got them in your band. Pay them. Of course, if you treat somebody right, they're more flexible

whenever it's leaner times. You're making less so everybody is making less, but you make more, they make more.

[1:20:00] It's always good to treat a band good. Billy Joe Shaver always told me, he says, "Man, I'm happy to take care of you guys. You treat somebody like a star, they're going to act like a star." He says that and he really means it. Being in his band, that's one thing. I learned a lot from being in his band how to treat a band that you have. What you do. How you do it. How you get past these little hurdles that come. Regular life is full of hurdles. Touring life can have little extra angles you didn't even think of.

[1:20:30] My band members ... My four-piece band that I play with, my Gulf Coast band, Umbrella Man. You got Robert on accordion, Robert Rodriguez, who is also teaching, also playing full-time, also doing all that, but you know he's ready for a gig. You book them shows and you just ... Because he's ready. That's what he does. Sometimes you have other band members who - it's just a reality - who have their full-time jobs, who have their lives arranged a little bit differently. You just have to work with every situation accordingly. You have to accommodate certain things. Of course, you know with some musicians, they're just road ready and you're just ready to go. They're ready to drop ... Not really dropping everything. That's a funny expression. We're constantly holding onto things at home when we're out there, you know, trying to run the machine just so you come back and you're not in complete financial shock or whatever. Even if you do make some money on the road, you want to hit the ground running coming back.

[1:21:45] Bandmates are the guys that you're closest to. You're with them in that van between cities. You're doing all of that. You're eating together. You're stopping at road stops together. You're sharing a stage together. It's a tripped out experience. In Shaver's band ... I've done a lot of touring with our band members, Jeremy Woodall on guitar. I play bass and Jason McKenzie plays drums. We all play for Billy Joe Shaver. That same existence where you're in that van together. You do everything together, then by the time we get to the motel, we'll split up, just kind of break off from each other, because that's the road life. You're always close to these guys.

[1:22:34] If you're lucky, you're in a band with people that you get along with. There's other bands that don't necessarily ... They have little ... Not every personality is going to be harmonious with everybody. The bands that I'm in happen to be pretty good about ... I'm pretty much friends with all the guys. We all look out for each other. It's still a very close and personal circle. (.)

[1:23:04] **Mary:** Is there anything you would like to add?

[1:23:08] **Nick:** On the band members? No. Other than just being tight friends with them. I enjoy going up and down the road with them. Yeah. Any other concepts of that, no. Not so much. I think we've covered it.

[1:23:22] **Mary:** Anything you want to add at all?

[1:23:24] **Nick:** Add at all? No. No. I think we got it all there. Yeah. Anything else to ask?

[1:23:28] **Mary:** I think we got through all of my questions.

[1:23:30] **Nick:** Yeah. Yeah.

[1:23:33] **Mary:** And a few more.

[1:23:34] **Nick:** Yeah. Yeah. That's great.

[1:23:36] **Mary:** Thank you very much for your time.

[1:23: 38] **Nick:** Yeah. No, thank you. Sorry about that. I think about my dad sometimes and I get just like ...

[1:23:42] **Mary:** No, please don't apologize for ... Please don't. This concludes the interview with Nick Gaitan.