

THE LEGACY OF SARG RECORDS

ABOUT A DOCUMENTARY FILM BY DAMON COOK AND DAN PRINGLE
REWORKING OF THE PRESS KIT WITH ADDITION BY IMPERIAL.

SGT. FITCH - THE LEGACY OF SARG RECORDS

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Sgt. Fitch explores the advent and influence of Sarg Records, a small independently owned record label cultivated by WWII hero, Sgt. Charlie Fitch. With his unconventional approach to the recording industry, Fitch redefined Texas music in the 1950s by mixing ethnic styles and different genres to create entirely new ones. Although, Sarg played a significant role in launching some of today's rock 'n roll and country music legends, the label's legacy arguably lies in the overlooked and undervalued treasures from it's relatively unknown artists.

The story of Sarg Records is a tale of minor enterprise dealing with TV repair, jukeboxes and records in a small Texas town located 40 miles from San Antonio. Luling is a South Texas oil town renowned for its petroleum and watermelon farms, but not for its music. Nevertheless, what began at the Luling Phonograph and Record Shop at 311 East Davis Street in 1953 produced or influenced music heard throughout the entire world today.

Charlie Fitch, the engine behind Sarg Records, enlisted in the Army Air Corps in 1940. He served as a tail gunner on over one hundred battle missions in WWII, and became a war hero on his final mission when his B-17 bomber took a hit from a Nazi anti-aircraft missile over Frankfurt on the morning of November 5, 1944. Fitch took control of the situation, calming his young and inexperienced crew, systematically rigging their jump gear and seeing them to safety before jumping himself. He was captured on the ground and spent the next six months as a Prisoner of War in the notorious Nazi prison camp, Stalag Luft 4.



It was Fitch's experience working on the electrical systems of his airplane in WWII that gave him the technical knowledge to open an electronics repair business upon returning home from the war. While stationed at Brooks Air Force Base in San Antonio, his part-time job was to service broken radios, televisions and phonograph players. As fate would have it, he was called on to service jukeboxes for a local operator in South Texas. Sensing a burgeoning business in the jukebox trade, Charlie purchased his own jukebox with his Air Force re-enlistment bonus in 1946. By the time Charlie was honorably discharged in May 1950, his foray into the jukebox business had flourished. He was now a full time jukebox operator and eventually built up his business to include 25 jukeboxes spread across South Texas. He moved back to his hometown, Luling, where he and his wife, Bennie, took up residence at 311 E. Davis Street, formerly the site of a grocery store, with living quarters in the back. They had no special plans for the front room of the building, initially using it as a

storage area for parts and records for the jukeboxes. The idea occurred to Charlie that he could use the space to sell the same records he was buying for his machines in a retail capacity . . . on October 9, 1950 the Luling Phonograph and Record Shop was open for business. Charlie spent most of his time driving from town to town servicing his jukeboxes .

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collecting coins, making repairs and changing out records. Every couple of weeks he would travel to San Antonio and purchase the latest 78s and 45s from distributors for his jukeboxes and store. In the meantime, Bennie managed the retail store selling records over the counter, and because they lived in the back of the shop, she could keep an eye on the kids. It was a perfect arrangement for both of them.

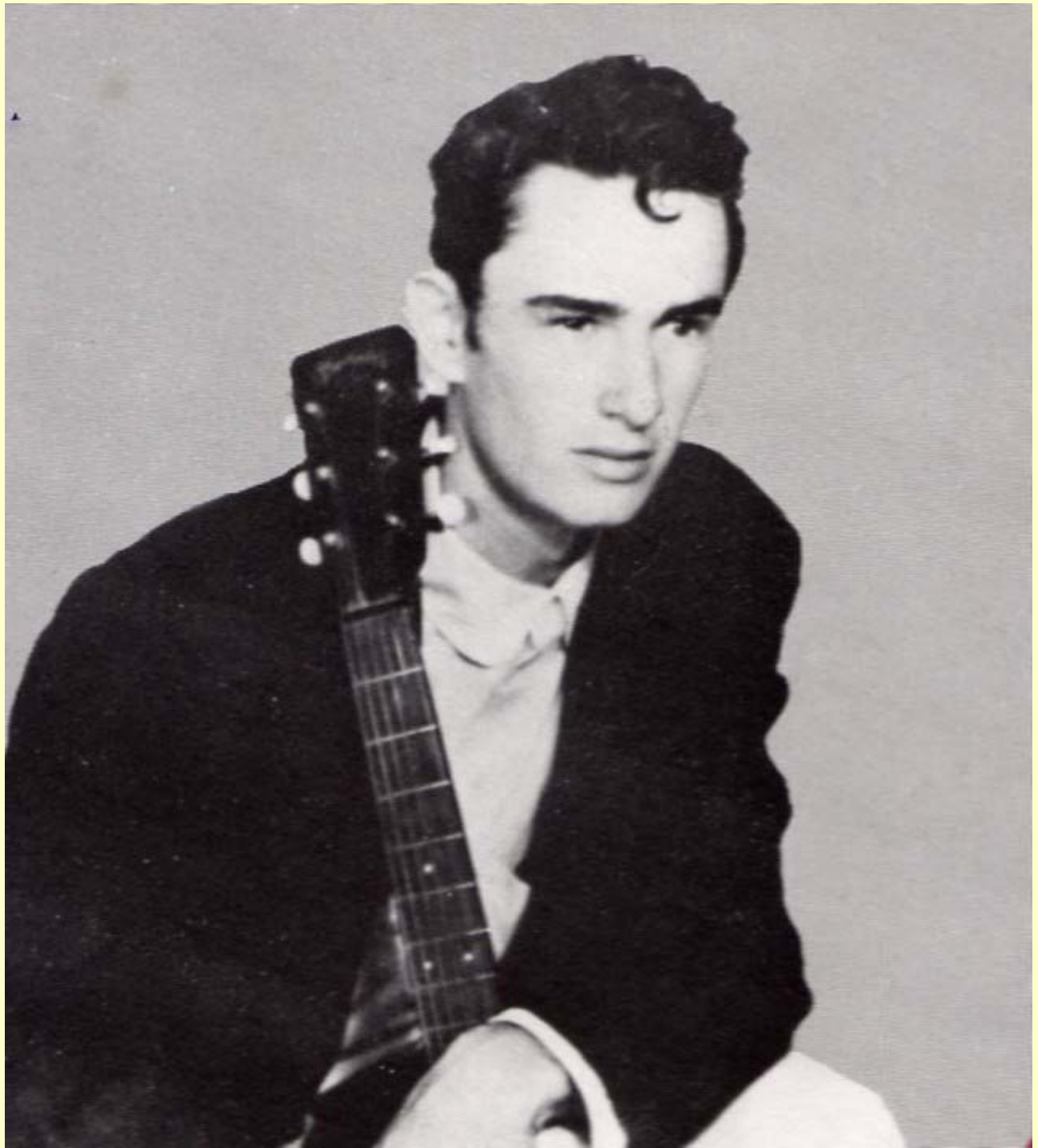
Spending much of his time working his machines in country dancehalls and honky-tonks, Charlie encountered hundreds of local musicians, bands and singers. This inevitably led to other music related ventures. He started working as a promoter and booking agent for local concerts and dancehalls bringing stars such as Johnny and Jack, Kitty Wells, Faron Young and Webb Pierce to the area. Next, he hosted a live two-hour radio show for KCNY in San Marcos, TX adding 'disc jockey' to his resume' that now included jukebox operator, record store owner and booking agent. However, it would be the next phase of the music business that he ambitiously embarked upon that would be his legacy.

Immersed in the local music scene, the idea struck Charlie that it would be good business if he had records of these unknown local acts to put in his store and jukeboxes to take advantage of their immediate fan base. The opportunity presented itself to him in the summer of 1953, when a local Luling woman approached Charlie and introduced him to her nephew, a young singer named Neal Merritt. Charlie was impressed with Merritt and helped to arrange a session to record his original tune, Korean Love Song. Knowing nothing about the actual record manufacturing process, he chose to act as an agent and help Merritt land a record deal. He packaged the newly recorded material with a demo tape of another local musician he had encountered in San Antonio, 12-year-old child prodigy 'Little' Doug Sahm, and began shopping it to major labels. After a series of rejections, Charlie began to explore the possibility of starting his own label to record and promote regional talent. With the confident assumption that he knew as much about what would sell to the public than those snide producers from Nashville, Fitch began drawing up plans for his new label. Although he'd handled records for several years by this point, and knew the trade as well as anyone in South Texas at that time, he still had little understanding of what went into the recording and manufacturing end of the business, however; undeterred, he jumped right in. There was no question as to what the label would be named. Everyone in Luling had called Charlie by his rank, "Sarg", and he had sometimes referred to his jukebox and dance promotion business as 'Sarg Productions'. Inevitably, with the release of Sarg 101 (Neal Merritt's Korean Love Song), in December 1953, Sarg Records was in business.



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Whereas most startup labels in the fifties were ‘copycat’ labels, relying on trends and radio marketing, it was Fitch’s love of all types of music, regardless of marketability, that kept him afloat. Virtually every style of music performed in Texas was documented on the Sarg Label from western swing, country, rhythm and blues, rock and roll, rockabilly, conjunto, waltzes and polkas, pop and jazz. Waltz and Polka records sold pretty well in the San Antonio region, a legacy from the time when German settlers began arriving in the San

Antonio region, a legacy from the time when German settlers began arriving in the 1840s. T'n'T was another Texas label feeding the jukebox with those popular dance records.



Although two Texas icons, Willie Nelson and Doug Sahm, made their earliest recordings for Sarg, the label's legacy lies in the celebrated records by western swing pioneer Adolph Hofner, honky-tonkers Herby Shoelzel and Larry Nolen, rock and rollers The Moods and The Downbeats, and rockabilly mavericks Cecil Moore and Al Urban.



Over the next two decades, Sarg Records maintained a steady presence on the music scene in the multicultural milieu that is South Texas, eventually releasing over 150 singles over a twenty-year period. The label's massive historical importance lies in the documentation of a time period and talent-laden region where ethnic diversity and new post war attitudes led to the birth of entirely new genres of music. By unintentionally creating this archive of sound, Fitch carved out a niche for himself and his artists in American music history.

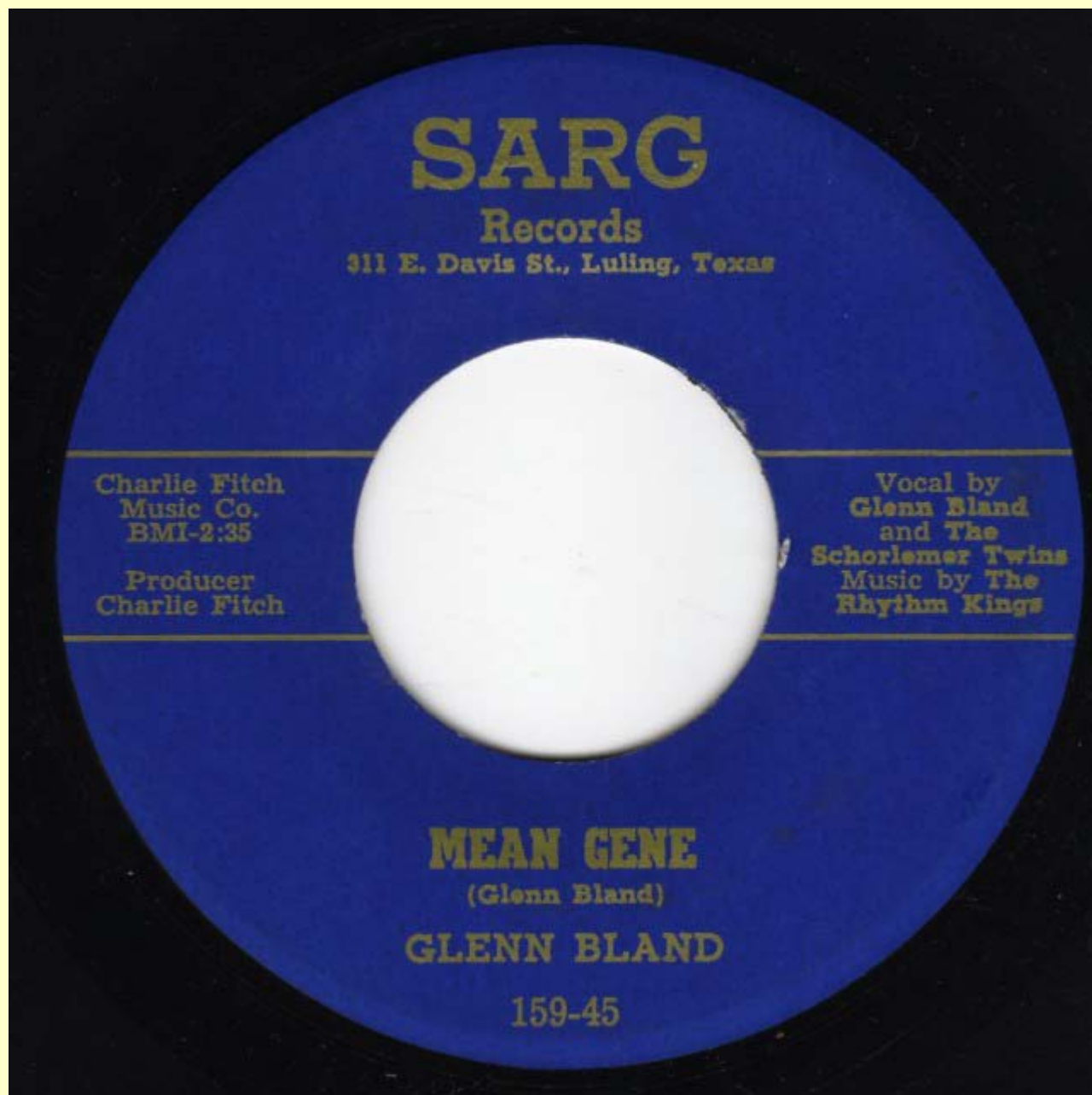
F. Young C. Fitch J. Burrage F. Cramer J. Day T. Franks W.Pierce



THE MAN AND THE PERFORMERS

Charlie Fitch

Charles Wesley "Charlie" Fitch was born in Hallettsville, Texas, on October 9, 1918. He enlisted in the Army Air Corps in 1940, serving as a tail gunner on B-17 bombers during World War II, and was a German prisoner of war in 1944-45. He married Bennie Lou Bassett of Luling, TX in September 1945 and they had three daughters and a son. He worked at San Antonio's Brooks Air Force Base until his honorable discharge in 1950. He then moved to Luling and started the Luling Phonograph & Record Shop, and began Sarg Records in December 1953 with Neal Merritt's "Korean Love Song." For more than 35 years, Sarg Records released more than 150 singles in Western swing, country, polka, rockabilly, rock & roll, R & B, and conjunto and the label's biggest hit was Cecil Moore's 1964 instrumental "Diamond Back". Fitch also served as Caldwell County's Veterans Services Officer until his death on May 7, 2006.



Aaron Allan

Singer-Songwriter/DJ & Emcee, Aaron Allan has written over 900 songs with 27 of them being recorded by the likes of the Osborne Brothers, Charlie Walker, Stony Edwards and Willie Nelson, who made Aaron's "Truth Number One" a hit in 1970. He has been inducted into the D.J Hall of Fame and the Country Music Association of Texas Hall of Fame. He has worked for over 50 years in the country music radio industry working at stations all over Texas, Kansas and Tennessee. When Aaron left KBOP in 1954, Willie Nelson took his place. He and Nelson remain good friends, whereas he continues to serve every year as Emcee of Willie Nelson's famous 4th of July Picnic. He was also a recording artist for Sarg Records forging a lifelong friendship with

Charlie Fitch. He is still an active radio personality hosting “The Double A Show” at KCTI in Gonzalez, TX every weekday afternoon where he features Texas and regional music, conducts guest interviews and hosts live in-studio performances.



Larry Nolen

Larry Nolen was born in Mineola in Northeast Texas in 1933 and moved to San Antonio as a child. He began his professional music career as a rhythm guitarist in 1946, at the age of 13, when he joined The Mountain Rhythm Band, a family band that featured Boy and Gene who later achieved success as The Jacoby Brothers. Smiley Whitley, leader of one of the most famous western swing bands in Texas, recognized a star on the rise and invited

Larry to play with his band, Smiley Whitley and the Texans. They performed most Saturday nights at Bandera's famous Cabaret Dancehall and also hosted a radio show at San Antonio's KONO / KMAC radio station five days a week. In 1954, Nolen left the Texans, started his own band Larry Nolen & The Bandits and released "I Need You Now" and "Hillbilly Love Affair" on Sarg Records. Nolen went on to share the stage with Elvis Presley, Porter Wagoner, Spade Cooley, Hank Thompson, Doug Sahm, Marty Robbins, Johnny Paycheck, Roger Miller and George Jones frequently appearing on The Louisiana Hayride and more than fifty Grand Ol' Opry Road Shows. Larry has been inducted into the Rockabilly Hall of Fame for "King of the Ducktail Cats" issued on Starday 668 in 1957, the Texas Western Swing Music Hall of Fame with the Texas Tophands, and the Bandera Music Hall of Fame as a Living Legend. A few of his hit records include "I Need You Now", "Please Talk To My Heart", "The Bandit", "Hillbilly Love Affair" and "Ramblin' Rose" which was recorded by Nat King Cole. Larry currently lives on a ranch near Pipe Creek, Texas with his wife, Dixie. He owns and operates Bandit Records, his own private recording studio on the ranch. Larry continues to perform live at venues and events throughout Texas and has recently recorded his latest CD, "Hangovers Sure Hang On".

Jeff Stone

Jeff Stone was born in San Antonio in 1936. He began working with area bands as early as 1953 and with a group of teenagers called The Texas Cut-Ups, he landed a radio spot on KBOP in Pleasanton around the same time Willie Nelson was deejaying there. Stone auditioned for Charlie Fitch at Sarg Records in 1956 by showing up at the record store unannounced and performing his original composition Everybody Rock. Fitch liked what he heard and booked time for Stone to record at ACA on September 21, 1956. Though aficionados revere the record today, at the time of its release in April 1957, it barely sold. After a stint in the Air Force, Jeff Stone continued to pursue music in San Antonio. He recorded for the local Alamo Audio label circa 1965 and later Stop in Nashville, where he had a small hit with Hey Little News Boy under the name Bobby Stone. He toured with Marty Robbins and Willie Nelson in the early 1970s. Enjoying resurgence in popularity and interest in his music in Europe, he continues to record and release records on his own label. In 2000, on the success of his album Stone Country, he had 6 #1 hits in Europe and was nominated for several awards by the European CMA including 'Entertainer of The Year' and 'Male Vocalist of The Year'.

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Cecil Moore

Cecil Moore was born on a farm six miles from Luling, TX on July 5, 1929. He began playing music in the late forties with Clarence 'Sleepy' Short, a fiddler who'd worked with some of the top bands in Houston and San Antonio. As a duo, Cecil and Sleepy appeared at area nightclubs like The Bluebird Inn in Kingsbury and the Shamrock Inn in Luling. The Korean War put Cecil's music career on hold for a couple of years, but by 1953 he was out of the military and forming his own band, The Notes, who took up residence at the Flamingo Club in Seguin, holding down a regular gig there for a few years in the mid-fifties. Charlie Fitch had been aware of Moore for some time, but for whatever reason did not record him until 1958 (and only then after Cecil agreed to help finance the session). Moore recorded Walkin' Fever and (I Lost My) Little Baby at ACA in Houston on March 22, 1958. Sales of that single Sarg 150, issued in April 1958, were encouraging. More singles followed like "Moonshine"/"Kathy" (Sarg 165) in 1959, "GI Blues"/"Little Girl" (Sarg 177 under The Notes' name) in 1960 or "My Money's Gone"/"I Want to Be with You Forever" (Sarg 192) in 1961. Through the years, Moore became a steady presence for the Sarg Label and the South Texas music scene. In 1964, Moore recorded the instrumental tune "Diamond Back" (Sarg 206) that went on to become the single most successful Sarg record. Backed with "Rise and Shine", the response upon its initial release on April 7, 1964, was

immediate. Of the radio stations that issued their own charts, Diamond Back hit the Top 10 in San Antonio, Houston and Austin. Atco picked the record up for national distribution and sold several thousand records. The attention Moore garnered from Diamond Back was inevitably brief, but fun while it lasted. He appeared on several television shows performing the tune, and managed to play some of the biggest clubs in Texas. He was also one of the opening acts for the Roy Orbison – Everly Brothers concert at the Houston Coliseum in the summer of '64, where he played his hit in front of 13,000 screaming kids. Moore continued to record for Sarg, among other labels, for the remainder of the sixties and into the seventies. He received an unexpected boost to his notoriety and income when in 1993; The Max Weinberg 7 began playing his original composition Gotta Go as a recurring theme song on NBC's Late Night with Conan O'Brien. Cecil Moore passed away on February 9, 2006.

Al Urban

Al Urban was born on a farm in Gonzales, Texas, on March 1, 1935. He began playing the guitar in his mid-teens and formed his first band, The Daybreakers, in the early fifties and obtained a regular gig at the popular Log Cabin Inn north of Luling. After a first record issued on "Dixie", Urban recorded his original songs "Lookin' For Money" and "I Don't Want To Be Alone" at Gold Star Studio, in Houston, in 1956. Al sent the master tape to Charlie Fitch who agreed to release it on Sarg 148. The record debuted on November 30, 1956 receiving rave reviews from Billboard magazine. It was a modest hit and sold respectably. Two other songs from the same session were issued by Al Urban on his own lable "APU" in 1957. Urban was invited to appear on the Louisiana Hayride on the strength of the single. He was a prolific songwriter often returning to Bill Quinn's Gold Star Studio on his own dime to record his compositions. George Jones was using the same studio during the same period and the two often shared the same backing band. Charlie Fitch released, in 1958, "Gonna Be Better Time"/"Won't Tell You Her Name" (Sarg 158), a furious single with Hal Harris on guitar. Another single was issued in 1960s and Al, disgruntled with Fitch, left the label. In the early 60's, Al Urban issued few records on his own "Fang" label and worked with Charlie Walker. Later, he got records on his own "Kash" records label and at the dawn of 70's some of his songs were recorded by Charley Pride including the hit "I'm Beginning to Believe My Own Lies" that was included on the Grammy award winning album Charley Pride Sings Heart Songs.

HAL HARRIS



Al's story was told on "Blue Suede News" in 2003 by Caroline Gnagy, member of the Casey Sisters, and he became friend with Marti Brom when she was living in Austin (Texas). He recorded a couple of songs with Jimmy Day before he died, played on stage with Wildfire Willie and The Ramblers and was on stage at the Greenbay festival in 2005. He's not from the past, for sure!

Al Urban new CD "I Just Dropped In To Say Goodbye" treats his fans with vintage and traditional roots of country music. This CD showcases his ability to put the many sides of love and will captivate you all. Recorded in Round Rock (Tx) and Hendersonville (Tn), those eleven sides feature first class musicians on guitar, fiddle or steel gtr. That's what country music is all about.

"I Just Dropped In To Say Goodbye" is a great sad song about divorce and will talk to many listeners just as sure as did "Dear John" in the 50's. "Used Wedding Rings" talk about how pawn shop host memories of the past and "Broken Hearted House" feature nice fiddle and piano triplets. "T.I.M.E" brings here steel gtr and open the door to "Country Songs and Angels", a beautiful song about churches and songs. "If I Paid The Band To

Stay” tell about a magic moment at a country dance and “Fire Of Love” about time and faded love. “When The Train Come In” and “Two of A Kind” are other great ballads. “I Already See San Antone” is the only up-tempo number and Al’s tribute to Texas. A great dance ditty that will make you tap your feet and raise you spirit.

“The Good Old Days” close that nice authentic traditional country CD and bring the nostalgic of those good old days before Luling began to decline in the late 60’s and left “SARG” as a ghost of the past until that great documentary.

Clyde Wallace and The Moods.

Clyde Wallace of Luling, Texas assembled some local musicians together in 1958 for the sole purpose of auditioning some of his original songs for Charlie Fitch and Sarg Records. Fitch told them they had potential, and if they stuck together as a group to come and see him again in six months. Wallace, along with Jimmy Bazar (lead guitar, vocals), Ross Whiteside, Jr. (tenor saxophone), Fred Frazier (rhythm guitar), Larry Voight (bass) and Alvin Smith (drums), began working together soon afterward as a result of this informal meeting. The Moods recorded their first session on June 1, 1959, at ACA. Little Alice, written and sung by Wallace, was pure teenage rock ‘n’ roll with sax and sold all of the 1,000 copies that Fitch had pressed on Sarg 162. "Easy Going"/"Duck Walk" (Sarg 176) follow in 1960 before the release of the terrific rocker "Let Me Have Your Love" sing by Jimmy Bazar (Sarg 179). They went on to release two other records on Sarg 184 and 185 in December 1960. From the late 1950s, through the late sixties, The Moods were one of about three bands that dominated the teenage market in South Texas selling out virtually every dance they played for nearly a decade. After leaving Sarg in 1961, they continued to record for labels like "TNT" and "Renco" in San Antonio and "Kool" in Houston. They underwent many shifts in personnel over the years, until by the 1970s none of the original members were still in the group. Wallace recently retired from teaching and coaching and currently manages the Luling Municipal Golf Course in Luling, TX. Recently, the original members of The Moods got back together for a reunion show and were so surprised by the response that they’ve began playing together again on a semi-regular basis.

Dave Isbell

Dave Isbell (born in 1927) formed The Mission City Playboys in San Antonio along with steel guitarist Tiny Williamson in 1947. The Mission City Playboys are one of the few Sarg Records acts to have been acknowledged in print over the years. . not for their music, but because future stars Willie Nelson and Johnny Bush were members of the band. In 1953, a teenage Johnny Bush joined as rhythm guitarist, but later switched to drums. Willie Nelson, still strictly a guitarist, and his friend, fiddler Cozette Holland, sat in with the band one night in 1954 at the Mugwam Club in San Antonio. Dave Isbell recalls he was looking for a fiddler, and hired Nelson to appease Holland. Nelson and Bush made their recording debuts with The Mission City Playboys at a session for Sarg Records on August 9, 1954. Two singles on Sarg 108 and 109 were issued. The band remained together only for a short time after the records were released before Nelson and Isbell quit the band and turned it

over to Johnny Bush who carried the group a while longer before disbanding in 1957. Disenchanted by the music scene, Isbell quit playing music altogether in the late 50s. He currently resides in San Antonio, Texas.

Arnold Parker

Arnold Parker was born January 25, 1936 in Cuero, Texas. In 1953, at the age of 17, he joined the already popular Southernairs as their featured vocalist. The Southernairs had already established themselves as one of the most popular Country and Western dance bands in South Texas.

By the time they recorded their first session for Sarg at ACA (on May 2, 1954), the Southernairs had already released records for "Gilt-Edge" in California and "Humming Bird", a label based out of Waco and Houston. Their two Sarg records stayed within the framework of traditional country music that they had already established on their early efforts. The records received a fair amount of airplay in the area, but neither sold enough for Charlie Fitch to retain interest. They went on to record for Starday in 1956 and cut "Find a New Woman"/"People Laugh at a Fool" (Starday 570) and were booked as the opening act for Elvis Presley's final appearance on 'The Louisiana Hayride' (December, 15, 1956). In 1959, Arnold was DJ on KULP located on El Campo (Tx). In 1964, Parker and lead guitarist Ken Williams regrouped and called themselves "The Mustangs". The reunited with Fitch and released seven singles for Sarg Records between 1966 and 1971.

Jimmy Farmer

Jimmy Farmer was an Elvis fanatic from Lockhart, TX. He was playing in a local group called the Parques when he approached Charlie Fitch in 1962 at the suggestion of his uncle, an engineer at KTSA in San Antonio. Fitch liked Farmer's "Long Black Train" and scheduled a session at Texas Sound Studios with Cecil Moore's band, the Notes, providing the music. Although critics often cite the track as one of Sarg's better efforts, it was released on Sarg 201 to mostly deaf ears on August 25, 1962. Farmer appeared with The Notes for a short period of time after the release of his record, but soon lost interest and never recorded again.

Herby Schoelzel (Herby Shozel)

Herby Schoelzel was born in Fentress, Texas on August 28, 1928 and grew up immersed in music. His family moved to San Antonio in 1941 and by 1945 he and his steel guitarist brother, Eddie, had a local radio show there three times a week. Around 1947, they both joined Tommy Hill's early band, The Texas Hillbillies. When Tommy and Goldie Hill left for Shreveport, the group disbanded, and Herby and Eddie regrouped with another band, The Bar-M Playboys. The Korean War intervened soon afterward when Schoelzel was drafted in October 1950. He returned in January of 1953 with the intention of starting his own band and persuaded his former band mates to leave the Bar-M Playboys and join his new band, The Longhorn Playboys. The band made a name for themselves playing as far South as Corpus Christi and as far North as Fredericksburg, as well as the usual local

hotspots, such as the Circle B in San Antonio. Their notoriety picked up considerably when they landed a regular Friday and Saturday night gig at the infamous Barn where soon after, they were approached by Charlie Fitch who arranged for The Longhorn Playboys debut recording session in Houston. Group originals "I Suppose" and "You Ain't Foolin'" were recorded at ACA on March 18, 1954. Released one month later, "I Suppose" was a local hit that summer, selling close to a thousand copies. They went on to release four more singles with Sarg (107 & 116), but none sold as well as their debut. Schoelzel began to have misgivings about his agreement with Sarg. They split acrimoniously in 1955. The band continued to play into 1959, but unfortunately did not record again.

Doug Sahm

Douglas Wayne Sahm was born November 6, 1941, in San Antonio, Texas. Considered to be a prodigy on steel guitar, mandolin, and fiddle, he made his radio debut at age five singing "Teardrops In My Heart" on KMAC in San Antonio. He became a featured player on the Louisiana Hayride country radio program by age eight. Known as Little Doug Sahm, he would often sit in at live performances of such greats as Webb Pierce, Hank Thompson and Faron Young. In December 1952, Hank Williams took Doug on stage in Austin, Texas, less than two weeks before Williams's death. Doug released a number of singles on various local record labels, beginning at age thirteen with "A Real American Joe" backed with "Rollin' Rollin'" on Sarg 113. As a teenager, Sahm was offered a regular spot on the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville, but his mother decided that he should stay in his hometown and finish junior high school. He fronted several bands during his high school years, including the Pharaohs, the Dell-Kings, and the Markkays. Although he was a child prodigy in country music, he became a significant figure in blues, rock and other genres. Today Sahm is considered one of the most important figures in Texas Music. Along with Augie Meyers, he was the founder and leader of the 1960s 'British invasion' influenced band The Sir Douglas Quintet that scored an international hit in 1965 with "She's About A Mover." In 1973, Jerry Wexler of Atlantic Records bought Sahm's contract from Mercury and produced Doug Sahm and Band, a "supergroup" album featuring Bob Dylan, Dr. John, David Bromberg, and Flaco Jimenez. Sahm and Augie Meyers continued to record together for different American labels throughout the 1970's and early 1980's and eventually reunited with Flaco Jimenez and Freddy Fender in 1989 to form a 'Tex-Mex version of the Traveling Wilburys', The Texas Tornados, who went on to produce eight albums. In 1994, Sahm re-formed The Sir Douglas Quintet with his sons Shawn and Shandon and recorded the hard rock album Day Dreaming At Midnight. The same year he was also the centerpiece of the more R&B influenced album The Last Great Texas Blues Band. In 1999, Sahm inaugurated his own label, Tornado Records, in order to continue releasing his own material, as well as producing albums by other musicians, such as Ed Burleson. Shortly after the inauguration, Doug Sahm died November 18, 1999, while vacationing at the Kachina Inn in Taos, New Mexico.

Adolph Hofner

Adolph Hofner was born in Moulton, Texas, on June 8, 1916 and raised on a farm in Lavaca County, TX. Hofner's father was part German and his mother was Czech. Growing up in a primarily Czech community, Hofner heard polkas, schottisches, and other forms of local dance music. When he and his family moved to San Antonio in 1928, he and his steel guitar-playing brother, Emil, began performing in local clubs. Their sound reflected several strands of the Texas musical mosaic. Adolph was a crooner, and Emil, like other early Texas swing musicians, emulated Hawaiian sounds. After the brothers heard the pioneering music of Milton Brown and Bob Wills, they began playing the jazzinflected country-dance music that in retrospect was labeled Western swing. Adolph, whose smooth singing style earned him the nickname the "Bing Crosby of Country," first recorded with Jimmie Revard's Oklahoma Playboys, a major musical attraction in 1930s San Antonio. Hofner also cut some sides as a solo vocalist and performed on vocals with Tom Dickey's Show Boys. His lead vocals on "It Makes No Difference Now" became a hit in its own right and inspired Hofner to form his own band in 1939. At first the band was known as Adolph Hofner & His Texans, but when they began recording for Okeh and Columbia in the early '40s with the addition of fiddler J.R. Chatwell, they were called the San Antonians. Among their best-known tunes were "Maria Elena" and "Alamo Rag." The band spent the early '40s working in southern California, and during World War II, he briefly changed his stage name from Adolph to Dolph to avoid association with Adolf Hitler. After the war he began using his own name again, and in 1949 returned to Texas and in honor of new sponsor Pearl Beer, Hofner's band became the Pearl Wranglers. He claimed to have been the first to record the classic "Cotton Eyed Joe" (1941), which has since become a standard. They recorded for the Sarg label for many years and were fixtures of San Antonio music through the 1980s. Issued under the name of Emil "Bash" Hofner, with Eddie Bowers taking care of the vocal duties, on Sarg 138, "Rockin' and A-Boppin'" is a great recording. "Pistol Packing Mama" (Sarg 161) and "Pipeliners Blues" (Sarg 202) showcase heavy western swing roots. He was best known in the Texas Hill Country and the Valley as a tireless performer who knew exactly what the people wanted come Saturday night and continued to perform up until 1993 when he was slowed by a stroke. He was a durable musical icon of south Texas who helped shape Western swing, and whose dual career as a swing bandleader and Czech dance musician showed the ways in which Western swing had roots in Central European dance traditions. Hofner died of lung cancer in San Antonio on June 2, 2000. His many honors include induction into the Country Music Hall of Fame, Texas Western Swing Hall of Fame, Texas Polka Music Association Hall of Fame, Country Music Association of Texas Hall of Fame, and Western Swing Society Hall of Fame.

SARG 136



Willie Nelson

Willie Nelson was born April 30, 1933, and raised in Abbott, Texas. His grandparents gave him mail-order music lessons starting at age six. He wrote his first song when he was seven and was playing in a local band at age nine. Nelson made his recording debut as lead guitarist for Dave Isbell and the Mission City Playboys released on Sarg Records in August 1954. The earliest known recordings of Nelson and his original compositions are a demo tape sent to Charlie Fitch in 1955 (later released by Sarg Records) that he had recorded at radio station KBOP in Pleasanton, TX while on break from his job as early morning deejay. Charlie Fitch passed on the young singer/songwriter opting not to extend a recording contract. Nelson went on to become an American icon. As a songwriter and a performer, Willie Nelson played a vital role in post-rock & roll country music. Although he didn't become a star until the mid-'70s, Nelson spent the '60s writing songs that became hits for stars like Ray Price ("Night Life"), Patsy Cline ("Crazy"), Faron Young ("Hello Walls"), and Billy Walker ("Funny How Time Slips Away") as well as releasing a series of records on Liberty and RCA that earned him a small, but devoted, cult following. During the early '70s, Willie aligned himself with Waylon Jennings and the burgeoning outlaw country movement that made him into a star in 1975.

Sources and Acknowledgments

Biographical information is based off of personal interviews with and documents maintained by Charlie Fitch, music historians and various Sarg recording artists. However, the producers would like to acknowledge the following bibliographic sources, and especially, the research and writings of Andrew

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[Pas de commentaires, soyez le premier à commenter ce dossier !](#)

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Sgt. Fitch: The Legacy of Sarg Records. Produced by: Damon Cook and Dan Pringle. 2-Page Program Summary. Sgt. Fitch explores the advent and influence of ... - <http://www.sgt-fitch.com/Filmmakers/>

Sgt. Fitch explores the advent and influence of Sarg Records, a small independently owned record label cultivated by WWII hero, Sgt. Charlie Fitch. With his unconventional approach to the recording industry, Fitch redefined Texas music in the 1950s by mixing ethnic styles and different genres to create entirely new ones. Although, Sarg played a significant role in launching some of today's rock 'n roll and country music legends, the label's legacy arguably lies in the overlooked and undervalued treasures from its relatively unknown artists.

The story of Sarg Records is a tale of minor enterprise in 1950s small town America. Luling is a South Texas oil town renowned for its petroleum and watermelon farms, but not for its music. Nevertheless, what began at the Luling Phonograph and Record Shop at 311 East Davis Street in 1953 produced or influenced music heard throughout the entire world today.

Charlie Fitch, the engine behind Sarg Records, enlisted in the Army Air Corps in 1940. He served as a tail gunner on over one hundred battle missions in WWII, and became a war hero on his final mission when his B-17 bomber took a hit from a Nazi anti-aircraft missile over Frankfurt on the morning of November 5, 1944. Fitch took control of the situation, calming his young and inexperienced crew, systematically rigging their jump gear and seeing them to safety before jumping himself. He was captured on the ground and spent the next six months as a Prisoner of War in the notorious Nazi prison camp, Stalag Luft 4.

It was Fitch's experience working on the electrical systems of his airplane in WWII that gave him the technical knowledge to open an electronics repair business upon returning home from the war. While stationed at Brooks Air Force Base in San Antonio, his part-time job was to service broken radios, televisions and phonograph players. As fate would have it, he was called on to service jukeboxes for a local operator in South Texas. Sensing a burgeoning business in the jukebox trade, Charlie purchased his own jukebox with his Air Force re-enlistment bonus in 1946.

By the time Charlie was honorably discharged in May 1950, his foray into the jukebox business had flourished. He was now a full time jukebox operator (or 'op' as they were known in the trade) and eventually built up his business to include 25 jukeboxes spread across South Texas. He moved back to his hometown, Luling, where he and his wife, Bennie, took up residence at 311 E. Davis Street, formerly the site of a grocery store, with living quarters in the back. They had no special plans for the front room of the building, initially using it as a storage area for parts and records for the jukeboxes. The idea occurred to Charlie that he could use the space to sell the same records he was buying for his machines in a retail capacity . . . on October 9, 1950 the Luling Phonograph and Record Shop was open for business.

Charlie spent most of his time driving from town to town servicing his jukeboxes . . . collecting coins, making repairs and changing out records. Every couple of weeks he would travel to San Antonio and purchase the latest 78s and 45s from distributors for his jukeboxes and store. In the meantime, Bennie managed the retail store selling records over the counter, and because they lived in the back of the shop, she could keep an eye on the kids. It was a perfect arrangement for both of them.

Spending much of his time working his machines in country dancehalls and honky-tonks, Charlie encountered hundreds of local musicians, bands and singers. This inevitably led to other music related ventures. He started working as a promoter and booking agent for local concerts and dancehalls bringing stars such as Johnny and Jack, Kitty Wells, Faron Young and Webb Pierce to the area. Next, he hosted a live two-hour radio show for KCNY in San Marcos, TX adding 'disc jockey' to his resume' that now included jukebox operator, record store owner and booking agent. However, it would be the next phase of the music business that he ambitiously embarked upon that would be his legacy.

Immersed in the local music scene, the idea struck Charlie that it would be good business if he had records of these unknown local acts to put in his store and jukeboxes to take advantage of their immediate fan base. The opportunity presented itself to him in the summer of 1953, when a local Luling woman approached Charlie and introduced him to her nephew, a young singer named Neal Merritt. Charlie was impressed with Merritt and helped to arrange a session to record his original tune, *Korean Love Song*.

Knowing nothing about the actual record manufacturing process, he chose to act as an agent and help Merritt land a record deal. He packaged the newly recorded material with a demo tape of another local musician he had encountered in San Antonio, 12-year-old child prodigy 'Little' Doug Sahm, and began shopping it to major labels. After a series of rejections, Charlie began to explore the possibility of starting his own label to record and promote regional talent.

With the confident assumption that he knew as much about what would sell to the public than those snide producers from Nashville, Fitch began drawing up plans for his new label. Although he'd handled records for several years by this point, and knew the trade as well as anyone in South Texas at that time, he still had little understanding of what went into the recording and manufacturing end of the business, however; undeterred, he jumped right in. There was no question as to what the label would be named. Everyone in Luling had called Charlie by his rank, "Sarg", and he had sometimes referred to his jukebox and dance promotion business as 'Sarg Productions'. Inevitably, with the release of Sarg 101 (Neal Merritt's Korean Love Song) in December 1953, Sarg Records was in business.

Whereas most startup labels in the fifties were ‘copycat’ labels, relying on trends and radio marketing, it was Fitch’s love of all types of music, regardless of marketability, that kept him afloat. Virtually every style of music performed in Texas was documented on the Sarg Label from western swing, country, rhythm and blues, rock and roll, rockabilly, conjunto, waltzes and polkas, pop and jazz.

Although two Texas icons, Willie Nelson and Doug Sahm, made their earliest recordings for Sarg, the label’s legacy lies in the celebrated records by western swing pioneer Adolph Hofner, honky-tonkers Herby Shoelzel and Larry Nolen, rock and rollers The Moods and The Downbeats, and rockabilly mavericks Cecil Moore and Al Urban.

Over the next two decades, Sarg Records maintained a steady presence on the music scene in the multicultural milieu that is South Texas, eventually releasing over 150 singles over a twenty-year period. The label’s massive historical importance lies in the documentation of a time period and talent-laden region where ethnic diversity and new post war attitudes led to the birth of entirely new genres of music. By unintentionally creating this archive of sound, Fitch carved out a niche for himself and his artists in American music history.

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