



S.A. musicians set to show SXSW something different

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(Helen L. Montoya/Express-News)

San Antonio-based jazz musicians, composers and married couple Katchie Cartwright and Richard Oppenheim will lead the Katchie Cartwright/Richard Oppenheim Nonet into South by Southwest showcase action on Thursday at the Elephant Room in Austin.

Jim Beal Jr. • Express-News Staff Writer

Here's the stereotype of the bands that showcase at South by Southwest, the annual music and media conference that takes over Austin each March: young, hungry, living in the van on the road, ready for a shot at becoming the next big thing.

Even in the digital download age there are bands looking to get signed to a major label and hit the arenas of the world. A lot of those bands are hoping to get a boost at SXSW.

Katchie Cartwright and Richard Oppenheim don't quite fit that profile. He's 54, an alto saxophonist out of Chicago with a long stint in New York. He's worked with Illinois Jacquet, the Buddy Rich Band, Marvin Gaye, Jaki Byard and Foghat,

On the Web

- [The official Cartwright/Oppenheim Web site](#)
- [Eleonore Oppenheim on Myspace.com](#)
- [Lawrence Ferlinghetti and his City Lights bookstore](#)

among others.

- [The Elephant Room site](#)
- [South by Southwest on the Web](#)

Catherine (Katchie) Cartwright, born in New York City, is a bit younger than Oppenheim, her husband. She's a singer, flutist, ethnomusicologist, author and an assistant professor of music at Northwest Vista College. Cartwright has traveled the world studying music and making music.

Cartwright and Oppenheim make music together and apart. Their latest project as a team is "A Mumbai of the Mind: Ferlinghetti Improvisations" (Harriton Carved Wax), recorded in Mumbai (Bombay), India and in New York and released in 2003. The CD features Cartwright (vocals), Oppenheim (sax) and three Indian percussionists.

The Katchie Cartwright/Richard Oppenheim Nonet is scheduled to play an official SXSW showcase Thursday at the Elephant Room. The group will be one of 17 San Antonio-based acts, and the only all-out jazz outfit, making the official showcase scene in Austin.

Early last week, Cartwright and Oppenheim were at Justin's On Main waiting for the weekly jazz jam session to start. When asked if they had a goal for the SXSW showcase, they laughed a little, in unison.

"I figured why not apply," Oppenheim said. "So I sent in some info and a cut from 'Mumbai' and they said OK."

"We really like the 'Mumbai' album and haven't had a chance to play it live," Cartwright said. "The music is unusual."

"It's a chance to take the music off of the CD and play it in a different way," Oppenheim added.

The Nonet will be Cartwright, Oppenheim, Cecil Carter (trumpet), Heinz Frommeyer (keyboard), Adolphe Yacé (electric bass), Utah Hamrick (upright bass), Angelo Stokes (drums) and two dancers, Jayne King and Bana Ramanath.

"Our daughter is impressed that we're playing South by Southwest," Cartwright said.

Their daughter, Eleonore Oppenheim, is a bassist who plays a lot of challenging music with, among others, Philip Glass.

"Eleonore came to visit us last year in March and took off to Austin to see friends who were playing at South by Southwest," Cartwright said, laughing.

Cartwright and Oppenheim met and married in New York. They've been together offstage and onstage for 26 years. In August 2006, they relocated to San Antonio so Cartwright could teach at Northwest Vista. Oppenheim quickly became one of the first-call reedmen in the area.

"I think collaborating as a couple is different," Cartwright said. "We have a chance to talk about things in the abstract and in specifics throughout the day. It gives the work more of a gestation period. We have a futon in our living room. We come up with a lot of ideas lying flat on our backs. We call it assuming the position. We wouldn't have a chance to collaborate with others the same way."

"And we wind up bringing in more things to the work because we experience more things together," Oppenheim said.

But collaborating with others is something the pair also does well. The "Mumbai" project came out of a trip Cartwright made to India to study Indian vocal techniques. The original plan, to play jazz with Indian musicians including pianists and guitarists, didn't come together, but the percussion project presented itself.

"We decided to create these modes and tunings with the percussionists," Cartwright said, "and we gave them ideas with stories."

"We had these vague narratives for these guys, stories about walking along a beach with their kids, things like that," Oppenheim said.

"We created the stories but didn't have a text for the stories and then later realized Lawrence Ferlinghetti's poetry in 'A Coney Island of the Mind' fit perfectly," Cartwright said.

So far, Cartwright and Oppenheim fit perfectly with San Antonio, and vice versa.

"Both of us love San Antonio," Cartwright said. "The climate is great, there's a kind of café society here, and there are great musicians and great venues."

"San Antonio offers an outdoor hang a lot of the time," Oppenheim said.

"In New York there's a little more diversity, it's easier to find Indian drummers and African percussionists, for instance, but San Antonio is also diverse and often has a more non-American feel," Cartwright said. "And the ice house thing is great. We finally got around to going to Sam's Burger Joint and loved it."

San Antonio has never been over-represented at SXSW. This year's crop of 17 participants is the largest ever from the Alamo City. But, since the early days of the conference/festival, San Antonio bands have done things the Alamo Town way. They've hawked merchandise, challenged audience members to after-set, uh, discussions and offered to sell their guitars. The Cartwright/Oppenheim Nonet works in the grand S.A. tradition.

"When we saw the back line set up at the Elephant Room, we said we also needed tables onstage for our dancers," Oppenheim said. "We're probably the only jazz band with dancers."

"Jayne King is a colleague at Northwest Vista. I gave her a copy of the CD, and she and Bana choreographed dances to it," Cartwright said.

So what's next for the Cartwright/Oppenheim tandem?

"We're mulling," Cartwright said. "We're assuming the position."

And another stereotype is shattered.

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Online at:

http://www.mysanantonio.com/entertainment/stories/MYSA031208.01P.SXSW_lead.1861cad.html