

Austin stars vying for Grammy

Little-known group head to head against Stevie Ray Vaughan

By John T. Davis

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Austin guitar star Stevie Ray Vaughan and his group, Double Trouble, will go head to head with a little-known, impromptu group of local guitarists called Big Guitars From Texas for one of the coveted Grammy awards Feb. 25 in Los Angeles.

The groups will be competing in the Best Rock Instrumental Performance category. Vaughan and Double Trouble are making their fifth appearance at the ceremonies — the blues-rock group won for the first time in 1984. For the musicians involved in the garage-band instrumental Big Guitars project, it is their first nomination.

Willie Nelson, another Grammy perennial, was nominated for two awards. For *Forgiving You Was Easy*, Nelson was nominated for Best Country Vocal Solo Performance. He also shares a nomination for Best Country Vocal Duo or Group Performance for the song, *Highwayman*, with Waylon Jennings, Kris Kristofferson and Johnny Cash.

The Big Guitars From Texas album, *Trash, Twang and Thunder*



Photo by Lone Star Silver and Assoc.

The Big Guitars from Texas are, from right: Evan Johns, Denny Freeman, Frankie Camaro, Don Leady, Mike Buck and Keith Ferguson.

— from which the song *Guitar Army* was nominated for the award — represents a David among the Goliaths of the major record labels. The album, which features four lead guitarists from four Austin bands in a one-shot collaboration, is a home-grown project that was conceived, financed, recorded and pro-

duced in Austin. In an era in which mass-marketing dominates the Grammy nominations, the tenacious popularity of *Trash, Twang and Thunder* surprised even some of its creators.

"I was skeptical at first" about the project, said Bruce Sheehan. **See Grammy, A5**

Grammy From A1

whose Jungle Records label released the album. "Then it just kept multiplying. We pressed less than 10,000 copies here, and about 4,000 overseas. We worked with about 15 independent distributors around the country, and got some radio play on some alternative college stations. We've been getting on some weird charts, too. For a while, we were number five in Vancouver, British Columbia."

In an era when albums can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars and take up to a year to record, *Trash, Twang and Thunder* was the project of a music fan's brainstorm and a weekend in the studio, according to Gary Rice, the record's production coordinator and manager of Austin's LeRoI Brothers and the Commandos.

"A little over a year ago, I was thinking about some other project to try," said Rice, who is also an assistant city editor for the *American-Statesman*. "So I called Vince (McGarry, the album's producer), and said, 'What if we got this wall of guitars from Austin and put them in the studio? Could you make that work?' And he said, 'Yeah, that would work.' So we made a list of guitar players and called them up. We got just about everybody we wanted."

"Everybody" meant a group of highly regarded local talents, including Frankie Camaro of Moto X, Evan Johns of Evan Johns and the H-Bombs, Don Leady of the Tail Gators, and Denny Freeman of the Angela Strehli Band. The four guitarists were aided in the studio by bassist Keith Ferguson and drummer Mike Buck.

Freeman, for one, was flabbergasted by the prestigious nomination. "That was real good news," he said excitedly. "I haven't ordered a new Porsche or anything, but it can't hurt to be part of something

like that.

"It's also very funny. That was the first project I've ever been involved in that came off so quickly and with so few difficulties," Freeman said. "They called me about it on a Monday, we went in that following weekend and recorded it. We were writing some of those songs in the studio, learning them and calling out the changes to each other as we were recording them. Vince pulled it all together, and within two or three months, the thing was actually in the stores. And projects just don't happen like that. If it never goes any farther than this, that's great, because it's already like a coup, or something."

Evan Johns joked that his plane ticket to Los Angeles was already paid for. "What do you say?" the guitarist said with a laugh. "I don't know how we pulled that off. I've been playing my whole life, but I've got something to write home about now."

Although Jeff Beck, Northern Star, the Jon Butcher Axis, and Yngwie Malmsteen are also competing for the Best Rock Instrumental Performance award, it is Stevie Ray Vaughan whom the Big Guitars have their eye on. But it is a friendly rivalry.

"That's got to say something about Austin right there," said Evan Johns of the fact that two hometown groups were competing for a national award. And Bruce Sheehan said, "Next year, everybody will be from Austin."

Vaughan, whose group was nominated for their song, *Say What!*, and Willie Nelson were unavailable for comment.

The Grammy awards will be presented Feb. 25 at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles. The show will be broadcast live on ABC-TV, Channel 2 Cable 2.