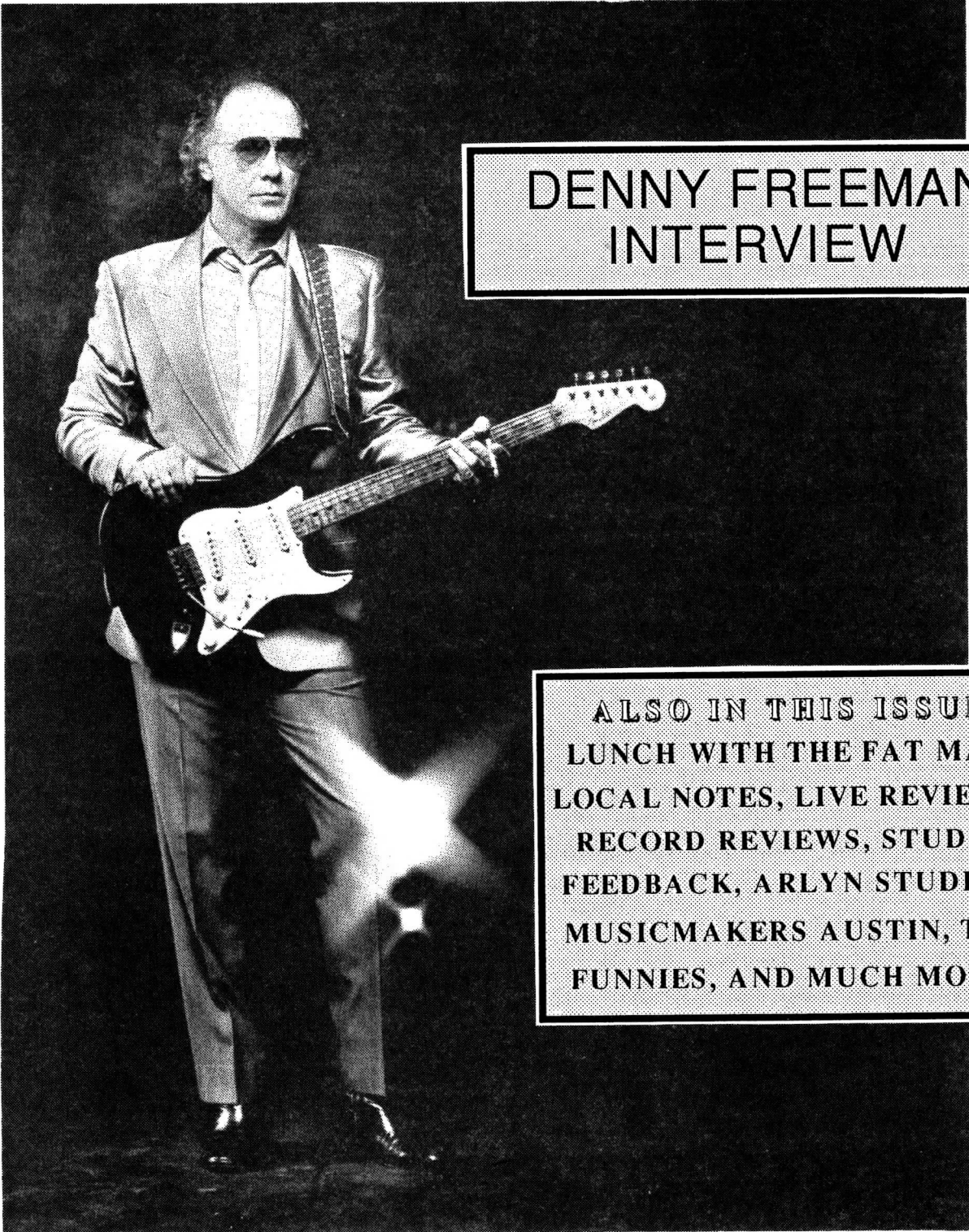


AUSTIN, TEXAS ONLY ALL-MUSIC PUBLICATION



# Glitch news



DENNY FREEMAN  
INTERVIEW

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LOCAL NOTES, LIVE REVIEWS,  
RECORD REVIEWS, STUDIO  
FEEDBACK, ARLYN STUDIOS,  
MUSICMAKERS AUSTIN, THE  
FUNNIES, AND MUCH MORE.

# Denny Freeman: Guitar Bluesman

by Keith A. Ayres

*The following interview was conducted on December 8, 1988 between Amazing Records recording artist Denny Freeman and Keith A. Ayres of the Glitch News. As you will see, the interview was divided into various sub-topics and was transcribed pretty much verbatim. DF-Denny Freeman, GN-Keith A. Ayres.*

## BACKGROUND

GN-Where is your birthplace?

DF-I got cheated out of being born in Texas because my mother was following my dad around while he was in the Army and I was born on an Army base in Florida.

GN-Where did you grow up?

DF-Mostly in Dallas.

GN-How were you introduced to music?

DF-Just like every person. Music you just hear it and you like it. Nothing really made a strong impression on me until I heard the first R&B stuff...I can't remember exactly who it was. It might have been Little Richard, it might have been Ray Charles. In '55 or something when I first started hearing wild negro music. Before that, all I'd heard was whatever my parents listened to, all of the white pop stuff.

GN-Did you receive any formal instruction?

DF-Yeah. When I decided that I wanted to play guitar, a friend and I took lessons at this place called Trick Brothers School of Guitar and Accordion. He was teaching us to play, but after a couple of lessons we were going, "Well, you know Tennessee Waltz is O.K., but we kinda wanted to play some Chuck Berry and stuff like that." And he said, "Alright we'll get around to that, but get back to your music." So we figured out that he was going to teach us to read music, but he was not going to teach us what we wanted to learn. It was one of those studios that want to get you in there just to sell your parents the guitar and the amp. We did that for a few months and learned a couple of things, but we realized that we'd make a lot better time by just trying to play along with Fats Domino records.

GN-Do you play any other instruments?

DF-I play around on the piano a bit.

## BANDS

GN-What were some of the early bands you were in while growing up?

DF-Nothing that anyone would remember unless they went to my High School. My first band was called the Corals. I'm old enough to where I had to deal with the military obligation. I got out of High School in '62 and at that time you either went to college or you got drafted. You had to deal with the military one way or the other, so I went to North Texas to avoid the military and...

GN-In Denton, Texas?

DF-Yeah. From 1962 to 1970, when I moved to Austin, all I did is play in weekend bands. Nothing memorable at all.

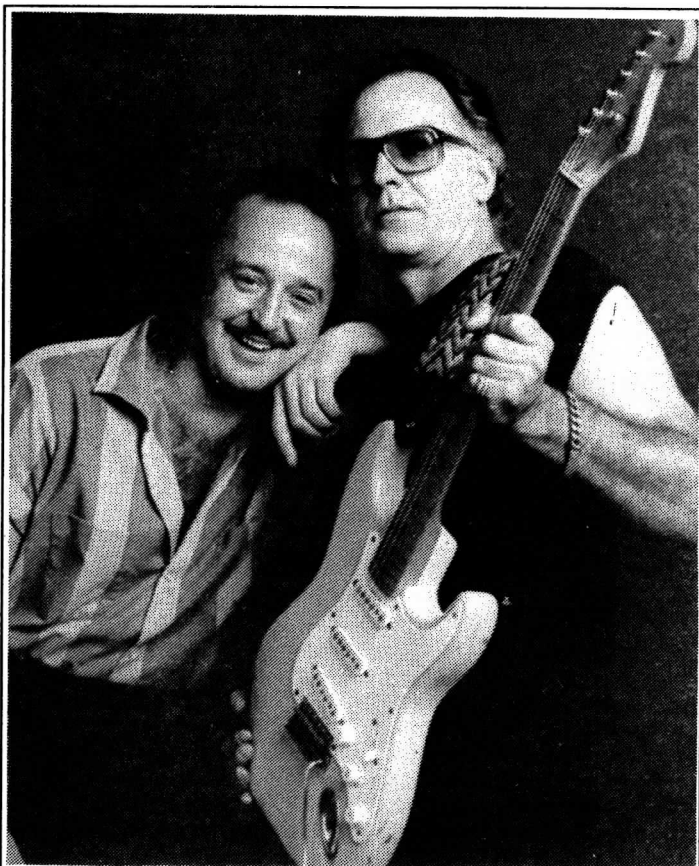
GN-Who did you play with once you moved to Austin?

DF-When I first moved here in the summer of '70, Doyle Bramhall, Jimmie Vaughan, and Paul Ray moved here at around the same time. As soon as we got to town Jimmie, Doyle, this other bass player named Jamie Bassett and I started the Storm. That was Jimmie's first Austin band. I played in that for a while and then W.C. Clark, Angela Strehli, Alex Napier, Roddy Cologna, and I had a band called Southern Feelin'. And then it went from there to Paul Ray and the Cobras.

GN-How long were the Cobras together?

DF-I was in it for eight years. I think that we came together for the first time in '74 and I left in '82. They continued on for about a year and a half after I left.

GN-Were there a lot of line-up changes?



Denny Freeman (R) and Kim Wilson.

photo by Jeff Rowe

DF-Oh, plenty. Paul Ray, who left the band in '78 or '79, counted them up one time and there were nearly thirty people that had been in the band over the years.

GN-What came after the Cobras, bandwise?

DF-Joe Sublett and I were in the Cobras when Lou Ann Barton's first record came out. Lou Ann asked us to help put together a band to go on tour to support that record. It was getting good reviews and everyone assumed that there would be a tour. We left the Cobras and rehearsed and rehearsed and then found out that they weren't going to send us out on tour. We played around the state for two or three months. It wasn't the situation that we'd have left the Cobras to get into. After that I drifted into Angela Strehli's band, but between the two bands there were little temporary bands that we would come up with. We had a band called Lefty and the Catholics that had some of Christopher Cross's people and Chris Layton (now with Stevie Ray Vaughan), some of the Cobras, and Tommy Taylor was our singer. Then Paul and I had another temporary band called the Raytones.

GN-Do you do any jamming around these days?

DF-Most of my work has been at the club (Antone's) just backing up people that they bring in.

GN-Is that with the Antone's?

DF-Yeah. Although with Angela's band we've been gone so much this year that the Antone's unit has expanded a bit. It used to be a real tight number of people, but George Rains, the drummer and Mel Brown (organ, guitar) would go out on tour with the Angela Strehli band so we had to get substitutes for the Antone's. We back up a lot of people that Clifford brings in.

GN-What else is going on?

DF-Do you know Bevis Griffin?

GN-Of Banzai Kik?

DF-Yeah. O.K., well he moved to New York a few years ago to pursue that, but returned to Austin a couple of months ago and he's still pursuing that (Banzai Kik) on one level.



But when he came back to town he said, "I'm gonna be here for a while; let's you and me put a band together for the fun of it". So Bevis and I, with Sarah Brown and George Rains, have a band called the Chill Factor, which I thought was gonna be another temporary thing because I didn't think Bevis was gonna be here very long, but it looks as if he might stick around. We've played at the Black Cat three times, the Continental a couple of times and we have a pair of upcoming gigs at the Continental. So this thing with the Chill factor is the first thing that I've really done outside of Angela's band and the Antone's in a long time. GN-What about the Denny Freeman Band? Is that just a recording entity for Amazing? (see Records) DF-Yeah.

GN-Is there actually a Denny Freeman Band?

DF-No. That's always something that's on my mind and it's something that I want to do, but up until now I've just been involved enough with Angela's band and I haven't really had the nerve to take on the responsibility of puttin' together my own band. I would like to pursue that, but right now it doesn't exist.

### RECORDS

GN-When did you get into recording?

DF-The first time that I went into a real studio was in Dallas. After I got out of High School a lot of work I did was pick up work. They'd tell me, "we got a gig Saturday night, just show up". Sometimes I was in a real band. I actually went into a couple of studios before I should have. Southern Feelin' laid down a bunch of tracks in '73, nothing ever came of it. Paul Ray and the Cobras put out a single. As old as I am, the first full album that I ever worked on that got released was that Big Guitars thing. I'd recorded on a cut for the Austin R&B Christmas album with Paul Ray.

GN-What is your favorite recorded track?

DF-I don't have a favorite.

GN-What is your most embarrassing recorded work?

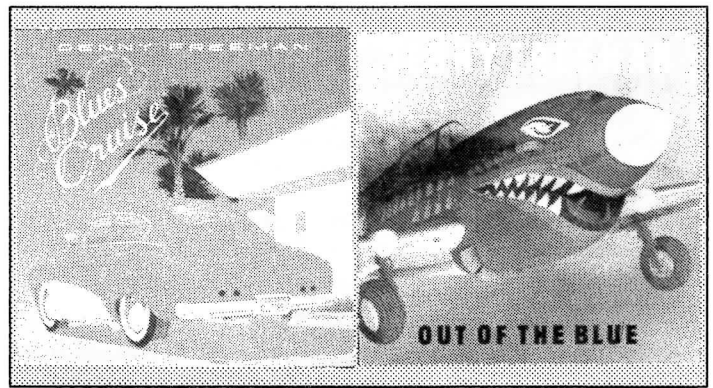
DF-Uh. (pause)(phone rings). There would probably be a four or five way tie on that. I wouldn't want to insult a couple of people by naming it. On the Big Guitars record I have two songs I wrote. One of them, called Nerius Beast, I wrote the night before we went into the studio and it didn't quite make it. They needed another song and I said, "Hell, I can write a rock n' roll instrumental anytime." But when it gets down to coming up with something that is worth putting on vinyl, I found out that it isn't that simple.

GN-You have your own label called V-8 Records. What are your overviews from that experience?

DF-It's real expensive. I had to do because it nobody else was gonna do it.

GN-It's my experience that singles are an expensive business card.

DF-That's exactly right. I'd recorded an live album with the Cobras at the Armadillo that was complete through the test pressing stage, the jacket was designed by Michael Priest and it was all ready to go and then they decided not to put it out. Then the Cobras went on a couple of other wild goose chases and I was getting real frustrated. So when Lou Ann asked me to join her band I said, "yeah". And then that fell apart. I didn't intend on putting out the two 45's (on V-8). Whenever I had some money I would go to a studio and record some songs that I had written. I didn't know what I was gonna do with them and I didn't really have that much money. I had a few songs that I wanted to record and so I started on them. Then I ran out of money. It took a while to finish up those. Anyway, in the meantime I said, "Well, I got these songs on tape and I don't know what to do with them." So I put out the 45's. After I recorded these, I kept going back in the studio everytime I had some money and what happened was eventually I looked down and I had eleven songs that I'd recorded. That's when I ran into (Jim) Yanaway and he expressed interest in finishing up recording an album. If I hadn't have done those recordings I wouldn't



Denny's first two albums are on Amazing Records.

have ended with the album. Plus, if I'm paying for it and it's my deal, then I can tell everybody how I want it to be. It's real expensive because I'm just a guitar player.

GN-What advice do you have for beginners in the record business?

DF-Everything costs more and takes longer than what you think. You have got to start somewhere though.

GN-How has working with Amazing Records been?

DF-Yanaway and I get along real good and I'll always be grateful to him and his partner Cass for taking the chance and doing this. I wish that they had a little more resources to promote and distribute my stuff.

GN-That's a big problem for most indie labels I know.

DF-Exactly. Jim and I worked together closely, especially on the second album. It's nice working with a guy from a record company that you can sit down and relax with, who knows music. He's a guy just like me tryin' to do, in his way, the same thing that I'm tryin' to do and a lot of our musical tastes are real similar and that helps.

### EQUIPMENT

GN-Do you remember what your first guitar was?

DF-Yeah, oh yeah. When I was takin' the lessons they provided you with an acoustic guitar that was so terrible that pretty soon you'd say, "Mommy, buy me a guitar down there at the studio, a real one". After I quit lessons I had to give that acoustic back. I don't remember how this came down, but mother was encouraging. I don't know that she really wanted me to spend the rest of my life in smokey nightclubs. As far as pursuing playing music, she was behind me. We went down to Ellum St. (it wasn't called Deep Ellum then) to one of the pawn shops and I came home with a Stratocaster. To me it's still about the coolest guitar there is. I was fourteen and I couldn't believe it. We got that and a little Silvertone amp for a hundred dollars.

GN-What's your favorite all-time guitar?

DF-Stratocasters and hollowbody electric Gibsons.

GN-What do you currently use?

DF-A Stratocaster. I've got three and the one I like best is a re-issue.

GN-What ever happened to the guitar your Mother bought?

DF-I sold it for a hundred dollars back when I was in school when I was broke. I hated to.

GN-Are you into collecting?

DF-No.

### PRACTICE SCHEDULE/FUTURE PROJECTS

GN-What is your practice schedule? Do you rehearse with a band and/or do you practice alone?

DF-I would like to take some lessons from a really good jazz teacher. I'm always picking up my guitar and playing something, but I'm tired of playing the same stuff. I need some help. I need some lessons from a real jazz player.

GN-So you have advanced to the point in Blues where you're interested in getting into jazz?

DF-Oh, I always have been. All of the other musicians that I have been associated with aren't really been interested in jazz. The last couple of years I've encountered more people

that are interested in that. One of the things that I would really love to do is get a little jazz unit to go play at the Continental Club on Sunday afternoons. I'd love to do it whether I made any money at it or not.

GN-Free form jazz?

DF-No. Straight ahead, just bop stuff, standards and swing. Fifties and Sixties style. Guitar, bass, drums and sax or something. Just a quartet or a quintet. No fusion stuff. A couple of years ago Mark Kazanoff our sax player, George (Rains), and a few East coast friends that had moved here would go down to Antone's on Friday afternoon, set up on the floor across the room from the bar and just play jazz. That's the only time that I got to do it. I learned a lot from that. We finally had to quit doin' it. I want to do more of my own stuff. I want to record again. I want to do this jazz thing for fun. I want to check out this Chill Factor thing.

**BLUES CLUBS**

GN-Before we go any further I want to bring something in about Clifford Antone and his effect on the Austin Blues scene.

DF-There is no question that he has played a major role. He wasn't the only one. We moved here the same summer that the Armadillo opened up. When we had this band with Jimmie (Vaughan) we were trying to play real blues. It wasn't polished, it was real blues. About the only gigs that we could get were at the Armadillo or the East Side.

GN-What were the clubs on the East Side then?

DF-At the time that we were playing over there the main one was the I-L Club. Later on there was a place called the Joker's Lounge, La Cucaracha which had been Charley's Playhouse.

GN-Is there still an East Side blues scene in Austin?

DF-I won't say that there is not. It's been thirteen years since I've played over there. Which doesn't mean that there isn't anything over there. In the early seventies Jimmie came to town and said, "I'm gonna play the blues", and nobody else really cared about it or was as serious about it as him.

GN-Old style Chicago and Detroit style blues?

DF-Right. Before I got here there was an East Side blues scene at Charley's Playhouse and Ernie's Chickenshack. By the time I got here it had pretty much fizzleed out. Before I'd moved here I'd played the Vulcan Gas Co. a couple of times. At the Vulcan you'd have all of these long haired hippies and they'd have everybody; from the hippie psychedelic bands to Mance Lipscomb, Muddy Waters, and Lightning Hopkins. So there's always been somebody in Austin, that even if it was a hippie club, they'd have blues. At the Armadillo one night they might have Captain Beefheart and the next night they'd have Freddie King. A lot of people had something to do with it. But Jimmie Vaughan has got to take a lot of credit for a blues awareness here. He was very determined to play blues. Stevie (Ray Vaughan) was playin' rock n' roll when he first got here, then he got into playin' more blues.

GN-Was that at the After Hours?

DF-Yeah. But before Soap Creek, Alex Napier used to lease that place and it was called Rolling Hills. Stevie was playin' out there with a band called Blackbird. The Storm and Southern Feelin' would play there. It was a real small little blues cult that was very determined to play blues. The credit can go around, but Clifford, with his nightclub that is totally devoted to the blues, has a major role in the blues awareness that is here.

**CLOSING COMMENTS**

DF-When a lot of us first came to town we were a little disillusioned with what was happening to rock n' roll at the time. I got caught up with the San Francisco music and the music of the late sixties. I loved Hendrix. I saw him a couple of times in Dallas. I saw Cream. When Cream broke up and Hendrix died, the kind of stuff that came after that, we lost interest in the new stuff so we rebelled and turned into blues

purists for a while as a reaction to a bunch of the stuff that we really didn't like. Nearly everything I have done has been some sort of variation of R&B. Whether it was low down blues with Jimmie or the Cobras and Southern Feelin' stretched a little bit more into soul music. Nearly all of us have gone through our blues purist stage. I don't think that one of us would mind writing a hit song. To be commercial isn't anything that any of us have a problem with anymore.

GN-Any closing comments?

DF-Only to say thanks for your interest.

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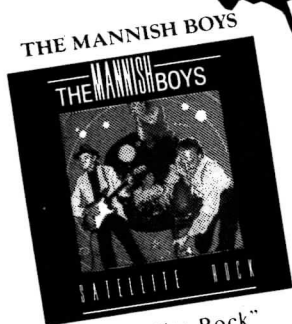
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