

Grant Street, just one block east of Montrose Boulevard, is a discontinuous little road that acts as a sort of buffer between the boulevard and the narrow residential blocks to the east.

Its three separate segments include doglegs, oblique intersections, and many full stops created by a north-south freight railroad line that once ran through Montrose. In its middle section, a single square block just south of Texas Art Supply, for more than 40 years the revered acoustic and folk music venue Anderson Fair has let its freak flag fly.

Anderson Fair was founded as a restaurant in 1969 by partners Marvin Anderson and Gray Fair. Their friend Pat Stout cooked simple dishes, a limited menu of one or two offerings per day, soft tacos or spaghetti dinners for example. Very quickly, a community of hippies, artists, writers, activists, queers, and weirdos claimed the place as their own. The putative business was really more of a community hangout, playing host to progressive and countercultural ideas percolating within the Montrose neighborhood. McGovern leftists, opposing the war in Vietnam and exploring the possibilities of electoral politics in Houston, considered Anderson Fair their home base.

Some participants remember the early days of Anderson Fair as a family or a village, often insular but always generous. This community has been essential to the survival and relevance of Anderson Fair. To this day, the Fair is staffed and operated by volunteers.

Within a few years of its founding, the focus of the enterprise had changed to live music. Until then, poets and singers would simply stand in a corner of the tiny dining room to sing or read for tips. Volunteers tore down the back wall, expanded the brick floor, and built a stage, using recovered timbers, glass, and fixtures. The improvisational structure stands today as a testament to amateur enthusiasm and DIY ingenuity.

The documentary **For The Sake Of The Song: The Story of Anderson Fair** by Jim Barham and



The "Mayor of Montrose" was designated at the annual street festival.



Lyle Lovett honed his craft at Anderson Fair before achieving fame.

Artists, Activists, and Weirdos

The by Hank Hancock

Anderson Fairy Tale

Bruce Bryant, which made its debut in March at SXSW in Austin and first played in Houston at Worldfest on April 10, collects some of these memories through interviews with key participants, and then goes on to offer a long, loving tribute to the music venue and the astonishing talent that passed through its doors.

No one ever made any money off of Anderson Fair, musicians included. Paying the rent throughout the 1970s and '80s was a struggle. After the original owners departed, a changing roster of investors would buy in for just \$250, or they passed shares along as gifts to friends. They staged annual block parties, closing off their isolated block of Grant Street, offering live music, hosting vendors of crafts and

underground news and comics, and raising enough money that way to make rent and repairs. From time to time, music-loving benefactors would step in.

While Anderson Fair was an indispensable part of the Montrose community throughout its heyday in the 1970s, it has made its name as a premier venue in Texas and across the country for singer-songwriters. Once the folk revival of the 1960s had faded, Anderson Fair continued to feature stalwarts like Townes Van Zandt and Dave Van Ronk, and then went on to foster the talents of later generations of songsters, including Lyle Lovett and Nanci Griffith. The documentary film includes profiles of 30 artists in all, including newer artists just starting their careers.

Eventually, Tim Leatherwood took charge of Anderson Fair, "by attrition" as he puts it. He laid down standards that artists play original music, that they play acoustically, and that they bring new songs when they return. The small audiences are known to be so highly discriminating that even commercially successful recording artists can't help but get the jitters before stepping onto the modest platform. In 40 years, the community, the neighborhood, and the city have undergone dramatic changes, but Anderson Fair is still—admirably, impossibly—open for business. 🚐



Anderson Fair was founded as a restaurant in 1969.