



# PAUL SCHLESINGER

## A LIFE ON THE FIDDLE

*"I can take this thing over to Perk Williams' house and I can get him to show me how he plays Release Me. If he could teach me how to play Release Me I'd consider my life complete."*

Duncan Warwick meets the purveyor of Western Swing.

A fair amount of Western Swing comes my way, but Paul Schlesinger really impressed with his *Paul Schlesinger And His Knights Of Texas Swing* album this year.

Hailing from just East of Round Rock, Texas, Taylor to be more precise, Schlesinger is a true student of the genre. He lives and breathes Western Swing and his album was chock-a-block full of local swing legends, and is as much a tribute to local musicians, even the more obscure musicians who might not be known outside of their immediate local area except by avid Western Swing aficionados. Names like Jimmy Heap and Cecil Harris aren't uttered quite as often as that of Bob Wills but the impact they have had on Schlesinger's music is immense.

Jimmy Heap is a legend down Taylor, TX. way, and one of Paul's main inspirations, but it wasn't just the geography that led Schlesinger down the Western Swing path. "It's more complicated than that," says the fiddle maestro, explaining his musical interests.

"My parents were married in 1960

and it wasn't until 1970 that I came along, and so I had the benefit of having parents that were a little bit older than I guess what you would say would be normal. And they had a pretty good record collection and, to make a long story short, I always enjoyed listening to older music. My mother's records, which she did have a lot of original 45s of Elvis and Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley and Buddy Holly and folks like that, and as they got older they kind of got more into the country music and there was a lot of the 60s and 70s country music in their record collection. That's what I grew up with, thinking it was important. I also had an affinity for The Sons Of The Pioneers and I always seemed to be drawn to musical groups that had a lot of good harmonies, I always enjoyed the vocal harmonies. And I became an avid record collector. Primarily because I had a 78 of the guy on a 78 record label from Louisiana called Meladee Records, a fellow by the name of Gene Rodrigue And The Bayou Boys. The house that we lived in was an older house and my folks didn't have enough money to pay for air conditioning all the time and

so it got insufferably hot inside the house and one day I picked up that 78 and it melted in my hand — I was heartbroken. So using that I guess as I got older I made it a point to try to find that record, and I began collecting records and I mainly started collecting The Sons Of The Pioneers records and at that time I was getting older in my late teenage years and that's kind of when The Bear Family started putting out a lot of their products. By that time I had enrolled in the College of Communications at the University of Texas at Austin where I went to college and I graduated as a journalist and I had already started taking pictures of Western Swing musicians and making them the subjects of a lot of my essays."

It was, it transpires, a Bear Family release that is more responsible than anything for Schlesinger's thirst for knowledge of the local Western Swing history. "There is a Bear Family distributor here in Austin and his name is Jürgen Koop and he and I have become friends and he was involved in getting me lots of Bear Family products and stuff, and one day he says, 'Hey Paul, we're going





Far left: Schlesinger and his trick fiddle.

Top centre: Paul Schlesinger and Perk Williams.

Above: Schlesinger (far right) with Glen Collins and the Alibis, an "Old School" honky tonk / dance hall band with whom he regularly plays.

Left: Schlesinger playing a blue Barcus Berry fiddle that Perk Williams used back in the early to mid 1970s. It still contains rattles from a rattle snake that Perk stuck in the body all those years ago. He claimed that when you hit a certain frequency that the rattles would indeed rattle. Paul says, "I've yet to hit that right frequency! Frankly, I think he was telling a tall tale."

to be doing a CD of some of your hometown musicians—Jimmy Heap and the Melody Masters. I had heard of Jimmy Heap and I had never really heard his music. I was working when I was in high school and in my early college days I was working at a grocery store and Jimmy Heap's widow was also working part-time at the same grocery store—she was friends with the people that owned the store.

"Then Mr Koop brought up this Bear Family CD and he goes, 'Hey, we've got some here would you mind taking a copy to Mrs Heap?' And I just said, 'Yes, and I would like to buy one for myself because I had never heard Jimmy Heap's classic pieces.' Then for the first time I heard the original recording of *Release Me* and I read the liner notes and I just was totally fascinated that there was this band that in the 1950s had their own radio program, had been on television, had a Top 5 Billboard hit and all these guys were from my hometown.

"I said to Mrs Heap, 'I'd like to hear more. I'd like to learn more about this.' And she graciously invited me to her house and she pulled out all of her scrap books, everything that she still had, and it was just like I had found the next chapter of my life. I became so engrossed with learning everything I could about Jimmy Heap. At that time Jimmy was the only one of the original Melody Masters that was dead, all of the other guys were still alive, and she gave me the addresses that she still had on file for all of those band members. I went and started visiting all those people.

"That part was an introduction of me getting to play, the idea of becoming a performer. I'd already kind of got into Western Swing because life sometimes takes all kinds of crazy directions. I was already collecting The Sons Of The Pioneers records and I was trying to find Jimmy Heap records and I'd made some connections in the record collecting world. Two friends of mine were antique record dealers but they were also phenomenal Western Swing aficionados, and they knew the original Texas Playboys and they would go to all the Western Swing festivals and when I had met them, while looking for records, they had welcomed me into their house and showed me all their Bob Wills and

Texas Playboy records, their Western Swing collection - belt buckles to posters to books - and they found out that I was a photographer and started bringing me to all those Western Swing shows and get me to take pictures of Leon Rausch and Tommy Allsup and Tom Morrell—whoever was at the biggest Western Swing festival. As a result I started also collecting Western Swing records. But looking at the record aspect, I had no concept that I would become a Western Swing musician; I was on my way to become a photojournalist; I was taking pictures; I was documenting all of these people. That's what I wanted to do, I wanted to write stories. That's what my goal was."

It is possibly not surprising that Schlesinger cut some of his *Knights Of Texas Swing* album at Ray Benson's Bismieux Studio, but the album has effectively been 23 years in the making, with the seeds having been sown all those years ago with the fortuitous meetings with his local musicians. There are many positive things one might say of Paul Schlesinger, but 'a man of few words' is certainly not one of them, but he concisely agrees, "yeah, I think you could say that," before expanding further on his musical training.

"I did what a lot of kids my age did: when I was about 8 years old my mother sent me to get piano lessons. We had a piano in the house, an old standup piano and I had piano lessons for several years until I was in the fifth or sixth grade. I really had no concept that the piano could be used to play popular music.

"In the sixth grade I signed up for the junior high band and I played the trumpet for a year. After that they moved me over to the baritone. All throughout my high school years I played the baritone and later they bought me a better horn."

Of course, the instrument of choice for Paul these days is the fiddle, and as well as being skillfully adept he likes to show off. "I actually do fiddle tricks, where I play behind my back, on the floor, behind my head and all kinds of stuff," says Schlesinger with a sense of fun and not a trace of boastfulness.

"My mother bought a three quarter size fiddle off somebody at a dance place that she and my dad went to and they gave it to me for Christmas. The reason why she bought this fiddle is because she thought it would be kind of neat because she knew that I had met Perk Williams and that I was interested in Perk Williams' music. So she gave that fiddle to me in what I guess would have been the Christmas of '92 and I had never held or picked up a fiddle before. I didn't know anything about it and I'd never played one or had any desire to play one. But as I looked at that fiddle I just said, 'Y'know, I have a wonderful opportunity here. I can take this thing over to Perk Williams' house and I can get him to show me how he plays *Release Me*.' I said, 'If he could teach me how to play *Release Me* I'd consider my life complete.' And so the next time I went over there I took that little three quarter size fiddle to Perk and I said, 'Guess what I got for Christmas? Can you show me how to play *Release Me* on there?' And he said, 'On that record I didn't play the whole song.' And I said, 'Well, yeah, but you probably know how to play the whole song.' 'Yeah, but before I teach you that I gotta teach you something else.' And so he sat down and in one afternoon he taught me how to play *Faded Love*. Granted, I had no idea how to hold a fiddle, I

had no idea how to note one, and he painstakingly taught me how to do all of that on *Faded Love*. The next few months he taught me about six songs, including *Release Me*."

In addition to a bunch of Cecil Harris tunes and lesser-known gems, Schlesinger has included *Hang Your Head In Shame* (Bob Wills, Carl Smith, and Justin Tubbs amongst others) and a wonderful take on Marty Robbins' *Pretty Words*, but he is probably most pleased with *Say Y Me Tib*, which is effectively a new old song, that had previously only ever been performed live.

"The Heap family welcomed me in. Mrs Heap welcomed me in and she has two sons, she has Jimmy Jr who was the one that went to Nashville and she had another son, David, who did not pursue music - he actually taught me swimming lessons when I was a little boy. In the 2000s we did several tribute shows to Jimmy Heap and at one point Jimmy Jr talked about allowing me...He still had all the master tapes that they had from their Fame years after they got off Capitol, they did their own record label for a while, and he asked if I could transfer those to CD. So I borrowed this nice, studio model, reel-to-reel machine and all these reel-to-reel tapes they were the masters of a lot of those songs but there were also miles of several live shows that they did in the early 70s. And on there was *Say Y Me Tib*. I heard *Say Y Me Tib* and I started learning a little bit more about it and I went and spoke to Cecil and he said, 'Yeah, I wrote that song.' I said, 'I think that would be a killer song,' because I'd already started playing it live and we sat down one day and we revised the lyrics to it."

Paul Schlesinger is a self-confessed 'melody guy' and even includes a wonderful caution for listeners of his album. 'Warning: The music in this CD contains fiddles and guitars playing actual song melodies. Many of these melodic lines are performed in harmony with multiple instruments.

The bass guitar and kick drum do not vibrate the neighbour's windows. Listeners of today's popular music may experience a total conversion against the noise heard on the

nation's commercial outlets.'

"Much of today's music, even what people are trying to pass off as country music, in my opinion a lot of it is just over reliant on heavy drums and lead bass playing and fuzz guitar," says Schlesinger. "Even the melodic lines of the vocals aren't something that as you walk down the street you can go [sings] 'I'm walking the floor over you.' They don't have anything like that anymore. There are one or two out there that come up with a melody, but I would say as a whole the melodic lines—whether it's vocal or whether it's instrumental—are definitely missing."

So, is Paul Schlesinger on a mission to keep Western Swing alive, spread the word, teach people some of the history, or just improve the public perception of America's only real original music form?

"I don't think it's in danger of dying, not right away, but of course you have much better promoters of Western Swing than I—you have Ray Benson and Asleep At The Wheel and you have fiddle-player Jason Roberts. So I think you do have leaders of Western Swing that are out there that have a better chance of...but I don't know if I would say my goal is to keep the entire genre of Western Swing alive. I would say it's more of keeping the memory of these not as well known musicians alive, making people aware of their contributions and what they did. I'm just trying to make more people, even in Western Swing, aware of these musicians and these songs, and perhaps giving them their long overdue recognition."

Paul Schlesinger's own particular brand of Western Swing is an absolute treat for the ears.

Paul Schlesinger And His *Knights Of Texas Swing* is available now.

CMP



# Compilation 1

## What's on the free CD:

Great new music from Austin to Nashville and beyond...Country, Bluegrass, Honky Tonk, Western Swing and Americana including previously unreleased tracks from Dale Watson and Mac McAnally.

Please note: The cover CD is supplied to subscribers and with UK retail purchases. CDs are available to overseas customers for the cost of postage. Contact us at: [countrymusicpeople@gmail.com](mailto:countrymusicpeople@gmail.com) for details.



### 7. My Golden Nugget - Joel Hofmann Band

Being a lifetime County-Roots-Rockabilly fan and musician, Joel began playing publicly in 2002. The band has had several incarnations of great musicians over the years, but the group they have now is by far the tightest. They can do anything from strict traditional country two steppers and waltzes, to blues and rock and roll. Joel currently has two albums out. One is a studio album with a mix of originals and covers featuring some really great names in music. Redd Volkaert and Earl Poole Ball set in on a few songs as well as steel guitar genius James Shelton. The latest record was done this year at Triple Crown in San Marcos Texas by Ace Pepper.

[www.joelhofmannband.com](http://www.joelhofmannband.com)



### 1. The Way Country Sounds - Jeremy Pinnell

Jeremy Pinnell grew up in Northern Kentucky just south of the Ohio River, where the towns are equal parts Southern hospitality, Northern attitude, and Midwestern charm. His voice made him a hometown hero but his demons kept him a secret to the world. *OH/KY* tells the story of the next 18 years of Jeremy's life, and it's a damn good story. It has all the things people love to read about. And most of all, it's a true story that's been recorded in the most honest way possible. The 55s, a honky tonk band out of The Queen City who lay the foundation so Jeremy's voice can shine and his story can come to life.

[www.jeremypinnell.com](http://www.jeremypinnell.com)



### 8. Rounder (Explicit) - Pine Street Ramblers

Hailing from the Sierra Nevada foothills, Pine Street Ramblers are a four piece string band performing bluegrass, country, old-time and good old-fashion roots rock. Their high energy sound is a refreshing take on the typical modern string-band; their live show is a raucous powerhouse that deftly showcases their songwriting prowess in the context of foot stompin' good times and remarkable collective instrumental chops.

[pinestretramblers.bandzoogle.com](http://pinestretramblers.bandzoogle.com)



### 2. Whiskey Bottle - Scott Southworth

Originally hailing from the great Pacific Northwest, Scott is an award winning Nashville based performing singer-songwriter and the creator/co-host of Radio/TV's "The Music Row Show", heard in 38 states and seen nationwide on the BlueHighways TV network. Scott is proud to be an endorsed Larrivee Guitar artist. He performs regularly in Nashville at the Bluebird Cafe, Douglas Corner and the Commodore Grille as well as house concerts and many songwriting festivals around the country and overseas. Scott has written and co-written more than 60 Indy cuts with artists such as: Marc Alan Barnette, Emma Jacobs, Stephanie Layne, Jenny Casey, Jamie Nattier, Bob Karwin, Becky Blackaby, Tom Templeman, Heino Moeller, The Ranch Rockers and Canadian Artist Damian Follet.

[www.scottsouthworth.com](http://www.scottsouthworth.com)



### 9. Last Call Love - Silo Road

Silo Road is a 4-piece Americana & Roots ("Ameripolitan") band headquartered out of Austin, Texas. Formed in late 2012, Silo Road evolved from an acoustic Roots act paying homage to classic Texas artists into the powerful live band they are today. Their emphasis on well-crafted storylines, tight harmonies, and dynamic song elements, executed with precise musicianship, has helped them develop a unique sound: Americana forged and hardened in the musical hearth of the great Republic of Texas. Since 2012, Silo Road has made its mark as a band with the kind of sound found only in Texas. Described alternatively as "Ameripolitan", "Americana" or "Roots", their honest, original storytelling gets attention wherever they go.

[www.siloroadband.com](http://www.siloroadband.com)



### 3. These Hills - Irene Kelley

Irene Kelley's signature mix of Bluegrass, Country and Americana appeals to music lovers across all genres. A native of Latrobe, PA, Kelley discovered her flair for songwriting as a teenager and soon found her way to Nashville, TN, where her songs were quickly noticed and recorded by Carl Jackson, Ricky Skaggs and Sharon White. While recording an album for MCA, independently releasing two more records and touring worldwide, Kelley raised two daughters and scored cuts with Alan Jackson, Trisha Yearwood, Loretta Lynn, Pat Green, Brother Phelps, Rhonda Vincent, Claire Lynch, Darrell Scott, The Whites, the Osborne Brothers and others. But it's not just her songwriting that has drawn much deserved attention her way. Kelley's pure and lonesome vocal prowess has endeared her to a score of music lovers for years, making her one of traditional music's most beloved musical story-tellers.

[www.irenekelley.com](http://www.irenekelley.com)



### 10. I Want My Honky Tonk Back - The Heresies

100% original Colorado honky tonk music. That's what the Heresies make. "100% original" here means two things. First - you won't catch them playing anybody else's music. All of the songs are written by the leader and frontman, Kris Harris. Second - although their music has a direct, easily traceable lineage to pure country and honky tonk of the past, there is no other band quite like the Heresies. In all things musical and otherwise, Kris sees the beauty, meaning, and functionality in the discarded bits and pieces that others have deemed ugly, meaningless, and useless. Then he glues, screws, and weaves them together along with universally appreciated items into aesthetically pleasing objects of intrigue and unique functionality.

[theheresies.band/index.html](http://theheresies.band/index.html)



### 4. Devil's Riding Shotgun - Andrea Colburn

Andrea Colburn is a fresh new face on the Outlaw Country/Folk Noir scene. Don't let her sweet smile and demeanor fool you. Her songs pack a punch like a pistol with an honest lyrical style that cuts through the bullshit like a switchblade. Colburn is out for blood. Colburn was born and raised in NW Ohio. After a difficult move to St. Louis, MO at 13, Andrea turned to music and poetry. Highly inspired by Bobbie Gentry, Andrea wanted to learn to play guitar, so her mother bought her one as a gift at 14 years old. After life led her to Georgia in 2012, and she met all the right people, she started writing songs influenced by traditional country artists like Waylon, Willie, and Hank Sr. as well as new alt-country acts such as Shovels & Rope.

[www.andreacolburn.com](http://www.andreacolburn.com)



### 11. Come Back To Me - NewTown

Based in Lexington, Kentucky, and fronted by award-winning vocalist/fiddler Kati Penn Williams and her singer/banjo-picker husband, Jr. Williams, NewTown is one of the most exciting acts in contemporary Bluegrass. The band's newest album, HARLAN ROAD, once again finds Kati and Jr. turning in outstanding vocal performances, with exceptional instrumental backing by the entire band. The project was produced by Grammy-winner Barry Bales, longtime bass player for Alison Krauss and Union Station. "Our manager knew Barry and put us in touch with him, and he was great to work with," Kati says. "We had a group of songs we were considering for this album that we thought might be good for us, and Barry helped decide which ones would work best. When we got to the point that we had 11 songs we liked, we were ready to go."

[www.thenewtownband.com](http://www.thenewtownband.com)



### 5. Say Y Me Tib - Paul Schlesinger

Paul is a fiddle player and vocalist from Taylor TX, where he grew up. His style of music is a blending of Texas swing and honky tonk, moulded by the unique playing styles of the professional post-war musicians who grew out of Central Texas. Paul studied piano as a child and later played the euphonium in the Taylor high school band. He has always enjoyed "older" music, thanks to his parents' record collection. Paul's high school contemporaries listened to the latest heavy metal or George Strait music; whilst he listened to the Sons of the Pioneers. While earning his photojournalism degree at the University of Texas at Austin in the early 1990s, he became immersed in the world of traditional western swing and Texas honky-tonk music, a source of his photo documentary projects.

[www.paulschlesinger.com](http://www.paulschlesinger.com)



### 12. Alive And In Between - Mac McAnally

A prolific Nashville singer-songwriter who authored hits for Jimmy Buffett, Alabama, and Steve Wariner, Mac McAnally is a six-time CMA Musician of the Year born in Red Bay, AL. Singing in church throughout childhood, at age eight he began taking piano lessons and within five years was performing professionally; McAnally later took up guitar and at 15 composed his first song, *People Call Me Jesus*. After quitting high school he went to work as a session player at Muscle Shoals' Wishbone Studios; one night, during a break in a Hank Williams Jr. date, McAnally began playing some of his own original material, so impressing producers Terry Woodford and Clayton Ivey that they convinced Williams to record the tune *I Need You Tonight*. Signing to Ariola, in 1977 McAnally issued his self-titled debut album, scoring a crossover hit with the single *It's A Crazy World* and is still writing hits today.

[www.macmcannally.com](http://www.macmcannally.com)



### 6. Two Ships - Warren H. Williams & Dani Young

Warren H Williams, an Aboriginal singer, musician and songwriter from Hermannsburg in Central Australia, has teamed up with emerging singer and fellow Aussie Dani Young to make an album of traditional duets in Nashville. Their album *Desert Water* is sure to quench your thirst for traditional country with catchy songs and a production that could have come from any time in the last twenty years.

Album available on iTunes and Amazon



### 13. The Bottle Never Let Me Down- Dale Watson

Dale Watson, keeper of the true country music flame, is a veteran touring artist and consummate entertainer - he is on the road more than 300 days a year. He also put his money where his heart is and took over ownership of two struggling Texas honky-tonks, the Little Longhorn Saloon in Austin (home of Chicken \$#!+ Bingo) and The Big T Roadhouse in St. Hedwigs (outside San Antonio). If not on the road, he and His Lone Stars perform at one of them each Sunday. *The Bottle Never Let Me Down* has been a live favourite for some time, is an homage to Merle Haggard, and is unavailable anywhere else.

[www.dalewatson.com](http://www.dalewatson.com)

C M P *i l a t i o n*

## 1

**1. The Way Country Sounds - Jeremy Pinnell 3:56**

(Jeremy David Pinnell) © Licenced to SofaBurn Records

From the album: OH/KY

**2. Whiskey Bottle - Scott Southworth 3:21**

(Scott Southworth) © 2016 Scott Likes Pie Music SESAC

From the album: The Last Honky Tonk In Town

**3. These Hills - Irene Kelley 3:35**

(Irene Kelley & Jon Weisberger) © Mountain Fever Records 2016

From the album: These Hills

**4. Devil's Riding Shotgun - Andrea Colburn 4:24**

(Andrea Colburn) © Andrea Colburn

From the album: Sad Songs And Switchblades

**5. Say Y Me Tib - Paul Schlesinger 2:19**

(Cecil Harris & Paul Schlesinger) © Paul Schelsinger

From the album: Paul Schelsinger & His Knights Of Texas Swing

**6. Two Ships - Warren H. Williams & Dani Young 3:35**

(Warren H. Williams & Dani Young) © ABC Music

From the album: Desert Water

**7. My Golden Nugget - Joel Hofmann Band 3:56**

(Joel Hofmann) © ASCAP Railroad Creek Music

From the album: Shop Sessions

**8. Rounder (Explicit) - Pine Street Ramblers 3:04**

(Jason Gardemeyer) © Jason Gardemeyer & Pine Street Ramblers

From the album: Hazy Shade Of Gold

**9. Last Call Love - Silo Road 4:14**

(Billy Broome) © Billy Broome

From the album: Last Call Love

**10. I Want My Honky Tonk Back - The Heresies 4:07**

(Kris Harris) © Kris Harris ASCAP

From the album: I Want My Honky Tonk Back

**11. Come Back To Me - Newtown 3:11**

(Jon Weisberger & Jeremy Garrett) © Mountain Home Records

From the album: Harlan Road

**12. Alive And In Between - Mac McAnally 4:24**

(previously unreleased)

(Mac McAnally) © Mac Cracker Music BMI

**13. The Bottle Never Let Me Down- Dale Watson 2:30**

(previously unreleased)

(Dale Watson) © Dale Watson

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Country Music People is published monthly.

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c m p *i l a t i o n*

featuring:

JEREMY PINNELL | SCOTT SOUTHWORTH | IRENE KELLEY | ANDREA COLBURN  
PAUL SCHLESINGER | WARREN H. WILLIAMS & DANI YOUNG | JOEL HOFMANN BAND  
PINE STREET RAMBLERS | SILO ROAD | THE HERESIES | NEWTOWN

plus previously unreleased tracks by:  
MAC MCANALLY | DALE WATSON

## 1



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