

**TRANSCRIPT:**

**INTERVIEWEE:** Bill Oliver

**INTERVIEWER:** David Todd

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**David Todd** [00:00:01] Very good. All right. Well, good afternoon, David Todd here. And I have the great privilege of being on the line with Bill Oliver. And with his permission, we plan on recording this interview for research and educational work on behalf of the Conservation History Association of Texas and for a book and a web site for Texas A&M University Press, and for an archive at the Briscoe Center for American History, which is over at the University of Texas at Austin.

**David Todd** [00:00:34] And I really want to stress that he would have all rights to use the recording as he sees fit, too.

**David Todd** [00:00:41] And I wanted to just confirm before we go any further, that that's a good arrangement for you, if that's, that's okay with you.

**Bill Oliver** [00:00:50] That's wonderful. That's okay with me.

**David Todd** [00:00:52] Great.

**Bill Oliver** [00:00:53] Gig 'em, Aggies. Raised by Aggies.

**David Todd** [00:00:58] Okay. All right, well, let's gig 'em. Let's get started.

**David Todd** [00:01:04] It is Monday, July 11th, 2022. It's about 3:10 on a Monday afternoon, Central Time. My name is David Todd, as I said. I'm representing the Conservation History Association of Texas and I am in Austin. And we are very lucky and fortunate to be conducting a interview with Bill Oliver. This is a remote interview, but I understand that he is also in the Austin area.

**Bill Oliver** [00:01:36] Remote!

**David Todd** [00:01:38] At a secure, undisclosed location.

**Bill Oliver** [00:01:42] I am in a gated community at the end of a dead end cul-de-sac, and by the wrong, the right side of the tracks. It depends.

**David Todd** [00:01:49] Well, wherever you are, is the right side in my book.

**David Todd** [00:01:53] It's remote.

**David Todd** [00:01:55] Okay. Well, Mr. Oliver is also widely known and fondly known as Mr. Habitat, and he is a singer, a songwriter and a teacher. Since the 1970s, he and his band, "Bill

Oliver and the Otter Space Band", have played for audiences across the country, entertaining them, but also educating them about conservation.

**David Todd** [00:02:21] And we were actually able to visit with Mr. Oliver 20 years ago, in April of 2002. So we feel doubly lucky to be back sitting with him again. And the goal today is to get an update about his life and career and to give people a taste, an introduction to how he does what he does.

**David Todd** [00:02:53] And we thought that it might be helpful to try to dissect some of his songs, a number of which deal directly with animals that have been a subject for this project, the Texas Fauna Project. One is called, "Pine Away, Pine Bark Beetle". Another is called, "Turtle Island", another, "Rio Grande Valley". A fourth is "Queen Invicta". And the last that we thought we might talk about is "Welcome back, Black-capped Vireo".

**David Todd** [00:03:31] And I think it'd be really interesting to find out, you know, how you go about creating and producing and performing these songs. And then what sort of reactions you get and why you've been taken to do this?

**David Todd** [00:03:53] And so I thought maybe we could just start with what's that the general idea behind "Pine Away, Pine Bark Beetle", and what instigated it? What spurred you to write it?

**Bill Oliver** [00:04:08] Well, there's munching in the song. Munching, munch, munch, munch. There was a munch track that was a, that was a highlight of that recording session.

**Bill Oliver** [00:04:20] The pine bark beetle issue was part of the east Texas wilderness campaign, led by Ned Fritz of Dallas, Texas Committee on Natural Resources and the, preserving the wilderness, the literally kind of small, relatively small wilderness islands in the east Texas wilderness was the goal of this campaign to protect to get those protected, and get more, get more wilderness out of the much larger national forest, which is multi-use, which mostly means clear cutting at the time.

**Bill Oliver** [00:05:00] And so, the pine bark beetle was an infestation that came through and devastated a lot of trees. And the devastation is, is, perhaps, it killed them, killed them. However, it was more complicated, naturally and politically and actually, in that, it was the way they were taking the pine bark beetle out of the wilderness area was making it worse and was not letting nature take its own course.

**Bill Oliver** [00:05:42] I am not a professional biologist, but I play one on TV. No, I play one on guitar and I was hanging out more, I hung out in the late '80s and '80s, into the '90s with biologists, more than, as much as I did, songwriters and musicians. My girlfriend was on the biology department at ACC and I was taking courses there and writing songs in the margins. And this was a mid to late '80s issue, as all of these songs are - funny. And, but I was getting my resources from these folks working on the issue that it was, the pine bark beetle was, yeah, it was tough on trees but it was actually thinning the weaker trees, in the tree, and making the forest stronger, thinning it out and the stronger trees were evolving or surviving. Or, the ones that survived evolved. So, that was the science and I just started making little expressions about it all and sort of put them together and started seeing which rhymed and which felt good to play.

**Bill Oliver** [00:06:59] It's a very simple melody, as all of mine are, and the arrangement is very simple. I was lucky to work with very talented artists on most of these songs - Bob Livingston, Paul Pierce, John Inman, Lost Gonzo - Gonzos, the last incarnation of the Lost Gonzos - worked together with them in studio for 15, 20 years, even more.

**Bill Oliver** [00:07:23] And so these are simple songs that these guys could learn fast and they'd bring the arrangement pretty much, the arrangements are very straightforward folk singer / songwriter like Western, you know, "Doo doo dah". And they just made a tight little arrangement and played it. And we added the "munch" at the end.

**David Todd** [00:07:44] And how did you make the "munch"?

**Bill Oliver** [00:07:49] "Smack, smack, smack." That was it. I don't know how that's going to translate in a transcript. It was just, you know, a short, short munch, actually.

**David Todd** [00:08:03] Very nice.

**Bill Oliver** [00:08:04] But the thing is that they'd cut down, they would cut these trees down as a ruse. Forest Service was actually going along with it. And they would take the trees and sell them and they would haul them down the logging road, spreading the beetles. They made a mess of it. Instead of letting him just die in place, they spread it around and plus there was, there was money exchanged - that it was, in the salvaging, salvaging in these areas and lots of damage to get in and take them down.

**Bill Oliver** [00:08:42] So, these, these wilderness areas weren't that big, David. Maybe, you know, I'm talking, what, 20,000 acres out of a surrounding 100,000 acres, chunk of national forest, of which there was 500,000 acres in East Texas? And we got a very small amount of the, relatively, of wilderness protection. And this was an excuse to harvest more of it. Condemn it, that's what we thought felt. That's what we felt.

**David Todd** [00:09:14] Do you recall anything about the groups that you worked with or the biologists that, that helped you?

**Bill Oliver** [00:09:20] Well, well, Texas Committee on National Resources out of Dallas, that is, lots of groups around, lots of those folks, members and then scattered around East Texas that were out of Lufkin and Nacogdoches. What are some other towns over there that we remember?

**Bill Oliver** [00:09:44] So, and many of these folks were not officially scientists, but they were smart and informed and concerned. The Sierra Club, Audubon Society. Of course. Yeah. And they would all, you know, there was, it was quite a bit of networking. So it was a, it was a novelty hook, the Pine Away, Pine Bark Beetle, turn the wilderness over to nature.

**Bill Oliver** [00:10:19] Now it's you know, we could talk, we could move on to some other songs, I guess, but you go to beautiful places - Colorado, Arizona and other forests and see the beetles are at work out there. They, it's scary, it's nuts, I wouldn't want to, it's not my first song to call out at the campfire, but at the time it would address that issue in East Texas.

**David Todd** [00:10:45] This is sort of an aside, but one of the things I've always been intrigued by your songs, the lyrics and some of the sound effects, is that you try to take these subjects, which are pretty dire and dismal and, and you try to inject a little bit of humor and a

little bit of uplift. And can you comment about that? I mean, why you don't go with the more heavy-handed approach?

**David Todd** [00:11:18] Well, I don't want to be argumentative, but actually I do have a bunch of dirges - minor keys. And I just don't get played very much. Why? Why? Because it's, it's my nature. I'm just, it's second nature to be more of, you know, a wise guy joking around. First, my first band that I, actually, well my first high school band was called, "The Court Jesters' Music for Just Any Old Occasion". Class clown kind of a personality, you know. Need I say more? That's it.

**David Todd** [00:12:05] It sounds like it, you came by that naturally. That's, that's great.

**Bill Oliver** [00:12:10] Besides, you find out what works and, and stick with it. You know, it stays and you notice. I was never encouraged to be an entertainer and much less a musician. I mean, I just was kind of a folk set of chords, handful of chords. But as an entertainer that never, that didn't come around until the last day of high school. Some coach I thought was really didn't like me, "Aww, you're all right. You know, you're going to be an entertainer someday. You could be an entertainer."

**Bill Oliver** [00:12:46] What? Why didn't you ever say that before? That would have been encouraging. I hadn't thought of it, and I actually didn't think of it that way for a while, but it just crept up and stayed there and just started being out front with the style, my style's to be more jovial and up-tempo, when it works. In an irony, of course, I fell off the fence politically and that really hurt, as far as being liked and being, taking things lightly, because I do wind up with a lot of more serious songs and, or double entendres that don't work in the bars anymore.

**David Todd** [00:13:39] Yeah.

**Bill Oliver** [00:13:42] By "anymore", I'm talking, mid-'70s. I would, you know, I started having more fun playing container deposit songs and getting commissioned to do recycling songs for the city. And that was more fun, than trying to play those same songs in a bar. I could do it in school. Schools liked it and they paid a lot better and that attentive audience. And so all of that was good. I love kid, kid shows, tapping into that energy.

**David Todd** [00:14:20] Yeah.

**Bill Oliver** [00:14:21] Especially when it's the same song. It works in a, you know, I worked in a family show and a campfire, in a national park.

**David Todd** [00:14:28] Right. So, so more diverse kind of audiences, if maybe you keep things up-tempo and jovial and ironic.

**Bill Oliver** [00:14:41] One ballad, one ballad, per set is about all you can get away with for most shows.

**David Todd** [00:14:46] Okay, that's, that's a very good clue there.

**Bill Oliver** [00:14:51] And the next two songs would be those ballads, Turtle Island and Rio Grande Valley. It was hard to do the both of those in a 45-minute school set, but one of them. Kids like, kids like serious songs.

**David Todd** [00:15:06] That's interesting. They want to be taken seriously, I guess.

**David Todd** [00:15:11] Well, let's talk a little bit about Turtle Island. You know, we've been lucky to interview a number of people about just one kind of sea turtle that we see here in Texas, the Kemp's Ridley sea turtle, but you've written this wonderful song and played it - Turtle Island - which I think is, is more broad-based. From my understanding, it sort of touches on the lives and species of a number of different kinds of sea turtles. Can you talk about where that song came from and where it went?

**Bill Oliver** [00:15:48] Well, I, I hope that song is, you know, outlives me, so to speak. But the, the short, short - there's no short. The introduction I give to this song is, is that all, all species of sea turtles have been endangered, throughout their range, for as long as, pretty much long as I've been singing this song, and officially endangered by U.S. standards. And some maybe are lapsing back into threatened, and I don't want to get too technical here, but there's some good news here and there. And it comes and goes, you know, and I, I but at the time they were all severely threatened, Kemp's especially.

**Bill Oliver** [00:16:37] And Kemp's being a Texas issue, very much so. But they all were, all species of them, were on our beaches. I always, you know, turtles were always, have been attractive to people and it's lot of people's favorite totem. And cultures found their, the markings on their shells to be very accurate as calendars and these are cultures around the world with no contact with each other. So there's some great, great turtle mythology there based on, based on that. And their skeletons show up as calendars.

**Bill Oliver** [00:17:21] But, the turtles are just so great, and throughout history and natural history and stories and mythology. And we have had a couple of shows in Taipei over the years. We went two years over there for the Taipei American School, Glen Waldeck and I, and stayed about a school week, a whole school week, so we can have a concert at the end. The school had several thousand very hard-working kids from elementary to high school. Very hardworking, very sweet, very great kids. Very well taken care of. But they worked hard anyway.

**Bill Oliver** [00:18:06] Anyway, and we stayed with that family, a very active family. One of the first nights in town, we went down to the market, a very, very serious market in Taipei on the waterfront. And they were extremely colorful and, you know, rustic and rough. And, there was a pen of turtles, sea turtles, five or six of them, or more. Most of them very large - greens - all lethargic. Just pitiful. No, hardly any movement at all, crammed in. One Kemp's ridley.

**Bill Oliver** [00:18:39] And we just, Glen and I, were just, we were astounded. And there were crates of other turtles - freshwater turtles. Crates and crates of them. I mean, you know, four feet by four feet, stuffed with turtles. You know, live turtles, and so on, most of them.

**Bill Oliver** [00:18:56] So, it was terrible, to our sensibilities.

**Bill Oliver** [00:19:01] So, we asked around, talked about it a little bit there. And fast forward to the end concert we did, we put our tape sales towards a turtle purchase and we came down to the market after our final concert with the family, fine family, a teenager and his mom in their mini, minivan and a couple of others. And we went down and went to that pen and the Kemp's ridley was gone and there were several greens left and we bought one for our, ah, tape money, which was a little over \$300 U.S. And the thing must have weighed 150 pounds.

**Bill Oliver** [00:19:41] And we bought the turtle and. And took her to the beach. And it was pretty late at night. And it came awake and just took off for the water as soon as it ... well, it didn't really take off, but it became awake and shook off its lethargy and moved out.

**Bill Oliver** [00:20:07] So that was fine. That was, that was really exciting. I'll always remember that.

**Bill Oliver** [00:20:14] Turtles are great indicators of our culture and our, our interests, our concern.

**David Todd** [00:20:27] What a nice story. That's, that's so sweet. I mean, that you went and rescued this creature, set it free.

**Bill Oliver** [00:20:37] There's some, so much disturbing, um, you know, irony. That was a very rugged market down there. It turns out many of the turtles were bought by, for religious purposes, by the, I used to know a little bit more about it. But Feng Shui of some kind. They were bought by religious areas and consumed with some kind of ceremony, but it was brutal on the population.

**Bill Oliver** [00:21:16] I think, yes, that's right, Southern turtles crossing the road. A lot of those, our turtles are exported to Asia because they were running out. This is just ten years ago, something, I don't remember. It's atrocious. Turtle traps. Who wants to trap turtles?

**Bill Oliver** [00:21:37] But there was a market and when we bought this large turtle, we had, our translator very to our teammates friend that we stayed with - very nice guy - he said the guy that's selling it tells us that he can do an engraving on the back of the turtle before we take it to the beach to protect the turtle. I went, "What? Does that mean...?" And it says that the, if it gets caught again, the engraving will make it like unfit for ceremony. It says, "Nope. Used turtle", or something about it, or it's already been claimed by another religion or tradition. And so it's, it's not, it's a safety marker on the turtle. It was large: three characters. We took a picture of it. We have it somewhere. So we got that extra. And it didn't hurt the turtle. It was hard to tell. Didn't hurt the turtle.

**David Todd** [00:22:40] That is fascinating. Well, so tell me about the song that that I guess maybe grew out of some of these experiences with turtles - "Turtle Island".

**Bill Oliver** [00:22:52] Well, that's straight, straight off of the Native American, and other turtle origin stories. And, there's some great, Google that and you'll find turtles all the way down, which is another adaption of that, where there's a turtle on top of a turtle, on top of a turtle. And at some point there's a thin crust of earth. And that's us. I. It works for me as much as any others.

**Bill Oliver** [00:23:30] So, that's how the song started. And then it got a little more specific and it stretches out to all endangered species really, or it can be applied to all of the others and the efforts to share, share our domain with these creatures that are slipping away.

**Bill Oliver** [00:23:57] Song, of course, there's the song, of course, you know, a subliminal accidental, total accidental lift that from two or three Jimmy Buffett songs, bound to be, even better. That's, that would be easy to trace. I don't think there's a lawsuit in it, but there hasn't been any money either. So that's how you find out if there's a lawsuit. But I did try to give it to

Jimmy Buffett and that didn't work out. So and then I kept thinking, maybe you're turning yourself in.

**David Todd** [00:24:36] Well, you know, it's wonderful. How do you figure out that one of these songs will have some currency, will, you know, have legs and travel? And I guess one way is to use a melody that's familiar to people. You know, you change the lyrics and it has a different meaning. But maybe the ditty, the, the chords, you know, seem to to resonate with people because they've heard it before.

**Bill Oliver** [00:25:03] Well, I, yeah, it's a... You hear that? David, I hear thunder. I hear thunder.

**David Todd** [00:25:12] Ah, yes. Welcome sound.

**Bill Oliver** [00:25:14] Right here in South Austin. So, this, I do a lot of parodies, straight parodies that are, make that, that use that familiarity, you know, for, you know, we use the same words, if possible, for instance, and the same rhyme schemes. I do parodies a lot and I always have. That was a, yeah, the lowest, it's the lowest form they say. But who are, what do they know?

**David Todd** [00:25:40] It's a good kind of flattery.

**Bill Oliver** [00:25:45] Thank you.

**Bill Oliver** [00:25:46] Yeah, yeah, yeah. A review in the Chronicle said, "What do we need, another 200 weird Als for, something like that? And I said, "Oh, I'm in the top 200 at least."

**Bill Oliver** [00:25:58] But, but, the, this Turtle Island, I got to say, as was the, those are honest, just derivatives. That wasn't, these are not parodies or attempts to ... that's, that's subliminal lifting of pretty basic stuff actually. It's, it's not that, I'm fine with those songs and melodies, even though they're, they sound like some other stuff but they, that's just what happens with an art form with three chords and seven notes, 26 letters. I don't know, it's similar. That's for sure.

**Bill Oliver** [00:26:45] But nobody's a ... I haven't gotten harassed about it, so. They think they work.

**David Todd** [00:27:00] Well, so I think part of what...

**Bill Oliver** [00:27:01] Oh, you find out, you know, how do you find out? You find, you just either, you probably after a while, you do a few of these things, you get to know what, a sense of, what will work or what won't. Plus, a lot of these songs are written, too, got to get to the rally or there's an event coming. Let's write it in the car on the way, driving to the campfire, you know, kind of thing. And so you just try it and select, see what works and what doesn't. And pretty soon you could kind of predict what'll work or what won't.

**David Todd** [00:27:37] Well, so you mentioned campfires and rallies, do you do you remember any times that you've performed Turtle Island in public? I guess you mentioned this school in Taipei. Were there any performances in Texas that come back to mind?

**Bill Oliver** [00:28:00] Oh, well, sure. They still do. We now have five-foot cardboard, very thick cardboard turtles, costumes to go with this, and the hula hula beach party. We have some props. I like, my little festivals generate props. Kids walk around with these turtles on and we've got a whole herd of turtles. They're anatomically correct, and about the shells, the shell patterns. And there're, we have a bunch of big ones, five or six big ones, and now we have three or four little ones because we had too many big ones. Bunch of little ones. They're reversible for pumpkins on Halloween. But, they're like cardboard, you know, signs, sidewalk signs. But you wear it; your head sticks out of it. There's a turtle shape. They even have fins.

**Bill Oliver** [00:29:02] So, we, we continue to dress kids up like sea turtles and sing the song. And they dance around. They're in the beach party.

**David Todd** [00:29:17] What fun! Well, while we're talking about your songs and I guess about some of these turtles that appear on South Texas beaches. Do you think you could tell us about Rio Grande Valley: it's a big feature of South Texas. And I think one of the animals that has a cameo appearance in the song is the ocelot, which is something that we've managed to hear a number of biologists talk about. But I was curious if you could talk about that song and how it kind of weaves together the ocelot and a number of other creatures that are native to south Texas.

**Bill Oliver** [00:30:01] Well, of course, the ocelot is one of the most, the premier megafauna, the glamor poster child. It's the indicator of what is a wilderness and what isn't. And its southern border, northern border, I should say, has been the river and the corridor along the Rio Grande Valley. And biologists, and organized biology, and environmentalists - Valley groups - National Audubon, local Audubon, Weslaco and Brownsville, all the way through to many, many great birding areas.

**Bill Oliver** [00:30:46] And all the birding groups joined together to put aside as much of this wildlife corridor as possible. And they worked hard on it for about 20 year - '70s, '90s. And this song is inspired by that and trying to connect all these dots for, if you do that for ocelot and the jaguarundi, which is even more of an elusive mammal, if you do that for those, you're protecting quite a few other birding species, for instance.

**Bill Oliver** [00:31:24] So, it's a major campaign and one they could focus on and were successful until, until the wall came around. And the wall politics and wall restrictions were just devastating. And I really don't know what the story, what the story is on that right now.

**Bill Oliver** [00:31:50] But that song was commissioned actually by Dede Armentrout. You know her?

**David Todd** [00:31:59] With Audubon.

**Bill Oliver** [00:31:59] Yeah, and she's so much fun. And we did a lot of Audubon conferences. She said, "We need a, we need a little theme song." And I had, I don't know what I had as a placeholder for that. But she really wanted more of a theme song in the Valley and several other folks were involved too. Dede - so much fun - we wrote that theme song. She wrote, "Ought to be an Audubon", which is on that Audubon Adventures Collection.

**Bill Oliver** [00:32:32] The, oh, David, the deal, she said, "The deal with, the commission was that I would be able to bring Glen from Philadelphia to the rally, to the gathering, to the conference that, where the song would be premiered. So that's, those are the kind of deals: she



would, she would bring Glen down if I wrote this song. So that was a good one and a good exchange there.

**Bill Oliver** [00:33:07] The song is long. It's that long, repetitive, Marty Robbins kind of feel to me. Of course, you know, wishful thinking there. It's not a vocal stretch like he would do, though. But it was, I had a lot of help, and a lot of folks down there that are very knowledgeable about the species that are mentioned, and the creatures, and the situations there, and their personalities were fun to hear about and write down.

**Bill Oliver** [00:33:55] Let's see, this song wound up, I wound up going in elementary schools in a little tour, so, you know, a week or ten days, several of those, and several school districts. One, we would go to the Gladys Porter Zoo and then some schools. And I say, "we", because they, there was a school that the teacher was very active, very instrumental in all this. And their whole class, 15 or 16 kids, learned the song. She said, "We know your song, Rio Grande Valley song. And so, we will be doing it with you. And I said, "Well, which part? The song doesn't have a refrain. It only repeats. It doesn't even have a refrain."

**Bill Oliver** [00:34:40] And so, she said, "The whole thing." and I went, "The whole thing is 5 minutes long!" They'll do the whole song. And every time we played it, I would always mess up. I would mess up one place. And it was never, never the same place. And it wasn't a big deal when I was a soloist, you know. But now here's this, this group. And it got to be really terrifying for me because I knew I was going to mess up somewhere and they knew I was and they were just staring at me, waiting for it. And, uh, but they, they kept, they kept it strong. I'd mess up a word, and they'd be right on it.

**Bill Oliver** [00:35:13] So that was the fun part, doing that song with this group of kids that sang the whole song, all the way through. But I probably did that ten times.

**David Todd** [00:35:23] You know, the performance of Rio Grande Valley with that group of students reminds me that they're, I've heard recordings of a lot of your songs where there are these very accomplished, professional adult musicians. But then there's this, this chorus of young voices. And I thought maybe you could talk a little bit about why and how you incorporate that in your recordings and performances.

**Bill Oliver** [00:35:52] Well, why? Because it's fun. And how? Because it's usually pretty easy. There they are. It's happening. You know, it's different. That's about it. It ought to be. It seems like the thing to do. That's why. And it's just the, well, the learning and doing is more than just, you know, is more powerful, I suppose, to the participants than, than just being an audience member.

**Bill Oliver** [00:36:33] In fact, we did some conferences where, it was a three-day conference, Audubon, Sierra Club. Glen and I, I say "we". But we did, we had two days with and we'd meet with the day care people, these conference kids. People would bring their kids and there would be stuff for them to do while everyone really went to the workshops, the adults. But the kids would be taken care of - you know, five, ten kids, maybe more. And so Glen and I hung out with them and set up a show, got, recruited people for Habitat and Turtle Island and a couple others, a couple of Condo. And we went off and found props and made stuff, made turtles and turtle costumes and the kids made them. We showed them and then we would try to do it together. And as adults, they needed arts and crafty things to do.

**Bill Oliver** [00:37:34] So we're looking forward to this conference to actually show, I think, at some point, I thought they're learning more about these turtles while they're making these costumes. Because when they're singing the song, they're just, they're just petrified. You know, it's on stage; it's a show. They're not thinking about the content when they're doing the show, but they're thinking about it when they're making the costumes. See what I'm saying?

**Bill Oliver** [00:38:04] That kind of involvement is, is exciting, fun to be around. So every now and then we get a chance to do that.

**Bill Oliver** [00:38:15] We're doing that soon, at the Kerrville Folk Festival teen music camp, doing that sort of thing with them, to get on the water with those guys. It's about 60 teenagers, and the hottest week of summer, and Kerrville Folk Festival site, and for four days. They had about 15 to 20 kids a day. I take them canoeing on the Guadalupe at Center Point while the other kids are learning songwriting. But for one day they get to go on the river. And then we do little programs in the evening and have a final concert at the end where we break out some costumes, get pretty silly, spontaneous. Teenage Saturday Night Live, but with original material right away, you know, that they've made up. Pretty fun.

**David Todd** [00:39:12] It sounds great. And I love your thought about learning and doing and maybe learning by doing. Maybe that is the way to really get things to latch on.

**Bill Oliver** [00:39:27] Well, that's what, that's what teachers do all the doggone time, and we've worked with a bunch of and we just ... It's just incredible to go into classrooms and see all those projects and they say, "Oh we and we've, you know, we have your song going in the background." That's like, "Oh, all right!" The kids, so exactly what, thrilled to hear that.

**Bill Oliver** [00:39:48] Yeah. So anyway, what I'm saying is that what we do is, yeah, just nibbles at it, compared to the pros.

**David Todd** [00:39:59] Well I would put you in the category of pro, but, so, I'm curious: we've just, we talked about three songs so far, the Pine Bark Beetle, Pine Away, Pine Bark Beetle", "Turtle Island", "Rio Grande Valley" and a fourth that I thought would be interesting to, to discuss, just as an example, I mean, you've got so many songs. But I think that Queen Invicta tells a powerful story about a little creature that had a very big impact. And I was hoping you could talk a little bit about where that comes from and what spurred you to do it. And, you know, some of the experiences of writing and performing it.

**Bill Oliver** [00:40:50] Well. Gee, it was panic. It was a panic. It was written out of panic. I mean, not out of panic, but in response to that. And so what I'm rolling through my head right now is, is it really changed, or are we just, you know, we're just fine. We're living, living with it. We dealt with it. We're dealing with it. I have fire ants all over my place here. I just brush them off and move on. But the, so, I'm curious because that's what the song says is, don't, don't burn down the barn to get rid of the ants, you know, kind of idea.

**Bill Oliver** [00:41:35] The song was a commission from when Hightower roamed the land, when he was at Ag. And some of his folks, they were coming up with a more benign approach to fighting the fire ant scare and more benign than the commercial, the more mainstream conservative. I don't know; I hate to say conservative, but the, the way it was going at the time was a lot more poisons, and it would overkill. It was getting into food supplies, and waterways - just tough and bad to work around or be near.

**Bill Oliver** [00:42:20] But my, I had several people, that whole Department of Agriculture, to help me with it as far as the science and the technical stuff. So I did that. I hung out with those guys and those folks and got ... I believe that Beth Brown Bintner had moved on to Ag with Hightower from Austin's Recycling, and I think she was pretty responsible for me getting that gig, something like that.

**Bill Oliver** [00:42:54] And so we wrote, we got the song and finally got the hook. It's a simple, "Ouch, ouch! And then the slap of finding a fire ant."

**Bill Oliver** [00:43:04] You know, the history of the fire ant was kind of fun. So that was, that was easy to get into that melodrama. And then we got this gal, Vicki Fowler, to do the "Ho, ho, ho" - the Queen. I went after the Queen part and then Invicta, the name, Queen Invictus. And so, that just kind of bespoke, haughty, you know, silly, making fun of British setting. So that's how the song kind of worked out.

**Bill Oliver** [00:43:44] Plus, it's straightforward, simple, almost slow bluegrass, which, it's still fast song. And we had a great band, once again. Champ Hood plays fiddle on it. And the, let's see, John Emmett has a great muddy part, he said, "Oh, I can get muddy!" Brunnabrunna. And he went out and he had a smile. He went out in the car and came back and with this thing, I haven't used this in years. This is perfect.

**Bill Oliver** [00:44:12] But so that's the going in story. It was a very fun session and well-financed: it wasn't as rushed as a lot of them. Had a budget, by gosh. How exciting.

**Bill Oliver** [00:44:33] So, the real interesting part of this is at the end. The song got, finally they made a video out of it, and we used kids from elementary school, which was just perfect. We went to Zilker Park and went to the studio with the cameras and the kids. The final product, it took a while to get the video together, and almost by the time they finished it, Hightower was no longer agriculture commissioner. Rick Perry moved in and all of this kind of stuff was shelved or forgotten or lost.

**Bill Oliver** [00:45:12] So it seemed, I guess. Until a year or two later, somehow Good Morning America calls up and there, they had right before it all got cleaned out by Rick Perry's people, it (sorry, Aggies) it moved the, somehow that video got to Good Morning America, the science editor, and now he's doing a special on fire ants and he introduces it with, "And it even has a protest song!" And they roll tape, video, the video that the, from Texas, that had not been used for anything else. They were going to use it in schools and some other stuff but nothing happened until this little Good Morning America segment.

**Bill Oliver** [00:46:00] So, I heard about it after it happened and had to dig it out, video. Somehow we got it, a VHS copy, a very rugged copy of it. And they used the whole song. And in and out of the whole song, it played even in the background. So that was pretty exciting. They were, like they had a much longer segment. They used it to come in and out of the song.

**Bill Oliver** [00:46:30] Now. Let's see if I can keep going. The really extra interesting part about this was that I got paid royalties, the only decent royalties I ever got, and it was BMI, Broadcast Music International. They didn't believe me. I said, "It was used on ...", and they said, "Oh, it was probably 30 seconds here or there." And I said, "No it's more than that." And they said, "Well, send me a copy."

**Bill Oliver** [00:46:54] And that was that was not easy to figure out how to copy this. But we did. I sent it to them and they wrote back saying, "You're right, it was the whole song." And so I got publisher and writer - \$2400, David, in 19, what was it, 87. Whatever it was. And I got my first computer, so. And it's the only payday I've ever had, I think, it seems like. But it was all just an accident.

**David Todd** [00:47:22] Or maybe a happy accident. They're the best kind.

**Bill Oliver** [00:47:26] Well, it was a surprise.

**David Todd** [00:47:29] But, you know, one thing that you mentioned just in passing for this production is that you had some pretty noted musician, Champ Hood. And then earlier you were talking about how Dede Armentrout managed to get Glen Walbeck to come down and join you. And I thought this might be a chance to talk about the many musicians that you've pulled together in the Otter Space Band and your other incarnations. Some really talented folks that, you know, play mandolin and guitar and fiddle and flute and sax and trumpet and accordion, and, I don't know, drums. It's an amazing assembly of musicians. And could you give us some examples of people you've played with and how you recruited them?

**Bill Oliver** [00:48:23] Well, the first one recruited me. Doug Powell, our electric mandolin player, puts the outer space in the Otter Space Band. And it was a, when was that? In the mid-'90s or something, I was playing at the Colorado Street Cafe and he came up said, "Hey, you need a band, and I'm it", or something like that. And he he had already, he was playing with several really great - "Ain't Misbehavin'", and CPR - small vocal ensembles with a kind of jazz. More, way more jazz. Much harder, much more complicated, sophisticated songs, and tighter vocal harmonies.

**Bill Oliver** [00:49:07] But he's always been generous and friends and a real go-to guy and way more than just than just, just the music. But so that was a good start. And Doug Powell gave me a truck. I needed a truck. And he bought a boat when I needed to sell one. Stuff like that.

**Bill Oliver** [00:49:27] I guess all the turtles right now, we have to get those swapped out.

**Bill Oliver** [00:49:31] Let's see, Beth Gallagher is a multi-instrumentalist. She plays quite a bit with us, flute and sax and she's classically trained on the flute, but fiddle. That's a brave group of different instruments to take on. And sings and knows her way around a keyboard. She gives lessons and teaches and I, she, she plays, her and Doug, and Dean on bass, these guys will play for rallies. We play for a lot of events that have no, don't have a budget, but they are fun and interesting and they're real, real tight, loyal groups. A lot of fun to be with those guys.

**Bill Oliver** [00:50:21] Let's see, Dean Stinsmuehlen's our more recent, just a few years, our bass player, he plays with so many groups and has over the years, with Balcones Fault in the early days. Big hair! I had big hair then, but his was, he was on stage in lights, with Balcones Fault, doing these great songs in big productions at Armadillo World headquarters and I was just blown away by, saying, "Wow, man, I want to do that so bad!". How that never happens, but closest thing we got it."

**Bill Oliver** [00:50:57] Dean on bass and he's actually with lots of other bands in town too, as the other players do. But now this is the pretty much the current version of the Otter Space Band. And we have Oliver Steck, multi-talented Oliver Steck, he's a guest Otter that frequents

us. And really, it's like a secret weapon, turning him loose, he can round up the whole crowd, people of all sizes, and have a conga line going right away, and makes up songs and plays multiple instruments, accordion and horns. And just a funny guy, too, on the spot. So that's fun to have him.

**Bill Oliver** [00:51:41] Oh, my sweetie, Virginia Palmer, she provides a lot of energy. She's in the band a lot.

**Bill Oliver** [00:51:49] Let's see. Moving back in history, we had the Los Gonzos I mentioned - John Inman and Bob and Paul showed up (Paul Pearcy, Bob Livingston), they were on the Texas Oasis recordings, several songs there and four of them, three of them. And that was the most professional, exciting, magical session that I'd ever been in. And it was just like, "Oh, that's how it's done." It went very fast, when they took over, right. Right, appropriately, and just knocked these songs out. "Texas Oasis", the title song, "Watt Won't Do" and "Shopping Maul".

**Bill Oliver** [00:52:36] And it was so much fun: the power of John Inman's guitar playing, and the tightness of their rhythm. And it was exciting. Bob Livingston helped a lot through getting me up on stages and groups and events and meeting people. And Paul Pearcy, he's probably one of my better friends, and on a river level, too. He spends a lot of time off in New Mexico now, going to Colorado - Paul Pearcy.

**Bill Oliver** [00:53:09] And John Inmon remains a studio Otter. And every now and then we can get him in a, we get a gig that'll support his playing, which is large, really, just doesn't work everywhere we need a full band, seems like it, have a good part. But John's there and has a great little studio.

**Bill Oliver** [00:53:33] Bob is, Bob Livingston has just taken off on his solo career so much, we don't see him very much for, well, even before the pandemic that happened. But it'll be, he'll come around.

**Bill Oliver** [00:53:46] And then before that, before that, there was a Glen Waldeck. He and I were a duo. We were a band for 20 years, and it was a lot of fun. He was a multi-talented threat and I was the straight guy. That was a great, fun band.

**Bill Oliver** [00:54:02] And we also had Fishbait and the Nightcrawlers in the '70s. That had a lot of people come and go. In fact, Esther's Follies is where that was, kind of had its heyday. Hey, David, I have a gig at Esther's in the end of July this year. So that'll be interesting.

**David Todd** [00:54:24] All right!

**Bill Oliver** [00:54:24] A little opening slot. First time, in I don't know, what, 30, 40 years?

**David Todd** [00:54:29] That is great. That is great. I'll have to check that out. Yeah.

**David Todd** [00:54:36] Well, it sounds like you've had this wonderful rotating cast of, you know, multi-talented people that, you know, brought good humor and loyalty and all their instruments as well.

**Bill Oliver** [00:54:53] And there's probably, there's 10 to 15 or 30 really great occasional Otters - Richard Bowden on fiddle and folks that we'd meet through different, oh, causes and events. But over the years it's become fairly regular.

**Bill Oliver** [00:55:14] Yeah, go ahead, David.

**David Todd** [00:55:15] No, no, that's, I just admire what you've been able to do to bring people in and have them contribute their part of the puzzle to making a really fine song.

**David Todd** [00:55:30] Well, so speaking of songs, I want to ask you about one last production, the "Welcome Back, Black-Capped Vireo". And, you know, this rare bird we have in the Hill Country. And, you know, it's making something of a recovery. And this song seems to, to tell that story. Can, can you go through where the song came from and the career that it's had?

**Bill Oliver** [00:56:02] Well, it was a definitely on purpose to tell those stories that fill that, that fill that spot. It's sort of like if I was a painter, I'd have to have a bluebonnet painting or two, you know. So, actually I do have a bluebonnet song. But the, so, no, this was required reading for a songwriter, for me, I guess. And it was probably the opening hook, "welcome back, black-capped vireo". The opening line set it all up and the rest of it was pretty easy, after that. Somehow, somehow, that's the way some songs go. You can wait forever, try to, you can try to force an opening line. But, eh, they're so much better when they pop in and then just write it out. I think that's how that song happened.

**Bill Oliver** [00:56:57] And it was welcomed at Wild Basin and the places that are the name-dropped spots. Right. Yeah. Is that got Enchanted Rock in it, or am I thinking of, I'm thinking of another song, "April in Austin". No, but the black-capped vireo, and the warbler is, of course, in the second line, so it's for both of them. And I like the part that they've been coming here since the Pleistocene, whenever that was. That wasn't so long ago. I think that's only what, 20 or 30,000 years. But they've, they've been here long enough to deserve, deserve some more respect.

**Bill Oliver** [00:58:01] So, another endangered species song that we want to, you know, help put those, there's our pedestals. There's our heroes. The people are fighting for them.

**David Todd** [00:58:20] It reminds me a little bit of Turtle Island that you, I think, get some, some moral power from just the idea that these creatures, and our relationship with them, is really ancient and that we shouldn't be so negligent to just cast them aside, you know, for short-term benefits. Is that fair to say?

**Bill Oliver** [00:58:45] Oh, absolutely. Yeah. And. Well, we're the only creatures that I, I guess that have guilt or care on this level. On this, like this, maybe, or the influence. Yeah, the influence to do something one way or another. So, how you know, how does that work? Do you just, just move on and...

**Bill Oliver** [00:59:20] Like, my bubble is with activists and engaged and enthusiastic people. But this is like, I guess pre-pandemic. But, I also read a lot and try to keep up and it doesn't sound like we're winning a lot of the battles we had, like solid waste, for instance, of course global warming, climate change. It's, it's hard to tell how we're doing, because I'm with people with a lot of optimism, but they're worn out. And you can't tell, day to day, what that the progress is, or the prognosis is. What do you think?

**David Todd** [01:00:15] I don't know. I think the jury is out. But, you know, I think it's interesting that the people that you sing to and, you know, you've talked about how these songs were put together, the lyrics, the melodies, the orchestration. But I guess, from what I can tell, you, you really have a rapport with a lot of your audiences where you're trying to pass a message on to them. It's not just a, you know, feel-good enterprise. It seems like you're, you're a teacher in many respects.

**David Todd** [01:00:58] And I was wondering if you could talk about some of the audiences that you've worked with, especially the kids. It seems like you have a following among young people. Why is that?

**David Todd** [01:01:18] I mean really young people, not even teenagers. But little people.

**Bill Oliver** [01:01:24] Well, I have a connection. I don't know about the following. But it's just eyebrows, man. And you've got good eyebrows. I just, it's just, well, wiggling those. I can get silly. I don't think that it's just because they're an easier group that I do it, I don't think. And they may be easier because I guess I'm willing to go get a little silly and bring that out with those groups. I'm not too, I'm not too nervous around a large group of kids, for 45 minutes anyway, if it's going well. Naturally, actually, if it's going badly, let me out of here! But it usually goes pretty well.

**Bill Oliver** [01:02:23] But, as opposed to adults. And they're can be more demanding. And I guess it depends on the adults, too. It was the rally of EarthFirsters, I've use the same songs practically, or I can put an edge on the doom and gloom songs that had some silliness to them and well, it would be fun.

**Bill Oliver** [01:02:53] The, I forgot what we're talking about...

**David Todd** [01:02:57] Just about audiences and you know how you build that connection and ...

**Bill Oliver** [01:03:05] Well, just, just ... I don't know. Our goal is to, you know, whatever the, whatever the audience is, you're supposed to rock the room. Just go out there and try to entertain or perform, give a, make it worth their while for a little bit of time. So, you just do what you have. And after a while, it's, it's, you know, that part's, that part's just second nature. You just do it, it's not a lot of analyzing going on.

**Bill Oliver** [01:03:47] Interesting because we spend this team camp going over all this, and, and for the life of me, I haven't figured out how to, how to really ... I'm not one of the real teachers, actually. I take them on the river and we do produce little skits. But the teachers are there and they're, they really... It's much more tedious, that's for sure. So it's a different kind of work, but, and those are older kids. And they're motivated they're there for teen camp.

**Bill Oliver** [01:04:24] Motivation. Returning a circle, as I used to try to describe it as a cycle, a circle, of inspiration. I can be inspired, or, or I can be the inspirer. And a funny bass player said, he was talking about sometimes the music makes you happy, and sometimes you make the music happy, the other way. Got to, you know, you, you got to be there and deliver. So, and the cycle with kids is particularly rewarding when they, they come up with reactions or content, even, help the content, that gee, I hadn't thought about or put an angle to it. No, it grows itself. It's a cool, it's a good gig.

**David Todd** [01:05:21] Well, and you're good at it.

**David Todd** [01:05:24] So, do you feel like the audiences are much the same as they were, you know, when you started performing, I guess, in the late '70s, maybe earlier? Do you, do you see that they respond, they show interest in the same things, or are they changing?

**Bill Oliver** [01:05:47] Oh...

**David Todd** [01:05:49] I mean, this is 50-plus years into the environmental movement and I'm sort of curious how the beast is evolving.

**Bill Oliver** [01:06:01] Well, there's certainly a lot less, my prime days or years are behind in numbers and sheer, you know, bookings. That's for sure. So, and I, ambition and this follows my ambition. I don't really, I, I don't have a lot of energy or patience for the tedious that comes with that business part of it. So it's just mostly what comes, comes towards me. And that's been enough, I guess, and it'd better be.

**Bill Oliver** [01:06:44] So, to answer your question. I have had, it does seem the same, but less of it. But it's less of it. Why? There's over the years, of course, my particular niche has a lot more. There are a lot more folks that are actual environmental troubadours. And two or three of them have been, have come through my festival. Lucas Miller, he's fantastic, the singing zoologist. He's hard working, he has ambition and he has a family, he has responsibilities and that he has to work hard. And he does and he's very smart and he's a very authentic.

**Bill Oliver** [01:07:28] Part of my work ethic was to have time off, lots of it - river time, we called it - like spending, you know, spend it in a kayak somewhere. So I, that was, I was very successful still, still am. In fact we are going on the, we go, we have a trip Wednesday, Wednesday on Barton Creek. Music with the band.

**Bill Oliver** [01:07:52] But the audience that I go to, it's so subjective that. I mean, they still seem, they still seem receptive. We just finished playing Lady Bird, its 40th anniversary, and it didn't seem like a large crowd, but it was very hot and just barely out of the pandemic. But they said there were 600 people there somewhere? So a lot of it's the same.

**Bill Oliver** [01:08:22] But it seems to be thinning out. I don't know how Earth's days are. It's been several years that I seem to be a little less charming to me. Oh, of course.

**David Todd** [01:08:41] And so, what are the typical gigs that you've played? Me, I think you mentioned, I guess the recurring things that might have happened at a school, or a rally for some event or issue, and then and then things like Earth Day, you know, the 40th anniversary of Lady Bird. Are there other sort of occasions that bring you and an audience together?

**Bill Oliver** [01:09:11] Well, I've actually 20 years of producing our little festival in Zilker Park, two of them. And that took up a lot of my energy. 20 years ago, I was in the middle of a failed attempt to relocate to California, San Francisco Bay area, and that lasted about five or seven years when I was really back and forth in Austin a lot. The irony was that that is when I finally got to start my festival at Zilker Park, Mother Earth Day at the Springs. So I wasn't really here, oh, almost half the time.



**Bill Oliver** [01:09:47] But everything, a lot of things dropped off. Schools quit having budgets. And for one thing, it wasn't just me, or my, or my level of ambition. Folks that tried hard noticed it too. But that was when I was cranking up the festival. So I put a lot of my energy into making this little festival, that 500, 600, maybe 800 kids would show up, and for 4 or 5 hours at Zilker Park. And I was trying to make it especially about the local issues that for youngsters at schools also that I didn't see. There was one of those still isn't one like that.

**Bill Oliver** [01:10:34] And so, there I became a promoter and a festival producer. And, a side, an interesting effect of that was that teachers said, "Well, we don't. I said, "I still go to schools, you know." He says, "Oh, why don't we come to your festival for free? So we do that." So, great. Shot myself in the foot, market-wise. But we're still struggling to come back from the pandemic.

**Bill Oliver** [01:11:06] We've been taking the festival to schools and did one out at Manchaca a few months ago. That was great. 700 kids and we did a little mini version and had some of our booths and some other folks, their art, that.. Oh and Barton Hill School: we had a walk through the woods and they hiked down, and had one class of sixth graders hiked down and we put on a mini festival at Barton Creek, for our full band and some of our characters, Lady Bird Lake, I mean, Lady Bird Johnson, gal, she talked about Lady Bird Lake. And we had some poets and put them on canoes and kayaks for the rest of the, rest of that event, for about two hour and a half, then joined them on our raft.

**Bill Oliver** [01:12:00] So that's an event that we're working on.

**Bill Oliver** [01:12:03] Also, we've had two or three voyages on the Lone Star riverboat. We took about 100 kids and did songs and had Mark Twain and Lady Bird Johnson characters to give orations. So that's where I'm looking at now.

**Bill Oliver** [01:12:18] And it's hard for me to judge a larger, the larger world from inside these little productions, but it seems to be clicking along, although the news is frightening too.

**David Todd** [01:12:38] But it's interesting and heartwarming that you, you know, try to reinvent how to appeal and pull people in when budgets are tight and time is tight and, in the course of it all, you make it fun. You know, whether you're, you're on the Lone Star riverboat or, you know, you're taking a walk down to Barton Creek. That's good stuff.

**David Todd** [01:13:06] You know, and the other thing that strikes me is that a lot of these people in the audience, especially the children, are probably getting education through textbooks and PowerPoints and, you know, the droning teacher. And you have found a way to, I think, teach with music and song. And I'm wondering what you think the niche is for that and how you have come to sort of develop that that way of educating people.

**Bill Oliver** [01:13:42] Oh, well, it was certainly, lights already well established about when I came on. There was a group in northeast New England that Pete Seeger and that generation will be the first line of elders. They came to these events. And there were groups of, you know, hippie, post-beatnik musician, singer-songwriters, mostly from the Northeast, but from all over eventually, because they were the most, the most well-lived, the established traditional song or singer-songwriters, they would gather, gather together, political. And a lot of the politics eventually became entwined with, oh, younger, with environmental specialties, more specialties, teachers, lots of teachers, so, activists of all stripes.

**David Todd** [01:14:52] And I was involved more in environmental causes at the time so easy to overlap. And but that was one place that opened my eyes to all of these. There were lots of people that, by that I mean dozens, of acts and folks around the country and the world that are working about environmental and nature issues in their music. Endangered species fairs - and so I would go, I went up and saw a conference or two and that led to a conference or two and more.

**Bill Oliver** [01:15:27] And we wound up having a theme song. The Habitat song worked really well. Still does. I, I always thought Olivia Newton-John was going to cover it, but it's going to have to be somebody else. So I think that it's quite a, there's quite a, quite a niche now in Austin. Texas Parks and Wildlife did a story about Lucas Miller and Pearly Gates, and I doing environmental ed in schools through music. And there's three. And there's several more right around here.

**Bill Oliver** [01:16:12] But Texas Commission on the Arts, you know, supports some of that. I was with them for a while. Lots of nature themes showing up in storytelling. And not just showing up, they've been there.

**David Todd** [01:16:30] So, it's, I guess it's partly storytelling, in addition to, you know, the rhymes. There's a through line here, a message that you try to embed in these songs.

**Bill Oliver** [01:16:51] Yeah. Yeah. Sometimes. Yeah. Big wind. They call me, "Big Wind" in Alaska. And that's not Break Wind, Big Wind.

**Bill Oliver** [01:17:02] But, you know, like Ray Wylie Hubbard and Ramblin' Jack Elliott and Arlo Guthrie. I'm not, I guess, I'm not saying, I'm not saying. That's more like back to weird Al. And I'm not saying I have stories or that kind of humor. But those guys would they, you know, they'll do their whole set building up to one song in their introductions.

**Bill Oliver** [01:17:29] Other people, the audience yells, you know, "Shut up and play." And so, I'm somewhere in between there. And Kerrville is a "shut up and sing", "shut up and camp" kind of mottos on T-shirts there.

**Bill Oliver** [01:17:46] But you don't you know, you don't say that to Arlo Guthrie. You keep talking. Whatever.

**Bill Oliver** [01:17:52] So there was once in Hawaii, I was trying to, I was getting into a little long introduction to Turtle Island, and the audience, somewhere in the audience, came this very droll, loud, "Can't say enough about it." "Okay, I guess we'll do the song now." But, yeah.

**David Todd** [01:18:17] Well, I guess we all get impatient from time to time. We want to know what the bottom line is, what the, the joke is, or what the song is.

**David Todd** [01:18:30] Well, and I'm chewing up your day. And shouldn't keep you all day. But I really always enjoy talking with you and hearing what's on your mind.

**David Todd** [01:18:44] And I think as we wrap this up, maybe you can just tell us a little about where you think things are going from here, both for the future of conservation and environmental protection, and also for you. I mean, what is your next gig, you might say, your next chapter?

**Bill Oliver** [01:19:09] Oh, well, those are two subjects, that's for sure.

**Bill Oliver** [01:19:14] The environment - like we often would say, you have to continuously save an old-growth tree. Cut it down once. You have to continuously save a spring. You can't, you just, it's a lot harder to bring a ruined spring back. And so constantly protecting, protecting, protecting, protecting. But looking down the long line, like politics come and go, let things level off, and then it just becomes a philosophical tug of war, of power and circumstances. So it's like, man, we only need a couple of bad dips to really mess up. And I mean, climate change, of course, is just such a huge, you know, that was the basic example there. I mean, nature is not going to wait for us. So we're going to have to just be adapting on these things. And then we're surrounded by our own debris in the oceans and the rising tides.

**Bill Oliver** [01:20:37] So, look at 100 years, 50 years, everything, 200 years that these philosophies and power comes and goes. When will we come up with an enduring ethic? So you'd like to think that some of the power and energy and ideas that people are trying to create or maintain, hoping that some of that's on track and durable. So who knows? It's kind of, I guess, makes, you know, the only, there's no other choice but to try. So, yeah. Keep, keep at it and enjoy, enjoy it when you can.

**David Todd** [01:21:33] Have some river time.

**Bill Oliver** [01:21:35] I don't do either one enough. That's for sure. But let's see. Personally, I don't know. Well, I'm looking down the last few years of kind of organizing a lot of loose ends. I've got a lot of songs that we've actually recorded and never, never could afford to master or put them on the next level. And they were, I don't know, they, they, seems like I'm catching up where we will finally squeeze them out in a video or a still photo or some form.

**Bill Oliver** [01:22:06] The pandemic, the pandemic I made a, made a studio - stimulus money. I got some cameras and stuff and it's been kind of fun - our own little projects. And we hope to do more of that. A lot more of that. And as well as the, the festivals are, really want to do the festivals. But they're a lot of work and physical work. And I'm trying to at least taper, taper off on that if possible. But so need a crew. Need more crew members. That might happen and in the meantime videos and songs - I need to write a few more songs, that's for sure. I haven't been doing that so much. We got so much homework to catch up on, it seems like.

**Bill Oliver** [01:22:58] So, I'm, I'm looking forward to the opportunity, to the work and projects coming up, although it's really rather grim times, actually. I take it pretty seriously - the politics and the power that comes with it. So I guess we could talk all about that. But I.

**David Todd** [01:23:21] Yeah, no, it's daunting.

**David Todd** [01:23:25] Well, tell me what possible songs might be coming down the pike from Bill Oliver and the Otter Space Band?

**Bill Oliver** [01:23:37] Oh, man, that's tough, huh?

**David Todd** [01:23:40] Well, got any titles that are swimming around in your creative mind?

**Bill Oliver** [01:23:48] Oh, well, kind of, sorta. I wish I could answer that quicker. I have a, I want to, it's, I want a song, to write a song about Hippie Highway, which is the road that goes through South 5th here, South 5th and Dawson. It's a song about, oh, some of my political

songs. I wanted to do a song about the, but it would be a dirge, though, (I'm looking for my notes), a dirge about the, whatever, it would be, about the Civil War monument in Texas to the Freethinkers that were massacred for trying to escape to Mexico, not sign the pledge. That would be a civil rights song.

**Bill Oliver** [01:25:04] And so, uh, but that's, that's not what you're asking. The gal who, whose, the gal, the new road that we have, Robert E. Lee, that has changed - that gal, that road going to Barton Springs? Do you know what I'm talking about?

**David Todd** [01:25:38] Yeah, sure. Absolutely.

**Bill Oliver** [01:25:40] Morton. Morton.

**Bill Oliver** [01:25:43] What's her name? Yeah, I should know that name.

**Bill Oliver** [01:25:52] Well, one thing I think is important.

**David Todd** [01:25:54] Is that Azie Morton?

**Bill Oliver** [01:25:54] Yeah. There we go. Thank you. Azie.

**David Todd** [01:25:56] Sure. Sure.

**Bill Oliver** [01:25:57] I want to do a song about her. She has an amazing story. Gosh. Oh, Lord.

**Bill Oliver** [01:26:07] Oh, I know what I'm trying to think of. Ned Fritz is having a big resurgence and there's a project. This, your project reminds me of that. It's a legacy sort of thing, but it's about Ned Fritz. And Ned Fritz, of course, has many forests and trails and creatures and stories. And so a bunch of songs for that, some of which are barely, you know, were just done in campfires. So, we'd want to be working on that collection. And, right, Azie Morton.

**David Todd** [01:27:00] Well, I wish you well. And I'm one of your loyal fans. And I look forward to these songs getting lyrics and with funny rhymes and catchy melodies and, and always a very important message. So keep at it.

**Bill Oliver** [01:27:24] And thank you so much for both looking back at some, some old songs and then telling me about some new songs that may be in the percolator.

**Bill Oliver** [01:27:36] Yeah, man, this is inspiring. Exciting, and thank you for your interest. Oh, always interested. Thank you so much, Bill. And give my regards to Mr. Habitat.

**Bill Oliver** [01:27:48] I will.

**Bill Oliver** [01:27:49] Good luck with your project. What is there? Is there a, is there a launch? Is this just ongoing? It's not a something that you're going to publish?

**David Todd** [01:27:59] Well, you know, the interviews are, I think, have their own life, which I hope will go on for a long time. I really enjoy hearing people like you talk about their work, and their lives, and their ideas. But yeah, we are trying to distill some of this into a book that Texas A&M hopefully will like and be willing to publish. Well, so that's the goal. But it's, you

know, you can't always think about the end of the road. Just driving down the road is often fine. And so...

**Bill Oliver** [01:28:38] Yes, I understand that for sure.

**David Todd** [01:28:40] Doing these interviews is a little bit like river time.

**Bill Oliver** [01:28:45] So good.

**David Todd** [01:28:47] I like that term a lot. I hope you don't mind if I borrow it.

**Bill Oliver** [01:28:50] No. Go right ahead.

**David Todd** [01:28:52] Okay. Well, and Bill, as well, thanks for being patient with our technical issues. I think we've got a recording, and all I need to do is hit, "stop". And we will wait on the line for just a moment to let the recordings upload. And then we should be good. So, thank you very much.

**Bill Oliver** [01:29:15] Well, if you need to redo, need to do redo it, probably won't get any better, but I hope there's a good editor over there. Is that you?

**David Todd** [01:29:25] I wear one of those hats, yes. No, this is great. Thank you so much, Bill. You have a good day and I hope we get to cross paths really soon.

**Bill Oliver** [01:29:38] Right. Well, best to the family.

**David Todd** [01:29:41] All right. Take care.

**Bill Oliver** [01:29:42] Thank you.

**David Todd** [01:29:42] All right. Bye now.