

## “Benny Thomasson – Texas Fiddler”

Another quick note about my recent contributions to the Middle Tennessee State University Center for Popular Music in Murfreesboro collection.

In 1976 I arranged for Benny Thomasson to perform at the UCLA Folk Festival. During that visit I was able to bring Benny into the studio for a videotaped oral history. For more than an hour we talked about his growing up, where he learned tunes, his approach to improvising and much more. I also had the camera positioned so that it was easy to watch Benny’s playing technique.

I was the interviewer (off-camera). Tom Sauber (briefly visible) played rhythm guitar, and if I remember correctly, Erika Brady was at the controls of the recording equipment.



For those of you not familiar with Benny Thomasson, during the 1940s through the 1970s he was one of the foremost innovators and creators of the Texas-style or contest-style fiddling. A frequent competitor and winner at fiddle contests throughout Texas and elsewhere, he developed an intricate style of playing. Taking basic traditional tunes and creating elaborate new arrangements of the basic melody, coupled with improvisation in performance, his playing (and that of other Texas fiddlers) became the baseline for the fancy contest style heard today. One of his most famous students is Mark O’Connor. An overview of the Texas fiddling tradition and an in-depth oral history with Benny can be found on my website at:

<http://slidingscalemusic.com/.../Benny%20Thomasson%20Texas%20...>

<http://slidingscalemusic.com/.../Benny%20T.../BT%20Interview.pdf>

Much of my video was included in a special, limited edition issue of the 2012 DVD “The Devil’s Box”. (The tape I donated to MTSU has the entire session):

(<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1687904/>)

There is one other video that I know of featuring Benny. Produced by the Seattle Folklore Society in 1977 (with much better image quality) and commercially released in 1996 by Yazoo, “Texas Fiddle Legends: Benny Thomasson and Dick Barrett” is another chance to watch this amazing musician. It’s available for viewing on YouTube.

--- Michael Mendelson (Santa Barbara, California – October 2019)