

Bob Schneider has reigned as a *de facto* king of the Austin music scene for a couple of decades now, and while no one stays on top forever, the man shows no signs of decay in quality or creativity. Schneider is the city's genius chameleon, mixing pop, hip-hop, folk and biting humor with essential melodies and bloody brilliant lyrics. His joys and heartbreaks, laid bare in song, help us understand our own.

Schneider has been a recording artist for 25 years, putting out his first record ("Party Till You're Dead") in 1991 as frontman for Joe Rockhead, a funk-rock combo in the vein of the Red Hot Chili Peppers. That band was followed by his best-known group, Ugly Americans, which toured with the Dave Matthews Band and Big Head Todd and the Monsters. Ugly Americans was a kind of alt-rock supergroup, with former members of Cracker, Poi Dog Pondering and Mojo Nixon's band.

Schneider also fronted a full-on funk ensemble that played around Austin in the late 1990s called The Scabs, at the same time he was establishing himself as a solo artist. His first solo project, "Songs Sung and Played on Guitar at the Same Time," came out in 1998, and he's gone on to record an almost inconceivably diverse and eclectic array of songs since then, with his work making it onto the soundtracks of seven major motion pictures (and one indie film).

All told, Schneider has been the singer and main songwriter on nearly 30 studio albums, and he has been named Musician of the Year six times at the Austin Music Awards. Considering the renowned strength of the music scene in Austin, that's saying something. His artistry coupled with his movie-star looks and boyish charm makes it a wonder he's not a household name around the rest of the country the way he is in Austin.

His prodigious musical output is a result of a songwriting challenge group he started 16 years ago while touring. At first, the challenge was to write one song a day, and the people doing the writing were on the tour bus with him. They'd come up with a title each morning and at the end of the day play the songs they came up with for each other.

The pace of the songwriting challenge has eased up substantially since its beginnings, going to one song a week, but the scope of the participation in the group has widened to include a lot of widely known musicians.

"We've had lots of famous folks in the game from time to time, but they usually don't last very long," Schneider says. "The exception would be Jason Mraz, who has been in the game on and off for six or seven years and is one of the most consistent songwriters in the group. Very talented and will always turn a song in. At the end of the day, though, I really only have the group as a motivation to get me to write a song each week. Otherwise, a month might go by without writing anything and that would be a shame."

The past few years, Schneider has grouped the songs he's written in a year under an album title, just to kind of keep track of when they were written. Titles for recent years have included

“Here’s the Deal,” “The Ever Increasing Need to Succeed,” “Into the Great Unknown” and “Mental Problems.” This year’s theme (and the name of his current concert tour) is “The Practical Guide to Everything.”

Schneider has a fantastic website where fans can listen to all of the songs from the three five-song “King Kong Suite” EPs he released last year, with humorous commentary from Schneider himself between songs. The website also has the 10 videos he created for “King Kong” songs using public-domain found footage, including the menacing “Black Mountain” video that culls scenes from Francis Ford Coppola’s directorial debut.

The website also offers a chance to stream his regular Monday evening shows at Austin’s Saxon Pub.

“The Saxon Pub shows are unique in the fact that I play a lot of material there that I don’t play anywhere else,” Schneider explains. “New stuff that I wrote that week or in the last few weeks. Really old material that we haven’t played in a while. I hardly play any of the stuff that you’ll hear on the road, which is a mix of the best of everything. The best new material alongside the best of my last 20 years of writing songs.”

...He has an almost Dylanesque reputation for keeping things fresh, with shows so different from one another that for years he [has] recorded every show and...[sold] copies for people to purchase right after the show.

“I play a lot of cities twice a year, and I like the fact that a lot of my fans will come see me play every time I come to town, knowing that I’ll be playing material they’ve never seen me perform and might not ever perform again,” Schneider says. “I don’t have any of the banter planned either, so that stuff is usually unique to that night as well. It keeps things fresh for me and allows me to play crowd favorites that I’ve been playing for years, but still makes the whole thing feel new overall for me and hopefully for the audience.”