



Streaming Audio In *Austin*

By Tom Bentley

Independent musicians usually don't have the money, the industry connections or the media savvy to put their artistry in front of a wide audience. So when a guy like J.B. Hager—who's been hosting a popular radio show in Austin, TX for more than 18 years—offers to make a high-quality music video of a band and stream it from his site, musicians listen. And so do their fans.

A shiny angle to this story is that Hager and his partner Paul Boukadakis record the performances in or around Hager's 2009 Airstream International CCD. It's the third Airstream Hager has owned, so you know he's a fan of more than just good music. As he puts it, "They are amazing. I'd wanted one of these since I was a kid. I am a fanatic of all things 50s and 60s. Airstream is a slice of Americana that no one has been able to replicate. I love seeing the surprise on people's faces when they step in."

Hager has heard lots of good music since he began hosting the JB and Sandy Morning Show in Austin years back, but he and Paul, music fanatics both, constantly seek out new music, inviting artists from all over the country into the International's studio. (Those two are complemented by audio engineer Reid Mangan and Sam Shaw, their handler of artist relations.) Not a musician himself, Hager loves to discover new bands. The company's focus is on being a trusted music filter for listeners to discover their next favorite band.

"We don't charge the artists for the sessions," says Hager. "We are able to produce a beautiful, intimate, pared-down session that the band can release to promote their new music. We in turn get to share the videos and recordings, and the bands help us grow our fan base."

Los Angeles-based band "The Dawes," getting ready to gig in the new On-Airstreaming studio. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** A multi-member band makes for a resonant trailer: the Atlanta-based "Constellations," working it from Austin's historic Pecan Grove RV park.

"We started this because of our love of music and film, and the Airstream gave it a memorable hook. Because the artists are confined to a smaller space, it challenges them to perform the song differently than they do on tour, often the way it was originally written."

They removed one half of the trailer's dinette to provide more space, since they often use three to four handheld cameras to capture the close-quarters music. Since they've moved the trailer to a spot indoors in downtown Austin, they've conquered the extreme challenges of the Texas heat. Otherwise, the trailer has proven a sound medium for good sound.

"When we started doing the sessions we thought we were going to have to modify all the walls with soundproofing material. Miraculously, the sound is very vibrant and lovely, so that wasn't necessary," says Hager. "If we could convince Airstream to send some engineers to make the side-wall drop out for our audience we would be thrilled."

There is a complete recording studio in the Airstream, but it's mobile, and the audio processing can be run into a laptop. The trailer was originally parked in a historic RV park, but the On-Airstreamers has since re-created that RV park indoors, filling the space with artificial grass. That setting lets appreciative audiences come to sessions and watch a taping, sprawling on the faux grass and seeing what's going on in the trailer projected on a big screen to the outside audience.

Hager and his wife and daughter also used to take the Airstream down the Texas coast, but now that it's installed indoors, the wheels are at rest. "I'm itching to get another one for personal use again. For some time it was doing double-duty for work and pleasure. It's solely a working trailer now," says Hager.

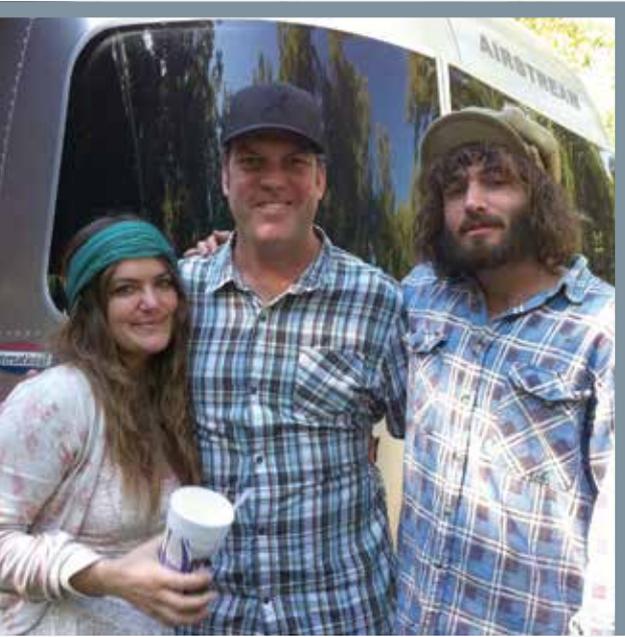
Hager has fond memories of his first Airstream, a 1966 22-foot Safari: "I bought it from a woman in Houston that was a mid-century furniture dealer. She had put in wood floors and these incredible Knoll fabrics that made it look amazing. I polished the entire thing to a mirror finish, which I stupidly thought I could do in a couple of weekends. It took me almost a year. It was gorgeous and I miss it."

He and his wife also bought a 2004 22-foot CCD, but they wanted the extra room of the 28-footer, which later ended up coming in handy for recording groups with a full band. Boukadakis is also on his second International, more proof that Airstreaming runs wide in Austin.

"It's safe to say we are ridiculous fans of the brand," says Hager. "I am obsessed with all things mid-century and Airstreams are iconic from that era. I've never been brave enough to pull my vintage trailer with my '62 Thunderbird, but I often think of how brave people were back then, pulling them around with station wagons and sedans."

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Producer J. B. Hagar flanked by siblings Julia and Angus Stone, top-selling artists from Sydney, Australia.

“I had a permanent spot in Pecan Grove RV Park. We would have sleepovers anytime we wanted, get up and walk next door for pancakes. We would often pull it to the Texas coast on a whim to take my daughter surfing—it was those early trips to the coast that led us down this path.”

Members of bands that are exposed to the Airstream take to the path easily. Hager says the challenge is to get them to leave after a session. “We usually relax over a few beers after filming, chat and get to know each other personally. Hanging out at the Airstream takes people’s minds off of everything else they have to do. We usually make them late for the sound checks or gigs.”

Hager is able to see his relationships with Airstream from a long rear-view mirror, saying, “My original goal as an Airstream owner was to create memories and have quality time with friends and family. Any time we would invite friends down to the trailer to hang out, they were skeptical at first. They didn’t get it. Then they would realize that they were unplugged for the day and got to just hang out and talk. Normal distractions didn’t exist when you are hanging at the Airstream. It really does take you back to a simpler time.

“I hope my daughter has the fondest memories that last her a lifetime. I would have never guessed that a trailer would have kickstarted her wakesurfing career (she’s now a two-time World Champion) and launched an iconic music series out of Austin, but it did. All because of an Airstream.”

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