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## Hanks: When locals and luck collide

**Anna Hanks, LOCAL CONTRIBUTOR**

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Earlier this month, I was standing at the bar at the Hole in the Wall with JoDee Purkeypile, lead singer/songwriter/lead guitarist of Austin's quintet the Alice Rose. The band was playing the club near the University of Texas later that night.

The pale, slight Purkeypile was clad in a dark jacket and skinny white scarf, dark hair charmingly tousled. As he leaned toward the bartender, I glanced at the jukebox to my left. Smack in the middle was Bob Dylan's 1966 "Blonde on Blonde," featuring a tight close-up of tousle-headed Dylan in a dark jacket and white scarf. The visual similarity between Purkeypile and Dylan was so unsettling that I did a double-take, looking back and forth between the iconic album cover and the thirsty singer-songwriter.

So why does my "pinch myself" bar moment matter? Because it illustrates the importance of serendipity, or fortuitous chance, in all our lives.

Perhaps it was no coincidence Purkeypile looks eerily like Dylan. The Alice Rose was heavily influenced by 1960s music.

"That's the kind of music we grew up listening to," Purkeypile said, before quickly pointing out that while the band reflects those influences, it isn't a retro '60s band.

The band told me those '60s influences were strongest on "Stop," which is both the oldest tune and my favorite song from their self-released 2006 debut "Phonographic Memory."

Like many other bands, the Alice Rose is playing South by Southwest as a result of a series of happy accidents and unlikely twists of fate.

Purkeypile and the Alice Rose rhythm section — Sean Crooks (bass guitar) and Chris Sensat (drums) — have been playing together for 11 years; they met at Austin's Bedichek Middle School. Over time, the trio has played about 300 shows together. They became the Alice Rose in 2001.

"We learned everything together. We came from playing in a garage to, like, our second show, was SXSW '98 in front of 500 people. Not because we were out there. . ." Purkeypile said.

"But because my father owned a club," Crooks chimed in. That club: Sixth Street institution Steamboat.

Years after that performance at SXSW, the trio was joined by an Austin native, guitarist Colin Slagle.

Fate found the final member, keyboardist Brendan Rogers. Rogers was browsing at South Austin Music where Crooks works. Crooks was impressed with Rogers noodling on an in-store keyboard and passed him a demo of the Alice Rose.

Slipping it into his car's player, Rogers was so impressed — and distracted — that he drove through the light at Barton Springs Road and Lamar Boulevard. The happy accident: no actual accident.

As the Alice Rose illustrates, it's funny how often what we do in life is influenced by whom we meet growing up. The Beatles songwriting team of John Lennon and Paul McCartney might never have gelled if they weren't both Liverpudlians. Who knows whether the Rolling Stones would have sent fans out of their heads at Zilker Park this fall if Keith Richards and Mick Jagger hadn't gone to the same primary school?

The Alice Rose might not be playing SXSW tonight if the majority of them hadn't grown up in the musically-minded city of Austin and gone to the same middle school. Yet fate only goes so far in getting a band to SXSW.

Some people don't know how to make luck happen, as my Uncle Norm once told me. Meaning you only get lucky when you've made effort to be in the right place at the right time. Ask most any "overnight success" about how it just happened — and find a chair as you settle in for the long explanation of the years of work they've put into their career.

Austin is filled with musicians who've struggled to get here. They invested considerable effort into getting themselves to a place where there's a tiny chance that a happy accident — like getting the right ears around a promo CD — might lead to a record deal, bigger audiences or just a much-needed free dinner.

Though you should be open to discovering a new band — especially if you're a record industry executive — be careful which CDs you pop into in the car player during the festival.

We can't have everyone driving through the lights on Lamar because they just discovered a great new band.

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