

Texan Musicians Discuss Their Journey to the Oscars at UT Austin

Musicians Adrian Quesada and Abraham Alexander discussed their Oscar-nominated song "Like a Bird" during an event Monday at the University of Texas at Austin.

"It's a huge honor to be considered for an Oscar," Alexander said. "Seeing individuals like Elton John, who inspired my journey, and to be associated with him, is incredible."

The hour-long conversation, moderated by Radio-Television-Film lecturer John Peyton, took place at the Moody College of Communication with approximately 65 people in attendance. Alexander is a songwriter and guitarist while Quesada is a producer, songwriter and UT studio art alumnus. They co-wrote "Like a Bird" for the film *Sing Sing* and received a nomination for Best Original Song at the upcoming 97th Academy Awards.

"It's not something I would have ever dreamt or imagined in my life," Quesada said about the nomination. "There are days where I wake up and still can't believe it."

The event began with a trailer screening of *Sing Sing*, a drama about an innocent man finding purpose through theater while imprisoned. Directed by Greg Kwedar, the film highlights resilience and the transformative power of art. The trailer featured the song "Like a Bird," setting the tone for the film.

Critics have praised "Like a Bird" for its carefully woven lyrics. According to [Texas Monthly](#), the song is described as "an emotional mix of guitar, soulful hand claps, and passionate vocals" that elevate the film's message.

Quesada and Alexander shared their journey to the nomination, including their collaboration with Kwedar. Quesada emphasized how his background of living in a border town, Laredo, influenced his music.

"I was always between two cultures, two languages, two countries, and I think it has shaped my journey as a musician and as an artist," Quesada said. "My vision for music has always been about building bridges and building walls, connecting the dots wherever I can."

Alexander spoke about the cultural freedom he found in Fort Worth after moving to the U.S. from Athens, Greece, which he said allowed him to express himself fully.

"I felt that I was confined growing up in Greece and had to be this perfect example of why I'm worthy to be Greek," Alexander said. "I felt that Texas was the opposite of that. It was like, 'Here's your chance to be as loud as possible,' and I'm grateful for it."

Peyton invited Luis Hernandez, a public relations sophomore, to the conference. He is also a musician, performing under the stage name Martin Leon, and found the event particularly inspiring.

"It was crazy for me to hear that for Alexander, his music journey really didn't start until he got to the U.S.," Hernandez said. "That sort of underdog tone of representation is incredibly inspirational, especially for someone from a low-income, border town, Mexican household like me."

Sophia Shelton, a junior in civil engineering, also attended the event. She knew about Quesada from his work in Black Pumas, an American psychedelic soul band based in Austin.

“I saw Black Pumas in February with my dad in San Antonio, and it was one of the best live performances I’ve ever seen,” Shelton said. “When I got an email about this event, I immediately put it on my calendar.”

The conversation provided Shelton with a new perspective on the music and film industry.

“I learned a lot about the [music] industry, which is far outside my civil engineering realm,” she said. “I love music, but I don’t usually think about the industry behind it.”

Sara Abrams, the assistant director of events at Moody, mentioned how Andy Langer, the senior director of live music and entertainment for UT events, pitched the guest speakers to Moody.

“Two Texan guys going to the Oscars and they’re kind of the underdogs to win. That’s the point of the event,” Abrams said.

Toward the end of the event, students had the opportunity to ask both musicians questions. The artists commented on the importance of storytelling through music and art.

“The more individual stories that get told, the better humanity is,” Alexander said.

Quesada added, “Anything that brings humanity and empathy right now is something that we need more of around these times.”

Sailing Through Success with ThunderCloud Subs

Mike Haggerty's journey back to Texas began on a frigid day in Chicago. His car, parked on the top deck of a garage, was frozen to the ground, and the battery was dead. It was at that moment he decided to leave the harsh winters behind and return to the warmth of Texas.

"Normally, you know, your battery's dead, you just push your car and get it going. But when it's frozen to the ground, you can't push it," Haggerty recalled while laughing.

Mike Haggerty, now the owner of ThunderCloud Subs, has built a thriving business in Austin through hard work and a commitment to quality. He shared his path from being a small-town dreamer to a local business icon.

Haggerty's early life was marked by a series of moves and diverse experiences. He was born in Dallas, then attended Bowdoin College in Maine for a couple of years. However, his competitive sailing career brought him to Chicago, where he spent three years building sails for boats and masts while working at a boat-building company. Soon, he decided to get his education back on track and took night school and community college courses, eventually relocating to Austin to complete his business degree at the University of Texas.

"I wasn't a great student," Haggerty said, sprawling back in his chair as he reflected on his academic journey. "But I got through it all."

Haggerty was only a customer when he met Andy Cotton and John Meddaugh, the founders of ThunderCloud Subs, at the original location on Lavaca Street near campus. Cotton and Meddaugh had been talking about franchising ThunderCloud Subs and brought Haggerty on as their first franchisee. He became the first franchisee for ThunderCloud Subs in 1980, and his first store was the Lake Austin Boulevard location, which opened in the fall of 1981.

"I knew the product very well and was a fan because I'd eat it before I'd go to school," Haggerty said.

Despite having no prior experience in the restaurant industry, Haggerty and his wife, Jeanie Haggerty, successfully ran the first franchise location. Jeanie Haggerty, originally from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, attended Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. Having worked in restaurants during high school and college, she played a crucial role in managing the personnel and training aspects of the business.

"I took it very seriously and I was worried about it all the time," Jeanie Haggerty said. "I wouldn't go on the hike and bike trail because I was afraid they couldn't manage without me."

The couple had their first child in 1983 and opened their second store in 1984 on Bee Caves Road, which was very successful. As the family grew and his expenses increased, Haggerty bought the franchise rights in 1989 from the original founders, Andy Cotton and John Meddaugh, who have since retired.

"I think Mike realized that he needed to take a little responsibility once we started having children," Jeanie Haggerty said.

He then expanded the business, opening around 20 locations across Texas and one in Nevada. After about 10 years, he decided to focus more on operating the business rather than selling franchise opportunities, recognizing that ThunderCloud Subs' unique culture and quality were hard to transfer.

"It's a culture to tell you the truth," Obviously, the product is really important, but it's the people that make the difference," Haggerty said.

ThunderCloud Subs is deeply involved in local initiatives, such as the annual Turkey Trot, which started in 1991 and has grown from a small event to one that attracts 20,000 participants each year. The proceeds raised from the Turkey Trot are donated to Caritas of Austin, a homeless organization, with over \$5 million raised since the event's inception.

“It's a day of thanks,” said Mike Haggerty, reflecting on a past Turkey Trot. “I always feel like everybody has their halos on a little tighter after that day.”

Along with the Turkey Trot, ThunderCloud Subs partners with various nonprofits to support community causes. The company's commitment to social responsibility is evident in its numerous initiatives aimed at helping those in need.

Mike Haggerty's journey from competitive sailing to owning ThunderCloud Subs highlights the importance of perseverance, adaptability, and community engagement. He will soon retire, but his story with his college sweetheart will continue across the country.

“We want to visit all the national parks and we're hoping Trump doesn't cut the funding,” Jeanie Haggerty said.

Despite his success in the restaurant industry, Mike Haggerty does not consider himself a food fanatic. Mike Haggerty proves you do not need to be an expert to be successful in the field.

"I love ThunderCloud. I'm a ThunderCloud fanatic," Mike Haggerty said. "My wife is an incredibly good cook; otherwise, I'm not a gourmet of any type whatsoever."