



## Viva Texas!

Can't get to a Texas dance hall? No problem. Palo Duro Records will bring one to you.

"Hank Williams Wouldn't Make It Now in Nashville, Tennessee." That might be a typically clever song title from **Eleven Hundred Springs** — the best Texas band you've never heard of — but it might also serve as the motto for Palo Duro Records, the best Texas record label you just might have begun hearing about. Founded in 2001, Palo Duro has assembled an all-star roster of Lone Star talent — **Eleven Hundred Springs**, **Dale Watson**, **The Derailers** — by tapping into the to-hell-with-Nashville tradition that's been a part of Texas music since **Willie Nelson** set up shop in Austin in the 1970s. **Jon Christopher Davis**, a Dallas songwriter whose eponymous CD Palo Duro released in August, is a perfect example of the label's ethic.

"Jon did a stint in Nashville, like a lot of guys trying to find the dream," says Palo Duro founder Chris Thomas. "Then they find out they can work at McDonald's in Dallas just as easy as they can in Nashville." Jon came back to pursue music."

So far the move has paid off for Davis, whose "next big thing out of Texas" reputation has gotten him connected in a hurry. His album's first single, "Love Had Something Else in Mind," was co-written by Stan Lynch, of **Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers** fame. Legendary country/pop songwriter **Rodney Crowell** also co-wrote tracks on the album.

Now 38, Thomas was drawn to Dallas in the 1990s not because of music, but to be part of several high-tech start-ups. Though he's never been in a band and plays no instrument — "I'm a curiosity in this busi-

ness," he says with a laugh — Thomas jumped into music when he got bored with microchips. He couldn't have picked a worse time.

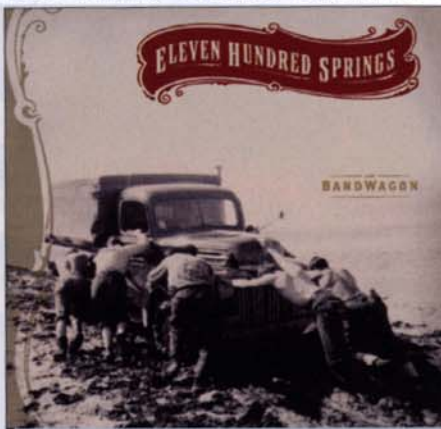
"The business model for music is just collapsing," says the entrepreneur who grew up in Bowling Green, Kentucky, and now splits his time between Tennessee and Texas. "Physical product sales are going through the floor; they're history. But digital sales are up more than 100 percent this year. I do think we're going to see this take off in two or three years."

What'll keep Palo Duro in business in the meantime is a Texas tradition of clubs and dance halls that, unlike most of the country, remains vibrant. Only the Eastern college and West Coast club circuits can rival Texas as regions where live music seems to remain important to large numbers of fans. As proof, in October, Palo Duro will release *Viva Terlingua Nuevo*, a collection of blistering tracks recorded over two energy-filled nights in Luckenbach by artists who flocked to the little city of legend to pay tribute to their favorite town.

"If you go to Nashville or even L.A., you'll find a lot of great talent sitting by the phone waiting for it to ring with a big deal," Thomas says. "In Texas, you find this attitude of, 'I'm gonna do it anyhow,' and you also find a lot of opportunities to play live right out the back door. Quite a few guys are doing well with no label and no management — nothing but a bull-in-a-China-shop attitude of just making it happen no matter what."

# 6 TRACKS

WORTH DOWNLOADING FROM  
THE PALO DURO CATALOG



Label founder Chris Thomas picks the songs that summarize the Palo Duro experience

### "Vegas"

#### Two Tons of Steel

"Incredibly cool road-trip song. Favorite line: 'Life's for living, for giving, not knowing what's in store.'"

### "The Only Thing She Left Me Was the Blues"

#### Eleven Hundred Springs

"Matt Hillyer's humor and wit are special — this is a lively tale of woe."

### "An American Man"

#### The Derailers

"Heartfelt tribute to Johnny Cash, written before his death. Recorded during a break in the studio."

### "As Long As the Bottle's Full"

#### Dale Watson

"Distinctively Dale. His response to Merle Haggard's classic, 'The Bottle Let Me Down.'"

### "I Still Talk to You"

#### Morrison-Williams

"Quintessential breakup song."

### "I Don't Care"

#### Jon Christopher Davis

"An upbeat rocker I can't get out of my head."

To hear these songs, log on to [www.palodurorecords.com/spiritmag](http://www.palodurorecords.com/spiritmag).