

# Bruce Springsteen joins Alejandro Escovedo at the Austin Music Awards

By John T. Davis | Thursday, March 15, 2012, 01:15 AM

“I wonder if there’s one more guitar player in the house?” Joe Ely asked an expectant crowd at the Austin Music Hall as the clock closed in on midnight. “We need another guitar player.”



## Jay Janner AMERICAN-STATESMAN

Sure enough, there was.

Jersey kid. Has a way with words and a certain degree of modest celebrity.

So, yep, for once the rumors were true. Bruce Springsteen did indeed put a finishing flourish to the 30th annual Austin Music Awards by joining headliner Alejandro Escovedo, along with Ely and New York singer Garland Jeffreys for the climax of Escovedo’s closing set.

Springsteen joined Ely and Escovedo for a dark and stormy rendition of Jimmie Dale Gilmore’s “Midnight Train,” and sang backup to Ely’s vocal on the traditional “Going Down the Road Feeling Bad. He chimed in on the chorus of Escovedo’s “Always A Friend” (Dueting with Springsteen on that song in Houston for the first time, said Escovedo, was “three minutes that changed by life”), and took a tangled, granular guitar solo as Jeffrey’s charged through the Rolling Stones’ “Beast of Burden.”

Springsteen’s cameo was a not altogether unexpected treat (he and Escovedo share a manager), but had he not shown up, the evening would still have been brimming with great music.

Return with us now to those thrilling hours of, well, about 7 p.m. this evening...

The 30th annual Austin Music Awards breathtakingly broke with precedent tonight. The show, which for decades has famously started at 7:09 pm, in fact commenced at 7:06 at the Austin Music Hall with a soaring mini-set by multiple AMA-winners Quiet Company. That kickoff was but the first in a night of surprises.

The band, which took home Band of the Year, Album of the Year and Song of the Year among other honors, was augmented by a cello, horns and a backup chorus, which represented almost an embarrassment of sonic riches.

Their set borrowed equal parts arena rock, indie edginess and eclectic shape-shifting. Their sweep of the major awards categories comes, in retrospect, as no surprise. (The night's other big winners, the Wheeler Bros., took home five awards).

By contrast, Joe "King" Carrasco served up a veritable Number Two dinner of muy picante punk-Mex. Joined at one juncture by Shawn Sham, Shorty Ortiz, and a bevy of mariachi musicians for (warning: pun ahead) "Nacho Daddy," Carrasco and Co. turned the dark Austin Music Hall into one big Spring Break bordertown beach party.

Sixteen Deluxe took we Austinites of A Certain Age back to the bright dawning age of an Austinesque interscotion of punk/indie/pop—aka the days when the Warehouse District contained real warehouses. If they've lost a step in the ensuing years, the hiatus wasn't on display on the Music Hall stage. Vocalist Carrie Clark and guitarist Chris "Frenchie" Smith and sounded as fresh as newly-baked bread. Their big set-closing piece (whose title I didn't catch) was magisterial, emotional and entirely timeless. The encore that emcee Andy Langer coaxed from them was just gravy.

Ruthie Foster and Carolyn Wonderland supplied a one-two punch of blues, soul and gospel, both separately and together. Foster did a transformative turn on Johnny Cash's iconic "Ring of Fire," transforming it into a pensive, Memphis-soul ballad, and Wonderland reprised an old Janis Joplin song, "What Good Can Drinkin' Do," as a stomping country blues.

San Antonio native Christopher Cross, who had a brief but Dimaggio-like streak of Grammy- and Oscar-winning hits in 1980, returned to the Austin stage for his induction into the awards show's Hall of Fame and a reprise of his biggest hits, including "Sailing" and the still-insanely-catchy "Ride Like the Wind" (And you officially qualify as Old School Austin if you can remember his radio jingle for a certain electronics firm: "A Dyer deal/Is a stereo steal...")

Patty Griffin gave a surprise acoustic performance as she accepted her own Hall of Fame Award. (Other Hall of Fame inductees included Joe "King" Carrasco, Grupo Fantasma, Cindy Cashdollar and Sixteen Deluxe).

By the time Escovedo and his large ensemble took the stage, anticipation was at a pitch. “Lots of folks are very excited for Jay Z to come sit in with Alejandro,” cracked emcee Andy Langer.

Mixing material from a forthcoming new album with cameos by guests including Amy Cook, Rosie Flores, Dan Dyer, Ely and Jeffreys, Escovedo wove a varied and assured path through nine songs before Ely brought up that “one more guitar player.”

It wasn’t the old days, when Springsteen played the Armadillo World Headquarters for three bucks and Western Swing fiddler Alvin Crow opened the show. But it wasn’t bad.