

INDIE SCENE



Todd Wolfson

SARA HICKMAN

In music and in business, Texas' Official State Musician has it covered



SARA HICKMAN DOESN'T WASTE a moment. An adept multitasker, she is devoted to both her family (she lists her role as wife and mother prominently in her résumé) and a far-flung 22-year career that's brought her success as a singer, songwriter, producer and entrepreneur. These days the tireless Texan is busier than ever with a long list of projects. They include her first animated DVD, *Big Bird, Little Bird*; a new all-ages trio dubbed Family Time Rocks; *Best of Times*, an album of her songs performed by fellow artists like Willie Nelson, Marcia Ball and Shawn Colvin, benefiting arts funding in state schools; and her latest album, *Absence of Blame*. Then too, there are the attendant honors and duties accompanying the recent legislative decree naming her 2010's Official State Musician of Texas.

Hickman doesn't deny the difficulty of maintaining the equilibrium between her various career pursuits. While she's quick to credit husband Lance Schriner for helping her manage her record label, Sleeveless, and her other disparate business interests, she maintains a regimen—she calls it her “work feng shui”—that allows her to appropriate her time judiciously. “It's very

easy to get caught up in the business side, especially now that there's Facebook and Twitter and other distractions,” Hickman admits. “But at some point I need to be creative. So I block out time to write and that's all I do. You learn to balance. It's like heroin. You can get so addicted to a certain part of this business—‘If I do this, I'll be at this level.’ But there are calmer ways to go about it.”

That philosophy has served Hickman well since she self-released her debut album, 1989's *Equal Scary People*. Major label Elektra Records later re-released the album and issued Hickman's follow-up, *Shortstop*, which yielded the radio hit “I Couldn't Help Myself” and garnered her a hosting role on VH1. But her next album, *Necessary Angels*, was rejected because the label felt it lacked commercial potential. “That was one of the saddest moments of my life,” she recalls. “Suddenly I realized I was back to square one.” With encouragement from her mom and help from fans, Hickman bought back the album's master tapes for \$350,000. *Necessary Angels* was eventually released by Discovery Records, but she soon encountered creative differences with that label as well. “It was

more of the same,” she says. “I just wanted to be me, because this was who I am.”

After releasing three more albums on Shanachie, Hickman opted to strike out on her own. The birth of her daughter prompted a series of well-received children's albums and the founding of Sleeveless, home to all of her work since 1999.

Touching on themes of alienation, peer pressure, weight issues and a friend's sudden suicide, *Absence of Blame* is Hickman's most reflective record yet. “I wanted to go edgier and darker, and all those songs are personal, about horrific things that I've had to process,” she says. “I felt they needed to be shared.”

In addition to all music-related activities, Hickman has developed parallel careers as a designer, photographer, graphic artist, inspirational speaker and spokesperson for several humanitarian causes. She also aspires to develop her own one-woman comedy show. “When people talk about diversifying your portfolio, well, nowadays you have to diversify your artistic portfolio. You have to be prepared to do something different to help you in the long run. To me, it's all the same thing.”

—Lee Zimmerman