

# Gary Clark Jr. no longer the kid who can sneak into SXSW



Pablo Martinez Monsivais/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Gary Clark Jr. got to play with some of his heroes and meet the president when he was asked to perform at the White House in February. From left, Troy "Trombone Shorty" Andrews, Jeff Beck, Derek Trucks, Clark, B.B. King, Buddy Guy, Warren Haynes, Shemekia Copeland, Susan Tedeschi and Keb Mo perform during the White House Music Series saluting blues music.



Deborah Cannon/AMERICAN-STATESMAN

Gary Clark Jr. says he's played SXSW nine or 10 times: 'I got to see Adele and a lot of bands that were very under the radar. I snuck in and wandered off by myself and heard very cool bands that not a whole lot of people got to see, just people playing backstage, and bands that not a whole lot of people had heard of. I just kind of went and wandered.'

## *Fest over, Clark plans to rest before return to L.A.*

**By Parry Gettelman**

SPECIAL TO THE AMERICAN-STATESMAN

Updated: 10:29 a.m. Tuesday, March 20, 2012

Published: 3:34 p.m. Monday, March 19, 2012

Gary Clark Jr. plays guitar with consummate authority and the kind of raw machismo that gets guys in the audience dunking their heads up and down like they're at a metal show.

Hours before his South by Southwest showcase Wednesday night at La Zona Rosa, Clark looked the part of a rock star, lean and aloof in black jeans, a black jacket, a white V-neck T-shirt and a sleek pair of Ray-Bans — not to mention the hip black fedora.

Talking in a plush tour bus parked outside the venue, however, he was laid-back and implausibly soft-spoken, sounding almost as diffident as a successful computer programmer suddenly obliged to discuss the band he's been playing with on the weekends. Actually, he's one of Warner Bros.' top artists with a packed summer tour schedule that includes pretty much every major festival in the country.

A favorite of Austin blues fans long before the release of his debut Warner EP last summer, Clark estimated he's played SXSW nine or 10 times — and his connections meant he got to go see a lot of shows even before he was old enough.

"I knew a few people who would let me in to see some shows — I won't put out any names," he said with a laugh. "I definitely was privileged. ... I went and saw the Strokes, at the Music Hall right around the corner, and I got to see Adele and a lot of bands that were very under the radar. I snuck in and wandered off by myself and heard very cool bands that not a whole lot of people got to see, just people playing backstage, and bands that not a whole lot of people had heard of. I just kind of went and wandered. I think that's the best way to do South by."

Now Clark is not one of those under-the-radar acts but someone people line up to see.

"Oh, that's kind of a trip!" he said. "It's good, though. I'm grateful. ... I definitely take moments where I can just kind of reflect and be grateful and realize I'm in a good spot to be able to do what I love to do and have people come out and have a good time when I do it. It doesn't get much better than that, I guess."

Clark's SXSW schedule this year was packed so tightly with gigs and interviews that he'd be lucky if he got to sneak off by himself at all.

"Years prior, I could kind of do what I wanted, get into a little bit of trouble or whatever, but I got to be on point; I got stuff to do, so it's good," he said.

Clark's full-length Warner debut was set for release early this year, but the phenomenal success of the EP pushed it to September.

"Fortunately, people wanted us to come out on the road and play shows, so we've been doing that, so I'm not mad at that at all!" he said. "Plus, the label has been really cool and said, 'Take your time and make the best record that you can.' So, it's good. There's not a whole lot of pressure on that end. I can just let things flow, naturally, organically."

After SXSW, Clark is hoping to catch up on his sleep for a couple of days before he heads back to Los Angeles to finish up the album.

"On my time off of the road, I pretty much go right into writing mode," he said. "Unfortunately, I thought I was one of those artists who could write on the road, and be inspired, and things would just flow — but I'm so in it day to day that I realize the way I work best is to kind of take some time and keep it fresh and relax and then recollect on what's been going on and draw from that and be inspired from those things. While they're happening, there's no songwriting going on."

Clark said the EP "was just kind of a little taste of a couple of influences from where I'm trying to go musically. It's good to have a solid foundation, but I like to branch out and do different things."

Clark grew up listening to his parents' records — Motown and other soul and funk.

"I got older and got familiar with Albert King, Freddie King, B.B. King, the blues guys, and Hendrix and Stevie Ray Vaughan and Jimmie Vaughan, and along with that, going back and figuring out what the roots of the music was, kind of to Lead Belly and Elizabeth Cotton, Skip James. And contemporary stuff, too. So, I'm a real big fan of Outkast and a lot of stuff that comes out of Atlanta, Cody Chesnutt and things like that. So I was really inspired all at once to do all kinds of different things, and the EP is kind of a small little look into kind of where I'm

going. I'm not exactly sure myself," he said with a soft laugh. "Lately, my go-to albums have been Otis Redding 'Live at the Whisky,' Shuggie Otis 'Inspiration Information,' a lot of Nina Simone, and Dr. Dre 'Chronic 2001.'"