

Charlie Sexton and the Barton Hills Choir jam at Austin Kiddie Limits

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“Let’s hear it for the kids!” Austin guitarist Charlie Sexton may have been the special guest of honor with the elementary-school Barton Hills Choir early Friday afternoon at the Austin City Limits Music Festival, but he was all about putting the spotlight on the choir itself.

Charlie Sexton with the Barton Hills Choir just after their ACL Fest performance at the “Austin Kiddie Limits” stage on Friday, Oct. 6, 2017. Erika Rich for American-Statesman

An appearance by the choir, which features around 50 kids who go to school just up the hill from Zilker Park, has been a regular feature of the fest’s opening day for a good while now, rivaling Asleep at the Wheel’s 16-year record of playing every ACL Fest. Choir leader Gavin Tabone leads the children through songs that take a left-turn from typical kids-choir fare, with the help of a three-piece rock backing band and usually a guest artist. (Next weekend, guitarist David Grissom will take Sexton’s place in the guest slot.)

*Barton Hills Choir doing [#DavidBowie](#) [#Starman](#) with [#CharlieSexton](#) at [#aclfest](#) [#aclfest2017](#)
pic.twitter.com/MU5o5879eD*

— Peter Blackstock (@Blackstock360) [October 6, 2017](#)

The highlights of Friday’s all-too-short 20-minute set were two David Bowie numbers. The kids got the lead vocals on “Starman,” while Sexton punctuated the breaks with distinctive guitar leads. On “Golden Years,” Sexton stepped out to cover some of the difficult vocal territory with a very Bowie-esque delivery, including some falsetto flights.

Woody Guthrie’s “Goin’ Down The Road Feelin’ Bad” proved a fine opener, a dusty rambler that put several of the children in the spotlight for a verse while the full chorus, some on risers on each side of the stage with another couple dozen up front, brought home the refrain.

For a rockin’ closer of Chuck Berry’s “Johnny B. Goode,” Tabone invited all Barton Hills Choir alumni to join them, increasing the fold by another dozen or two. The kids really got into the spirit for the finale, and so did the band. After the choir made their exit — many of them walking straight into the crowd toward their parents — Sexton and his mates kept chooglin’ along, bringing the show to a rousing finish.