

# Texas Myth/Texas Music

By Bill C. Malone



*Photo Courtesy of: Austin History Center, Austin Public Library*

---

*Over twenty years ago I interviewed Harold "Pappy" Daily in Houston. Daily had been a successful music promoter for many years, especially instrumental in the early success of George Jones, the legendary country honky tonk singer from Beaumont. When asked why Jones and some of his contemporaries such as Ray Price were such good singers, Daily looked at me incredulously and said, "Because they're from Texas!" Although probably said in jest, his statement embodied elements of both truth and fiction. While Texas has produced many of America's greatest musicians (with mere residence in the state undoubtedly contributing to the shaping of their art), Daily's response also reveals the prevalent mythology that has surrounded the popularization of all forms of Texas music.*

---

Music has always played a vital and sustaining role in the life of the people of Texas and has contributed mightily to the mystique of the Lone Star State. Indeed, in many important ways, the music has also been a by-product of the Texas Myth—the deeply held belief that the state has a unique and special history and destiny, and that its frontier heritage has encouraged freedom, individualism, experimentation, and flamboyance. Hearing the infectious dance tunes of Bob Wills, the irresistible accordion riffs of Flaco Jiménez, the anguished moans of Janis Joplin, or the unorthodox vocal phrasing of Willie Nelson, it is hard to resist the feeling, if not belief, that this music ushered from the soil in the same way that oil spontaneously erupted at Spindletop back in 1901. At least since the emergence of Austin as a Southwestern musical mecca in the 1970s, Texas musicians have invested in and promoted this image, professing to believe that their music embodies a liberated spirit and anti-commercial impulse that cannot be found in Nashville or other music centers. Growing multitudes of fans have responded fervently to the idea that “when you cross that old Red River” into Texas one enters a unique musical domain that follows its own impulses and rules. At least for the duration of the song, many fans who have never visited little Luckenbach, Texas, have identified with the village and have been ready to move there with “Willie, Waylon, and the boys.”

Texas’s musical heritage predates the birth of the Republic, with roots in the music of the Mexicans already living there and in the cultural baggage brought across the Sabine by whites and blacks moving from the older South. Music, we are told, played a central role at Texas’s first great historical event, the Battle of the Alamo. Two musical performances that occurred shortly before the battle seemed to define the cultural conflict that helped to generate the war between Anglos and Mexicans. Accompanied by bagpipe player John McGregor, Davy Crockett fiddled lively hoedowns to bolster the spirit of his compatriots in the Alamo. The Mexican commander Santa Anna, on the other hand, instructed his military band to play “Deguello,” the no quarter anthem designed to strike terror in the hearts of the Alamo defenders. Although these examples suggest a scenario of warring cultures in Texas, Anglos, Mexicans, and other ethnic groups actually began learning songs, dances, and musical styles from each other at the point of first contact. Stylistic diversity and the interchange of ideas, not division or conflict, have always distinguished the Texas music.

Texas’s two most important folk music traditions, the Anglo and African-American, had already interacted in vital ways even before they were transported to the region. Whites and blacks came as masters and slaves, but their geographical proximities, shared experiences as rural and agricultural people, and common exposure to Evangelical Protestantism contributed to the making of a body of music that shared many traits. The fiddle was the dominant instrument in both cultures, and banjos were much more common than guitars in nineteenth-century Texas. Despite the opposition voiced by many church leaders, dancing was widely

popular in both racial groups. Community dances, generally called frolics or house parties, prevailed among whites and slaves alike, and a common body of songs and dance tunes moved freely across racial lines. Styles of performance, of course, often differed dramatically, with black Texans tending to improvise more freely than whites and to sing with expressive, open-throated voices. White people generally admired the emotional abandon and sensuous expressiveness of black singers, but their performance styles more often reflected the inhibitions fostered by Calvinistic Protestantism and its suspicions of physical display.

Both blacks and whites valued religious music highly, and the context of church or church-related activities provided the inspiration or training-ground for many of the state’s best singers. Shape-note singing schools, camp meetings, and revivals flourished in the state, and street-corner evangelists could be heard in virtually every community expounding the word of God and singing the gospel with the backing of guitars, mandolins, and fiddles. At the turn of the century, Pentecostal preachers (black and white) came to Texas, dispensing their fiery brand of religion and popularizing their variety of spirited, emotional music. Partly through their presence, white singing style changed, becoming more emotion-laden and sometimes closely akin to the loose-throat sound associated with black music.



Photo Courtesy of: Austin History Center, Austin Public Library

Black Texans’ most crucial contribution, of course, was the blues. The blues had moved west from Mississippi, but Texas singers became famous for their fluid, supple styles of singing and for their inventive and free-flowing instrumentation. Created by African Americans, the blues nevertheless was familiar to most white Texans (and to Southerners in general). This lonesome but liberating music came from field workers, road crews, stevedores, prisoners, barrelhouse piano players, brothel and honky tonk musicians, and street corner buskers. Some of the best of them, such as Blind Lemon Jefferson, Texas Alexander, and Henry Thomas, were more than ready when the nation’s recording companies began looking for such performers in the 1920s.

Anglo and African Americans were certainly not alone in making Texas's music. Long before either group ventured into the Texas region, Mexican Americans, or "Tejanos," had built a vibrant musical culture of love songs, *corridos* (ballads), *bailes*, and fandangos. Fiddles were also present in Mexican culture, as was the guitar and various kinds of wind instruments. By the middle of the nineteenth century, Tejano musicians had acquired the accordion and a taste for polka rhythms, possibly from south of the border, but more likely from their German neighbors in South Texas. *Conjunto* music, played usually with accordion, bajo sexto (a 12-string guitar), and drums, along with other "latin" styles, insinuated themselves into the hearts of all Texans, with, as Bob Wills confessed in "San Antonio Rose," an "enchantment strange as the blue up above."

In various parts of the state, other ethnic and racial populations contributed to the general musical mix. In the late nineteenth century, French-speaking Cajuns from Louisiana began bringing their *patois*, love of life, and fiddle and accordion-based musical styles to Orange, Beaumont, Port Arthur, and Houston. Cajun styles, however, did not reach Texas in unalloyed forms. The presence of African Americans in Southwest Louisiana, the central locus of Cajun culture, along with oil discoveries there in the early twentieth century, added new sounds and songs to the traditional French *mélange*. French-speaking blacks in Houston added their own unique spice to Texas's and America's musical gumbo with the making of the now-popular style known as Zydeco that melded rhythm-and-blues and Louisiana French forms. Czechs and Germans in the communities of Central and South Texas absorbed musical ideas from the people who lived around them, but also preserved their love for drink, dance, and community celebration. They bequeathed a legacy of polkas, schottisches, and waltzes to the state's musical culture. Like their counterparts elsewhere in the United States, German Americans made lasting contributions to music at all levels, as teachers, composers, publishers, businessmen, and musicians.

Cultural diversity and musical interaction may define the reality of Texas music, but all styles evolved in a context dominated by the Cowboy Myth. In the American popular mind, cowboys and Texas have been practically synonymous (that helps to explain why President George W. Bush and his entourage felt the necessity to wear custom-made cowboy boots at his inaugural balls). Of course, some "reality" does undergird the myth: the cattle kingdom of the late nineteenth century did originate in South Texas and was exported to the upper plains through the famous long drives of that era. The "real" cowboy was a composite of the cultures discussed earlier—Anglo, African, Mexican. Nevertheless, the cowboys that populate the landscape of America's music were sons, not of the sweat, toil, and grime of the frontier, but of popular culture. Well before his music was discovered and introduced to the world, through the famous collections produced by Nathan Howard Thorp and John Lomax (in 1908 and 1910), the cowboy had been mythicized and romanticized through dime novels, silent films, and Wild West shows. It now seems inevitable that music would be touched by the same kind

of idealization. From the beginning of commercialization in the 1920s, Texas grassroots musicians exhibited the appeal of the cowboy myth. Fiddler Alexander Campbell "Eck" Robertson wore cowboy clothes to his first recording session in New York for the Victor Talking Machine Company, a session in 1922 that marked the beginning of commercial country music. In 1925 Carl Sprague, born in Alvin, Texas, and a proud possessor of the Lomax book, recorded for Victor a popular version of "When the Work's All Done This Fall." A few years later Jimmie Rodgers, the ex-railroad brakeman from Mississippi who had taken up residence in Kerrville, Texas, introduced romantic cowboy songs into his repertoire, and such songs have remained part of country music ever since. Beginning in 1934 Gene Autry, a native of Tioga, Texas, did most to create and popularize the version of the singing cowboy that we all remember, through his motion pictures, popular Columbia recordings, and weekly radio shows. Largely because of Autry, an industry of "made-for-movies" cowboy songs came into existence, along with a wardrobe of simulated cowboy attire that has attracted generations of country singers.

It is easy to see why the cowboy image would prevail. No entertainer really believed that dressing like a farmer or oil driller, or any other economic type then prevalent in Texas, would win the admiration of the audience. The cowboy, on the other hand, demanded respect. In most popular guises, he tended to be Anglo-fearless, individualistic, moral, and free. It was easy to believe that he, and the expansive environment that nourished him, had produced a body of music that, in contrast to the tradition-bound music produced back east, was bold and liberated. The Cowboy Myth has touched virtually all of the various manifestations of country music, but its most explicit identification with freedom, spontaneity, and experimentation came with its association with the style now known as Western Swing. In 1940 Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys appeared in their first movie, *Take Me Back to Oklahoma*, playing the part of dapper cowboys but performing an infectious blend of urban and country music that had been born in the dance halls and radio stations of the Southwest. Clearly recoiling against the hillbilly persona that tainted much of country music at that time, and profiting from their association with the cowboy movies in which they often appeared, Wills and his Playboys seized upon a romantic image that has been endlessly appealing to the popular mind. Since that time the cowboy periodically has been resurrected to fuel various kinds of country music revivals, usually those that oppose Nashville and its hegemony. Whether presented in the persona of a Willie Nelson-style "outlaw," allegedly defying both social and musical convention, or as an Urban Cowboy seeking momentary release from work stress on a mechanical bull, simply in the joyous guise of a Bob Wills tune, or more recently as a "hat act" in mainstream country music, the cowboy has endured as a figure of almost-infinite plasticity and as an inspiration for music that values freedom over restraint and fun-making over money.

The stress upon western symbolism, and on the state's ethnic and racial diversity (all of which suggests a body of music and music-making rooted in the soil and in rural and frontier sensi-

bilities) should not obscure the role played by technology, commercial entrepreneurship, and urban culture in the making of Texas music. The source of Bob Wills's innovations lay neither in the range country of West Texas nor in the cotton fields of the Lone Star State. Inspiration for musical experimentation came instead from the cities and from the radio stations, recording companies, and commercial forms of entertainment that were located there. From the very beginning of Texas history, town culture had in fact played a profound role in the shaping and transformation of the state's music. Towns and cities extended their influence out into the hinterlands long before they were transformed by the migrations of rural people. Traveling salesmen, tent-repertoire shows, and medicine shows brought songs and new musical ideas; the mail-order catalogues of Sears-Roebuck, Montgomery Ward, and other national department stores made available the newest editions of sheet music, phonograph records, guitars and other string instruments, parlor organs, and pianos. Even a locally based periodical, such as the *Dallas Semi-Weekly Farm News*, which reached thousands of rural Texas homes prior to World War II, brought exciting hints of the comforts and diversions that could be found in the city. On its "young people's page" the paper responded to readers' requests by printing the lyrics to old songs, many of which had been published as sheet music originally on New York's Tin Pan Alley.

Cities like Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio acted as magnets for restless rural youth long before the abolition of slavery, the emergence of sharecropping and tenantry, and the collapse of agriculture fatally weakened the older institutions of rural life.

Those people who ventured into town on a Saturday night for an evening of fun, perhaps to one of the notorious "sin streets" like Deep "Ellum" (Elm) in Dallas or Fannin Street in Shreveport, probably heard a street-corner blues musician or a barrelhouse piano player. Itinerant musicians may have learned their art and polished their repertoires in rural settings, but they

moved to cities to find audiences for their music. Scott Joplin, from Texarkana, seems to have been the first Texan to take his music to the North. Absorbing songs and musical riffs wherever he went, from Sedalia, Missouri to New York, Joplin reshaped them into a body of musical suites, such as "Maple Leaf Rag," that fueled the Ragtime Revolution of the early twentieth century. Blind Lemon Jefferson, from Wortham, came along a few years later with his wailing vocals and fluid guitar style, and moved first to Dallas and then to Chicago, making listeners conscious of the emerging Texas blues style. Since that time, an unending stream of Texas musicians such as Aaron "T-Bone" Walker, Gene Autry, Bob Wills, Jack Teagarden, Harry James, Eddie Durham, and the Stamps Quartet have taken their styles of music to cities all over the United States.

While we are well aware of the contributions made by Scott Joplin, we cannot be sure of how many Texas musicians,

prior to the 1920s, physically participated in such urban entertainment forms as black-face minstrelsy and vaudeville. We do know that the music of these phenomena insinuated itself into the consciousness of both fans and musicians in the state. Phonograph records and radio broadcasts, on the other hand, permitted grassroots musicians to popularize their music on a

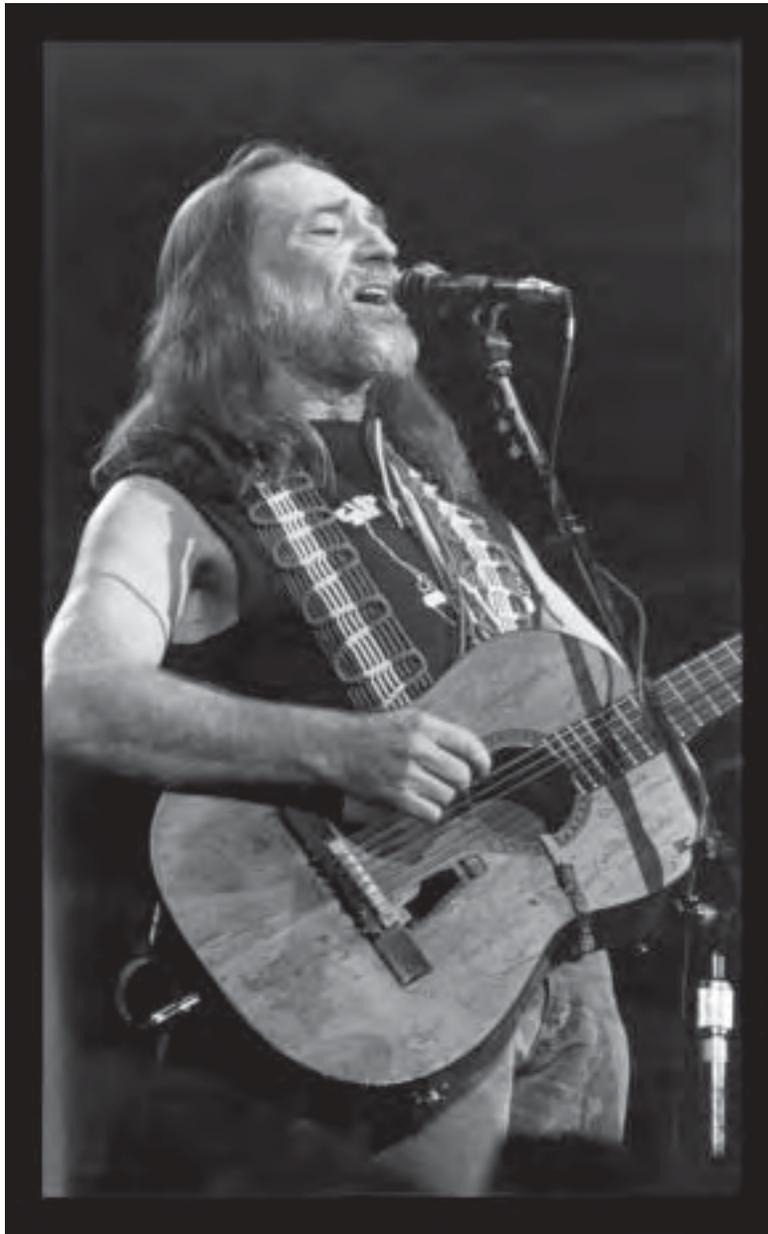


Photo Courtesy of: Media relations & Publications, SWT

Willie Nelson

broader scale and to learn more readily from other sources. Indeed, most of the commercial vernacular forms that have dominated American music in this century—country, blues, gospel (black and white), cowboy, Tex-Mex, and Cajun—were products of the communications revolution launched in the 1920s by radio and recording. Eck Robertson's fiddling skills, for example, were largely confined to contests and house parties until he made his first records in 1922 for Victor. Blind Lemon Jefferson and the great gospel singer and bottle-neck guitarist, Blind Willie Johnson, had built passionate clienteles in the saloons, brothels, and church conventions of their home state, but phonograph recordings made after 1926 introduced them to audiences throughout the nation and ensured their enduring fame. Playing with her family band, La Familia Mendoza, Lydia Mendoza had already become known as "the Lark of the Border" when the Victor Company recorded her in 1934. But these recordings ultimately made her name and music known around the world. The Stamps Quartet had been pillars of the shape-note singing conventions, those beloved all-day-singings-with-dinner-on-the-grounds, but their Victor recordings after 1927 made them regional favorites. The list could go on and on.

Texas musicians found even larger audiences through broadcasts on such powerful 50,000-watt radio stations as Fort Worth's WBAP (the first station in the nation to feature a Saturday night "barn dance"), Dallas's KRLD, San Antonio's WOAI, Tulsa's KVOO, Houston's KTRH, and Shreveport's KWKH. Gene Autry's radio broadcasts as the Oklahoma Singing Cowboy, first on KVOO and later on the WLS Barn Dance in Chicago, made his name known to the Hollywood entrepreneurs who in 1934 invited him to make movies. Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys also used KVOO broadcasts to popularize their danceable blend of jazz and country throughout the Southwest. The Chuck Wagon Gang, on WBAP in Fort Worth, and the Stamps Quartet, on KRLD in Dallas, made their varying brands of southern gospel music available to a regional audience. The territory covered by these stations, however, was small compared to the reach of the powerful Mexican border stations. With power that sometimes extended well beyond 100,000 watts, such stations as XERA, XEG, and XEPN blanketed North America with spiels for spurious products, religious evangelism, populist politics, and vernacular music programming. Well into the 1940s insomniacs, truck drivers, cross-country travelers, and fans would have heard either live or transcribed music by such entertainers as Cowboy Slim Rinehart, Mainer's Mountaineers, and the Carter Family.

Since the 1930s, Texas grassroots entertainers have demonstrated that their music could be put to a multiplicity of social purposes, including the selling of laxatives, the saving of souls, and the election of politicians. With Jimmie Rodgers, Gene Autry, Bob Wills, Lydia Mendoza, and T-Bone Walker pointing the way, Texas entertainers had suggested that music could liberate people from cotton fields, oil patches, and barrios while also building within them a sense of identity and cultural pride. During the Depression years, musicians exhibited the healing and restorative powers of music through the religious consol-

ation provided by gospel singers, the social release promoted by the dance bands, and through the fantasy evoked by the singing cowboys who could be heard on radio and recordings and seen in Hollywood movies. In 1938 Wilbert Lee "Pappy" O'Daniel campaigned for and won the governorship of Texas with the support of his radio band, the Hillbilly Boys, the first political exploitation or utilization of a commercial music group. Woody Guthrie's radicalism would have prevented the Okie balladeer from winning any political office, but his social conscience and conviction that music could speak on behalf of the downtrodden had already begun to take shape during his residence in Pampa during the early 1930s.

With their vision of an unsullied land and unsullied people, the cowboy songs and movies provided heroes for an economically deprived populace craving reassurance. Dance halls and honky tonks, on the other hand, provided a different kind of fantasy and diversion: the release provided by dance and the escape contained in a bottle. It was through this union of drink, dance, and music that Texas performers made one of their most unique and enduring contributions to American music. Dancing had never abated even during the days of prohibition, and the German and Czech dance halls of central and southeast Texas had remained popular as family-oriented gathering places. The repeal of prohibition in 1933, though, encouraged the establishment of large dance halls, such as Cain's Ballroom in Tulsa and Mattie's Ballroom in Longview, where big dance bands often performed. Literally hundreds of beer joints and small establishments appeared as well where music might be provided only by a coin-operated jukebox. Legal alcohol inspired the creation of clubs everywhere, but those that emerged in East Texas oil towns, catering to the needs and desires of oil workers, contributed directly to a new style of country music. The oil boom brought money to communities ravaged by hard times, and fostered the growth of clubs offering drink, dancing, and easy women to receptive men looking for escape. Generally described as honky tonks, and often located on county lines in order to attract patrons from "dry" areas, these clubs encouraged a style of music with a strong danceable beat and lyrics that addressed the temptations, desires, and anxieties of blue-collar workers. The result was a highly electrified body of musical performances that spoke of cheating, drinking, and the sins of the flesh.

Although born in the 1930s, the honky tonks flourished during the war years when rural folk moved to Houston, Beaumont, Texas City, Dallas, Fort Worth, and other industrial areas to become part of the nation's defense production. The clubs and the music heard there did not simply function as social diversion; for many people, the honky tonk also helped to ease their transition from rural to urban life and from agriculture to blue-collar or industrial work. Musicians like Al Dexter, Floyd Tillman, Ted Daffan, Cliff Bruner, Moon Mullican, and Ernest Tubb, all of whom served apprenticeships in these "fighting and dancing" clubs, dominated the country jukeboxes throughout America during the forties and early fifties. Ernest Tubb took his Texas honky tonk style to the Grand Ole Opry in 1942. Before long, singers

everywhere in the United States were trying to emulate the sounds heard on Tubb's records and radio shows. Country music, in short, had taken on a decided Texas cast and tone. By the time the war ended in 1945, the music of Texas was becoming the music of America.

Since World War II, Texas musicians have played vital and transforming roles in American music. A steady procession of singers, musicians, and songwriters, representing virtually every kind of vernacular music, has won national acclaim. These musicians have demonstrated the influence of the performers and styles discussed earlier in this essay, either consciously or unconsciously, but none of them are slavish imitators striving to preserve some ideal of purity (in jazz music such purists have been described as "moldy figs"). The most important performers have been those who created something new and vital out of older materials, and who, like Janis Joplin, have successfully fused individual persona and art. Joplin adored the music of Bessie Smith, but meshed that blues style with elements borrowed from the folk revival and, above all, from 1960s rock culture. Stevie Ray Vaughan, who grew up in the Oak Cliff section of Dallas worshipping the music of the classic blues singers, went on to create his own widely admired style. Before her early and tragic death, Selena became an almost-iconic heroine in the world of Tejano music. With a stage persona clearly inspired by the rock singer, Madonna, Selena combined her barrios-derived style with components borrowed from pop, soul, and salsa music. Willie Nelson never lost his appeal to the honky-tonk community that had nourished his music, but he exhibited an affinity for and an ability to perform virtually every kind of pop music. Steve Earle, who grew up near San Antonio, has been similarly eclectic in musical tastes, on one hand exhibiting the instincts of a folk revival singer-songwriter with his songs of social protest, and on the other displaying the aggressive, almost-nihilistic, energy of a

rock entertainer.

Some singers, including Steve Earle, have been described as neo-traditionalists (a description often given to young country singers whose styles seem grounded in older forms). But, like Earle, these entertainers usually display styles that their predecessors and heroes would scarcely recognize. George Strait, for example, did not become a country superstar because he merely recreated the sounds of Bob Wills and Merle Haggard. His neo-traditionalism instead embodied elements of western swing and the honky tonk sound combined with Strait's smooth pop vocals and cowboy good looks. The Austin band, Asleep at the

Wheel, has become famous for its homage to Bob Wills, but their version of western swing is spiced with enough elements of rock-and-roll to make them palatable to a broad constituency. Only the cowboy singers of today exhibit a tendency to cling to styles and repertoires rooted in the past. But even the Texas singers Don Edwards, Red Steagall, and Michael Martin Murphey, while wearing cowboy costumes and paying tribute to Gene Autry, Roy Rogers, and the Sons of the Pioneers, mix their western songs with other kinds of material (Murphey typically includes in his stage act such hit pop songs as "Wildfire" and "Carolina in the Pines" from his earlier career). Like their predecessors from the Hollywood silver screen, however, the modern cowboy singers perform with smooth harmonies, dexterous yodeling, and jazz-like instrumental riffs

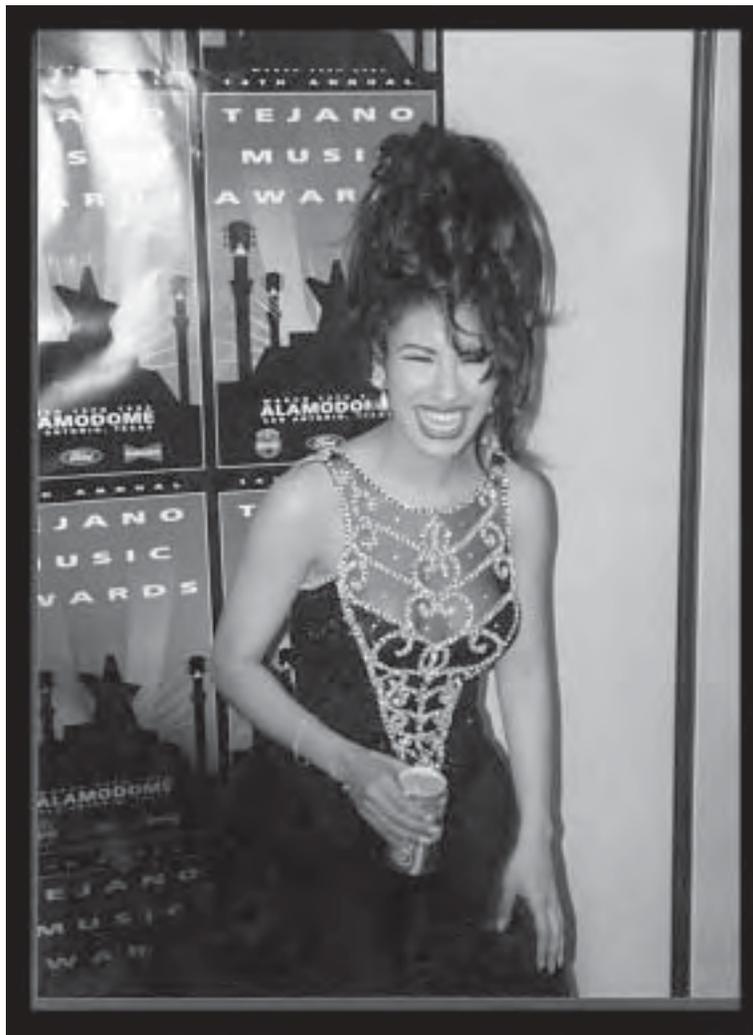


Photo Courtesy of: Tejano Artist Music Museum, Inc.

Selena

never heard in the cattle country.

Although the evidence may not be quite as clear as it is among the cowboy singers, the Texas Myth has touched virtually all Texas musicians. It is clear that the Texas that is celebrated in their mythology (and press agency) is a rural or frontier region still untouched by oil derricks, skyscrapers, or computer technology. We find the Texas musical landscape populated, then, by an assemblage of musicians who ply their trade with technological

tools crafted in the city, but who pay at least symbolic tribute to a mythical land of free-spirited cowboys. ZZ Top, for example, a trio of long-haired musicians from Houston, play some of the most thoroughly urban music heard in America, a high-decibel blues-based style of rock, but they surround themselves with the trappings of frontier nationalism complete with a Texas-shaped stage and a longhorn steer and black buffalo.

Richard "Kinky" Friedman, the self-styled "Texas Jewboy," who pursued a country music career before becoming a best-selling writer of detective stories, is similarly urbane in his irreverence and worldly-wise sophistication, but he wears cowboy boots and hat and a belt buckle emblazoned with the Star of David. Kinky facetiously argues that Jews and cowboys are similar because they both wear their hats in the house! In Austin in the 1970s, the young musicians there displayed a well-publicized brand of Texas nationalism, or what folklorist Nicholas Spitzer described as "romantic regionalism," popularizing a body of styles that drew upon both rock and country elements. Striving to create identities that illustrated both their Texas frontier heritage and their celebration of freedom (in both lifestyle and music), these musicians embraced a cluster of symbols, such as longhorn steers, longneck beers, armadillos, and cowboy costumes, and used them often as logos and illustrations. The bustling and fast-growing city of Austin had become the urban locus of what writer Jan Reid called "the rise of redneck rock." This was the community

that Willie Nelson joined in 1972, when he fled Nashville and the stultifying conservatism that he felt hampered his artistic creativity.

Texans still play decisive roles in American music, and our music would be much poorer without their contributions. As this essay is being written, a trio of dynamic musicians from

Texas known as the Dixie Chicks (Natalie Maines from Lubbock, and two sisters from Dallas, Martie and Emily Erwin) has asserted a dominance in American popular music that few people have equaled. The Erwin sisters can play anything with strings on it, while lead singer Natalie Maines fashions compelling vocals that draw on rock, blues, and country sources. Eclectic in both style and repertoire, the Dixie Chicks project a blend of tradition and modernity that defines the best in Texas music. Hordes of young fans respond enthusiastically to the group, including many young girls truly thrilled and emboldened by the spectacle of fun-loving, good-looking women expertly playing instruments and taking control of their own destinies.

The world continues to be turned on

by Texas music. The word "Austin" still has a magic and commercial ring, and a host of young musicians of varying stylistic persuasions proudly claim an identification with the city. "Austin City Limits," the nationally syndicated public television show, has reached millions of Americans each week since 1976. Thousands descend upon the city each spring to attend a huge cultural con-



Photo Courtesy of: Media relations & Publications, SWT

George Strait

vention known as South By Southwest (SXSW), a showcase for innovative films and music. Still others throng to the Texas Hill Country each Memorial and Labor Day weekend to attend Rod Kennedy's Kerrville Folk Festival, a haven for refugees from the folk revival and a showcase for such singer songwriters as Nanci Griffith and Tish Hinojosa. One can even receive instruction in the performance of bluegrass music at South Plains College in Levelland, Texas, a rather unlikely site for this style of music until 1986 when banjo wizard Alan Munde joined the faculty. Honky tonks, of course, still thrive in the Lone Star State, providing escape and diversion for dancers and passive listeners and venues for performers.

Fortunately, the commercial health of the wide variety of Texas musical styles is clearly in good hands. Since 1990 the Texas Music Office (in the Governor's office) has acted as a clearinghouse for information concerning the state's music industry. Its publication, *Texas Music Industry Directory*, serves as a vehicle for the promotion of all kinds of commercial music ventures. Although such business-oriented efforts are necessary to keep musicians in front of the public, we also need to document, preserve, and commemorate the music they make. Celebrating the Texas musical legacy, however, should not include blurring the lines between fact and fiction. While we can enjoy the cowboy persona and other self-styled Texana that have attached themselves to the music, we must not permit such romantic musings to blind us to the relationship between symbol and song. We should neither ignore nor discard the myths that have surrounded the music and other forms of culture that have issued forth from the state. They are part of being a Texan, and they are played out in our lives in a multitude of ways. The Texas Myth is basically harmless and mostly good fun (except when it is put to politically destructive uses). Myths have shaped public perceptions of Texas music around the world, and a refrain such as "I want to go home to the Armadillo" (heard in the theme song of "Austin City Limits") becomes an anthem of inclusiveness and pride. Yet, it's important to remember that the central reality is that fantasies of cowboy and frontier life have been played out in urban settings and most often by musicians who have fled the very life they sing about or portray in costume and publicity.

Certain assumptions about Texas music cannot be denied. The love of dancing is the central focus of Texas music culture, and a phenomenon that cuts across class and ethnic lines. But while the love of frolic and the sense of *joie de vivre* are salient attributes of Texas music styles, they are far from being the only themes that one finds there. For example, one hears almost no evidence of western swing in the music of Waylon Jennings's, even though this great Texas singer declared in 1975, in a song purportedly performed before a cheering Austin crowd, that "Bob Wills is Still the King." Not only does Jennings' song of tribute contain no element of style that seems attributable to Wills, his revealing autobiography makes no reference to the great western swing pioneer. When Jennings made that particular recording, he was not acknowledging a musical debt; he was paying tribute to a myth. At the date of the recording, Wills in fact had only recently been rescued from undeserved neglect by Merle Hag-

gard and other admirers. One does no disservice to Wills to note that he was only one of several musicians, representing widely disparate styles of performance, who won the hearts of Texas music fans. Wills's famous and strutting stage shout, "ah ha," expresses the joy Texans have often found in music, but Jennings's somber country-blues tunes and George Jones's anguished and clenched-teeth laments remind us of the loneliness and sorrow that have also been our lot. The country music band, Alabama, spoke volumes about the nature of Texas music when they sang "if you want to play in Texas, you gotta have a fiddle in the band." But legions of fans have also found comfort in the music of such Texas gospel groups as the Chuck Wagon Gang and the Stamps Quartet, neither of whom ever found it necessary to have a fiddle in their band. With a simple style of vocal harmony and the accompaniment of only a chorded guitar, the Chuck Wagon Gang has endured for almost seventy years, while winning devoted fans all over the country. First recorded in 1927, the Stamps Quartet similarly extended their influence throughout the nation with the backing of only a piano. The original members of the band have long since passed on, but the Stamps Quartet trademark has remained as the identifying name of similar gospel singers to our own time, evidence of the potent appeal of the name and of this kind of music.

I hope it is understood that I am not suggesting that the Stamps Quartet was the driving force of Texas music (even if the style they fashioned was central to the sound made by Elvis Presley in the 1960s). Nor are my remarks designed to disparage or repudiate the legacy of dancing in Texas culture. Dancing is the central animating impulse that touches and colors the music made by every ethnic and racial group in the state. But it is not the only musical passion that has won the hearts of Texans, nor is it the only style that they have bequeathed to the world. Those of us who document, commemorate, and explain Texas music have the obligation to cast our nets broadly and to tell the stories of all of the styles that have found favor in this state. I have attended too many conferences on Texas music that do little more than celebrate the good-time spirit and anti-commercial impulse that allegedly characterizes the music.

Of course, as these remarks are written I am aware that my own observations may seem narrow in scope. My perspectives are admittedly shaped by what I know best, the music of white, working-class Texans. When I listen to that music, I am conscious of the paradoxes and contradictions that have shaped its content and style and that have influenced its perception throughout the world. I cannot pretend to speak with much authority about the music of Tejanos, Cajuns, African Americans and other groups that have shaped the music of Texas. But I suspect that the plethora of styles created by those Texans have also been colored in various ways by the myth of Texas. Judging from the list of fine critics and scholars who have contributed to the first issue of this journal, I feel that not only is the telling of the complete story of Texas music in capable hands, but also that a constructive dialogue free of chauvinism, cant, and hyperbolae is about to begin. ۛ