



## Jazz Mavericks of the Lone Star State

by Dave Oliphant. (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 2007), Pp. 256, ISBN-13: 978-0-292-71495-3 (cloth), ISBN-13: 978-0-292-71496-0 (paper).

Dave Oliphant is well recognized as perhaps the most passionate chronicler of the Lone Star State and its relationship to jazz. His 1996 monograph, *Texan Jazz*, remains the most detailed history on the subject. Oliphant's new book, *Jazz Mavericks*, features twelve previously published essays and four new articles, all examining topics that the author believes were not adequately addressed in his earlier book.

The first four chapters — “Jazz Mavericks of the Lone Star State,” “The Roots of Texan Jazz,” “From Bebop to Hard Bop and Beyond,” and “Texas Bop Messengers to the World” — provide very good overviews of some of the most significant Texas contributions to jazz history. The following essays delve into more specific jazz-related topics, including jazz's influence on the development of western swing, the role of British fans in bringing worldwide recognition to Texans in jazz, the ways in which European and American discographers helped facilitate research into Texas jazz, and the little-known collaborations between Texan and Wisconsin jazz musicians. One chapter, “San Marcos in Jazz History,” eulogizes the Central Texas town's tremendously influential son, trombonist and electric guitar pioneer Eddie Durham, while two chapters on Ornette Coleman explore the Fort Worth free jazz pioneer's enormous impact on the long-term development of jazz.

Oliphant's interest in Texas jazz is broad-ranging and all-encompassing, as is reflected in his inclusion of jazz literature. “Jazz in Literature” looks at poems and short fiction pieces inspired by various Texas jazz artists. “The Alchemy of Jazz” examines two recent publications, the reissue of Studs Turkel's 1957 classic *Giants of Jazz*, and Alfred Appel Jr.'s *Jazz Modernism from Ellington and Armstrong to Matisse and Joyce*, which includes

Vernon-born trombonist Jack Teagarden, Dallas trumpeter Oran “Hot Lips” Page, and a painting of Thelonius Monk done by a Texas artist.

In another essay on jazz literature, Oliphant explores the crucial role of Austin-based folklorist, Alan Lomax, in documenting the life of Jelly Roll Morton, the legendary New Orleans pianist and self-proclaimed “inventor” of jazz. “A Texas Take on Ken Burns' *Jazz*” applauds the PBS documentary film series' but also points out Burns's glaring omissions of the contributions of so many Texas artists to the development of jazz.

The essays on western swing are useful introductions to this “Jazz of the Southwest” for those jazz aficionados who, like Oliphant, may have never before fully appreciated this unique musical hybrid which borrows so heavily from jazz, country, blues, ragtime, pop, mariachi, swing, and other musical genres found throughout the Southwest. Oliphant's enthusiasm for his own late-in-life discovery of western swing is apparent, although he concludes that it generally does not equal contemporaneous jazz, in terms of complexity and the technical dexterity required of its performers.

Oliphant does attempt to tie Texas jazz into other larger regional musical traditions, especially the blues. Although he suggests that Texas jazz players were perhaps more strongly influenced by blues elements than their contemporaries outside of the state, a clear connection between a unique Texas blues tradition and Texas jazz is never fully established. A comparative analysis of Texan and non-Texan versions of the same jazz tunes might have helped bolster Oliphant's argument in this regard.

Dave Oliphant belongs to the school of jazz critics who are in it exclusively because of their deep appreciation for the art form. His sense of wonder at the beauty and complexity of this uniquely American musical genre pervades most of the writings, regardless of the obscurity of the topic or the angle from which he approaches it. This book is no exception. It provides both useful overviews of major Texan contributions to jazz, as well as interesting angular explorations of specific aspects of its history and historiography.

— Ajay Kalra

## Bonfire of Roadmaps

by Joe Ely, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), Brad and Michelle Moore Roots Music Series, 208 pages with illustrations. ISBN-10: 0292716532 ISBN-13: 978-0292716537

Joe Ely's *Bonfire of Roadmaps* is a road trip without a road map. Ely, using excerpts from his journals on the road, structures his memories in quatrains, using the ballad method to tell his story in this compelling new book. The accompanying CD helps the reader experience the oral history contained in a collection of memories related by the popular Texas singer-songwriter.

In the spirit of Walt Whitman, Jack Kerouac, and Allen Ginsberg, Ely observes the world around him in poignant detail, reporting on wars, politics, history, and the mythology of American culture. His allusions to literature, art, philosophy, and politics help spark a curiosity that makes one want to experience the same sort of adventures on the road. Like the ultimate hero in Joseph Campbell's *Hero's Journey*, Joe Ely had to leave home in order to find home. This lifelong pattern of venturing out into the world only to return home a bit older and wiser each time has given Ely the skills and understanding to weave together a web of meaning through his poetry.

At one point Ely muses, "I look into the eyes of the audience in the dark/ And I see a longing for emotional fulfillment/ Not to be confused with intellectual awareness/ Like concepts, which turn good men into critics" (135). Commenting on both the highs and lows of spending much of one's life traveling, Ely says "The road will balance tomorrow" (142), and "These are the moments we live for/ All else is just Highway and Howdy do" (152).

Similar to Kerouac, who talked of life "from the womb to the tomb," Ely documents his decades-long journey in terms of near-constant motion. Roads, highways, wind, trucks,

and other symbols of restlessness populate his verses. Also, like Whitman and Ginsberg, Ely talks to the people, telling them what his eyes have witnessed. He speaks of his beliefs about life, death, love, and spirit. All the while, the road goes on, as does his own personal evolution. Each tour brings with it new memories, documented in a poetic style with the structure changing at times to match the new content.

Ely's final quatrain invites us to consider quantum physics. "When did Consciousness slap you Awake?! And toss you a Mirror and a tank of Laughing Gas/ Did it leave you on the beach, peering between Stars?! Looking back in Time for a Measly Clue" (192).

In a way, reading this book is like sitting beside Ely as he heads out on another adventure. We sense the dread in his voice upon leaving, even as we hear consistent and affectionate references to Sharon and Maria, the family he leaves behind.

Having been in places where Joe Ely has traveled and played and out among the audiences he describes, it was fascinating to be able to observe those locations and audiences through Ely's eyes. His book carries the reader along on a very personal journey which, in many ways, reflects the larger political, social, and historical issues of our time. This is an important example of homegrown American poetry written by one of the state's most enduring and introspective songwriters.

— Kathleen Hudson

