

## Tejano Proud: Tex-Mex Music in the Twentieth Century

By Guadalupe San Miguel, Jr. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2002).

This is an excellent multidimensional study of música tejana in the twentieth century. Beginning with early attempts by national recording companies to commercialize Texas-Mexican music in the late 1920s, Guadalupe San Miguel, Jr., explores the main stylistic features and adaptations of this diverse genre of music, as well as the major social, political, and cultural forces that shaped its ensembles and styles over the next seventy years. Emphasizing música tejana as a complex array of dynamic musical forms, he discusses the wide range of musical ensembles—the conjunto, vocal groups, progressive conjuntos, orquestas, grupos, and Chicano country bands—that have played it. He analyzes the evolution of música tejana in the context of a borderlands culture that nurtured its growth and creative expression.

San Miguel, Jr., begins by showing that the recording industry by the 1930s had contributed significantly to the growing popularity of conjunto music, particularly among agricultural workers in South and Central Texas. This popularization of conjunto benefitted from immigration, stylistic changes in ensembles and the mix of instruments, Spanish-language radio, and a growing number of jukeboxes, record players, entrepreneurs, and dance promoters. Although record companies and Spanish-language radio stations did record and play corridos, canciones típicas, huapangos, and other styles of music, diversity had become a casualty of the growing commercialization of música tejana by 1941.

The popularity of música tejana after World War II was due in large part to the formation of two recording companies—Discos Ideal, set up by Armando Marroquín and Paco Betancourt in 1947, and Discos Falcon, which was founded by Arnaldo Ramírez a few years later. These companies contributed to the rise of a number of popular Tejano artists who recorded for its label, including several women—particularly Lydia Mendoza, Chelo Silva, and Carmen y Laura—who shaped the Tejano recording industry in the 1950s. Thanks in large part to these recording companies and artists, the orquesta tejana and conjunto dominated all other forms of música tejana through the 1960s.

Although Chicano political activists embraced conjunto as an important cultural expression of the tejano community, conjunto suffered an overall decline in the 1970s and 1980s. San Miguel, Jr., attributes this decline to the rise of a more urban, acculturated Tejano middle class that associated the accordion and conjunto with the more bawdy, rowdy features of working-class culture and life in the barrios. He also points out that with few exceptions—most notably, Steve Jordan and El Rio Jordan and Chavela y Brown Express—conjunto

musicians continued to cling to tradition by playing mostly polkas and rancheras. They failed to incorporate rock and roll, contemporary soul, and other innovative styles that had become popular in the 1960s. As a result, older artists such as Tony de la Rosa, Rubén Vela, and Henry Zimmerle maintained their popularity, but conjunto had little appeal to youth in the 1970s and 1980s.

San Miguel, Jr., calls attention to the important role of Emilio Navaira's music in the resurgence of traditional conjunto in the early 1990s. Because of several adaptations and innovations, including the incorporation of country and rock influences, Navaira enjoyed great popularity and success in the tejano community as he sparked renewed interest in the accordion. The revival of conjunto was nurtured also by an annual conjunto festival in San Antonio, the creation of a traditional and progressive conjunto award category in the annual Tejano Music Awards, a growing number of bilingual tejano FM radio stations, and the expanded role of major record companies in the Tejano music industry.

In the late 1980s, Sony Discos, Capitol-EMI, and other major labels launched a concerted effort to find Tejano crossover groups that might attract audiences in the international Spanish-speaking as well as the domestic English-language market. San Miguel, Jr., points out that this led to selective recordings of cumbias and baladas for audiences in Mexico and Latin America. Among the grupos tejanos that spearheaded efforts to internationalize música tejana in the 1990s were La Mafia, Mazz, and Selena, who toured outside the United States, particularly in Mexico. Selena, who had a number of regional and international hits, developed an impressive repertoire of songs that reflected pop, rap, rock, dance, hip-hop, and *mariachi* influences. She also incorporated choreography and charisma into her performances. At the time of her murder in 1995, she was on the verge of becoming a huge international star.

This is a well-written book that makes important contributions to the history of music, popular culture, and ethnic studies. It is a highly nuanced study that takes into account class, ethnic, and gender considerations, and it pays attention to the important role of dance and instrument arrangements. *Tejano Proud* complements Manuel Peña's excellent book, *Música Tejana*, with whom San Miguel, Jr., has a few minor interpretive differences. I highly recommend it for classroom adoption.

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## Don't Get Above Your Raisin': Country Music and the Southern Working Class

By Bill C. Malone, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002).

Bill Malone is perhaps best known as the author of the still definitive study of American country music, *Country Music U.S.A.* (University of Texas Press, 1968, 1972.) He is arguably the creator of the modern genre of country music scholarship. In this latest volume, Malone presents a highly personal, well-thought-out and revealing discussion of country music and its connection with the southern working class.

Malone begins his study with two basic assumptions: that country music is southern, and that it has an intimate relationship with working people. He discusses, in detail, six realms occupied by country music. These are home, religion, rambling, frolic, humor, and politics.

Southerners and country music fans will find much of interest here. Malone readily admits that his membership in both of these groups colors his observations, but also gives him perceptive insight. Readers will discover themselves thinking, "Oh, yes, I've noticed that and always wondered why."

The discussion of the mother figure in southern culture and music is especially intriguing. Southerners likely never question the special position of "mother" in the South. Malone contrasts the reverential, almost holy position of the Southern mother figure with that of the Southern woman - often characterized in country song as one who cheats and lies and is often murdered. It is an interesting paradox.

Also fascinating is the discussion of the southern male, the "rambler" character and the development of the concept of Southern "honor." One can readily see, in stereotypes of contemporary Southern men, the continuation of cultural themes that originated in Europe centuries ago.

Bluegrass music is often overlooked or undervalued in discussions of country music. Malone gives this music its due here and identifies bluegrass as a vital sub-style which still embraces the classic country music themes.

The field of modern country music scholarship, for which Malone is largely responsible is filled with discussions of the music and its origins. This study of the people who developed, nurtured, and lived it, is long overdue. Malone debunks the popular notion that American country music is Celtic or Elizabethan in origin. Scholars who wrote early descriptions of rural Southern music (perhaps feeling the music was inferior) found it more palatable and deserving of attention if they could connect it to a more elegant past.

Malone makes no such apologies for country music and confronts it head on as it is, rather than how a lesser scholar might wish it to be. Indeed, American country music is deserving of serious study because of its origins and development among the American southern working class, not despite them.

Malone is at his strongest when he discusses artists and music from the early classic country music era. Historical perspective and his obvious love of the subject matter result in interesting and informative discussions of country music and southern culture from before the advent of recording to the 1970s. This reader is less comfortable with Malone's discussion of and conclusions about more recent artists and their music. Malone also may give too much import to performers on the periphery of mainstream country music, such as Iris Dement, Tish Hinojosa, and James Talley. Discussion of country music and southern culture since the 1980s is perhaps best left to future authors.

Despite these reservations, this work is highly recommended to students of southern culture and country music fans with an interest in the origins and culture of the music. It is a valuable addition to the literature of country music.

Joe Carr

# et al.: Reviews ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTORS

## **Gary Hartman**

is a History Professor and Director of the Center for Texas Music History at Southwest Texas State University. Recent publications include the introductory chapter “The Roots Run Deep: An Overview of Texas Music History” in *The Roots of Texas Music*, Texas A&M University Press, 2003.

## **Rush Evans**

is a graduate of the University of Texas Communications program and a free-lance music writer focusing primarily on Texas music and its rich history. He is a frequent contributor to *Discoveries*, a national music collectors magazine, where he has published articles about Willie Nelson, Kinky Friedman, The Flatlanders, and many others. He has been a Texas radio and television broadcaster for 20 years.

## **Sherrie Tucker**

is Assistant Professor of American Studies at the University of Kansas, Lawrence, and author of *Swing Shift: “All-Girl” Bands of the 1940s* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000). She was very honored to have been the convocation speaker for the Prairie View Founders Day and Honors Convocation on March 27, 2002.

## **Joe Carr**

is a string musician and a music instructor at South Plains College in Levelland, Texas. He has produced numerous instructional video tapes and books for Mel Bay Publishing and others. He is the co-author with Alan Munde of *Prairie Nights to Neon Lights: The Story of Country Music in West Texas* (Texas Tech University Press, 1995). He and colleague Alan Munde perform regularly as a musical duo.

## **Gregg Andrews**

is a Professor of History and Assistant Director of the Center for Texas Music History at Southwest Texas State University. He is an award-winning author of three books: *Insane Sisters: Or, the Price Paid for Challenging a Company Town* (University of Missouri Press, 1999); *City of Dust: A Cement Company Town in the Land of Tom Sawyer* (University of Missouri Press, 1996); and *Shoulder to Shoulder? The American Federation of Labor, The United States, and Mexican Revolution* (University of California Press, 1991). A former Andrew Mellon Humanities Fellow and National Endowment for the Humanities Fellow, he is currently working on a book on labor and culture in Texas during the Great Depression. He is also a singer-songwriter who uses public performances, classrooms, and scholarship to integrate music and history.

## **Nolan Porterfield**

Noland Porterfield grew up in Texas and holds degrees from Texas Tech and the University of Iowa. He is the author of *Jimmie Rodgers: The Life and Times of America’s Blue Yodeler*, and *Last Cavalier: The life and Times of John A. Lomax*. His novel, *A Way of Knowing*, won the Best Texas Novel Award from the Texas Institute of Letters. He lives near Bowling Green, Kentucky,