

The Journal of

Volume 1 Number 1

TEXAS MUSIC HISTORY

Spring 2001



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Letter from the Director



It's hard to believe that it's been only a year since we celebrated the inauguration of the Institute for the History of Texas Music at Southwest Texas State University. With the hard work and generous support of so many people, we've accomplished far more than we ever imagined we could in such a short time.

Our graduate and undergraduate courses on the history of Texas music have proven so

popular, that we've expanded the undergraduate class size for Fall 2001. We're busy working with the Texas State Historical Association and the Texas Music Office to publish the *Handbook of Texas Music*, the definitive encyclopedia of Texas music history. Our students will have contributed nearly 200 articles to the *Handbook* by the time it's finished in 2002. Working with the Texas Music Office, we also completed an extensive online bibliography of books, articles, and other publications relating to the history of Texas music. One of our upcoming projects this summer is to build an electronic database of Texas music archival collections from across the state.

We're very proud to have recently released our first compilation CD, entitled *Travelin' Texas*, which includes eighteen songs from such widely diverse Texas artists as Asleep at the Wheel, Tish Hinojosa, Marcia Ball, Joe Ely, Shake Russell, Step Rideau & the Zydeco Outlaws, Aztex, Slaid Cleaves, W. C. Clark, and others. Sales of the CD have helped fund our ongoing educational projects. We are very grateful to all the musicians who gave so generously of their time and talent.

We're also excited about our new "Texas Music History Unplugged" lecture series, which will bring prominent Texas musicians to campus to perform and discuss how Texas music reflects the rich history and tremendous cultural diversity of the Southwest. On March 20, 2001, this event featured celebrated Texas singer/songwriter Tish Hinojosa, multiple Grammy Award win-

ner Ray Benson, rising star Terri Hendrix, acclaimed musician/producer Lloyd Maines, and accordion virtuoso Joel Guzmán.

This year, the Institute added two important new collections to the university's Texas Music Archives: The Texas Heritage Music Foundation archives and the Guadalupe San Miguel, Jr. archives. These new collections are an important part of our effort to work with other organizations, such as the Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin, the Texas Music Museum in Austin, and the University of Texas at San Antonio Institute of Texan Cultures, to preserve and study the musical heritage of the Southwest.

We've also been very active in community outreach programs, through which we've given presentations at public schools, community centers, and conferences to demonstrate how Texas music reflects the history and culture of the Southwest. As a result of our efforts, the Institute has received attention from a variety of newspapers, magazines, journals, and radio and television stations, including *Billboard Magazine*, one of the music industry's most prestigious international publications.

The premier issue of *The Journal of Texas Music History* marks another milestone in our brief but very productive history. It will be the first academic journal to focus on the entire spectrum of Texas music history. We believe it will be an important addition to the existing scholarship on American music history, and, we hope, of great interest to everyone who loves Texas music and Texas history.

My sincerest thanks to Kitty Ledbetter, Gregg Andrews, Ann Marie Ellis, Gene Bourgeois, Gerald Hill, T. Cay Rowe, César Limón, Diana Harrell, Vikki Bynum, Mark Busby, Dickie Heaberlin, Richard Owen Baish, and everyone else who helped make this possible. We hope you enjoy *the Journal*, and we invite you to contact us for more information on the Institute and our programs.

Sincerely,

Gary Hartman, Ph.D.

Director, Institute for the History of Texas Music
Southwest Texas State University



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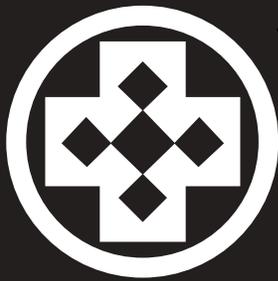


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The Journal of TEXAS MUSIC HISTORY

c o n t e n t s

Spring 2001

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Volume 1 Number 1

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The **Journal of Texas Music History** is published Fall and Spring by the Institute for the History of Texas Music at Southwest Texas State University. The contents of this journal do not necessarily represent the views of the University.

Subscription Annual subscription rates for the United States and North America are \$10 for individuals and \$15 for institutions. For outside of North America, please add \$5. Address subscription correspondence to Kathryn Ledbetter, Department of English, Southwest Texas State University, San Marcos, TX 78666-4616.

Article Submissions Please submit two copies of manuscripts in Microsoft Word format conforming to Chicago Style to the above address. Please include 3.5 inch disk. Manuscripts may also be submitted as an email attachment to the editor at KLedbetter@swt.edu.

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NEGRO SPIRITUALS

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Published by G. S. BROWN Co., Inc. 11 West 42nd Street, NEW YORK, N. Y.

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The Journal of TEXAS MUSIC HISTORY

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ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTORS

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Bill C. Malone was born in Smith County, Texas on August 25, 1934 on a farm near the Van Zandt county line. His doctoral dissertation at the University of Texas in Austin became *Country Music, USA*, the first general history of country music. He taught at Tulane University in New Orleans for twenty-five years, and now lives in retirement in Madison, Wisconsin, where his wife works as the director of the Office of School Services at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin. Bill has completed a new book, *Don't Get Above Your Raisin': Country Music and the Southern Working Class*, which will be published at the end of this year by the University of Illinois Press. He is also the host of a Wednesday morning radio show on WORT-FM in Madison — "Back to the Country," a three-hour program of recorded music devoted to classic country music.

Kevin E. Mooney is a lecturer of Musicology at The University of Texas at Austin, Southwest Texas State University, and Armstrong Community Music School of Austin Lyric Opera. His article, "Defining Texas Music: Lota May Spell's Contributions," was published in the Spring 2000 issue of *The Bulletin of the Society for American Music*, and he has contributed several articles to the forthcoming *Handbook of Texas Music*.

Dave Oliphant is coordinator of the Freshman Seminars Program at UT Austin. His principal publications are *Texan Jazz* (University of Texas Press, 1996), and his contributions on jazz to the *Handbook of Texas*. His other main interest is poetry, and his latest publication is a 300-page poetry sequence, *Memories of Texas Towns & Cities*, published in 2000 by Host Publications.

Guadalupe San Miguel, Jr., is Associate Professor of History at the University of Houston. Recent publications include *Brown, Not White: School integration and the Chicano Movement* (Texas A & M University Press 2001), *Let All of Them Take Heed: Mexican Americans and the Quest for Educational Equality*, (University of Texas Press, 1987; reissued by Texas A & M University Press, 2001); and various articles on Mexican American history. His most recent project is *Nuestra Música: Texas Mexican Music in the 20th Century*, forthcoming this year from Texas A & M University Press.

Joe Nick Patoski is Senior Editor for *Texas Monthly*, with previous stints as a radio broadcaster, a stringer for *Rolling Stone*, and reporter and columnist for the *Austin American-Statesman*. He is co-author of *Stevie Ray Vaughan: Caught in the Crossfire* (1993) and *Selena: Como la Flor*, both published by Little, Brown and Company. He also contributed a chapter to the *Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock and Roll*.

Andy Wilkinson is a poet, song writer, singer, and playwright whose particular interest is the history and peoples of the Great Plains. Andy has recorded five albums of original music and has written two plays, *Charlie Goodnight's Last Night*, performed by Mr. Barry Corbin, and the musical drama, *My Cowboy's Gift*. He has produced several recordings for other artists, among them *Heart's Compass* and *Ridin' Old Paint: Documenting the Canadian River Breaks Fiddle Tradition*. His work has received several awards, including the Texas Historical Foundation's John Ben Shepperd Jr. Craftsmanship Award, and three National Western Heritage "Wrangler" Awards, two for original music and one for poetry. In addition to his writing, he tours extensively in a variety of venues in the U.S. and abroad and teaches in the Honors College of Texas Tech University.

SPECIAL THANKS

Bill Ham and Bob Small at Lone Wolf Management
Wayne Beadles at Harsfield Design
Connie Gibbons of the Buddy Holly Center
Freddy Fender Music
Marcelo Tafoya of the Tejano Artist Music Museum, Inc.

DONORS

One year ago this month, Southwest Texas State University inaugurated The Institute for the History of Texas Music before a standing-room-only crowd of students, faculty, and music and business professionals. Our reputation is rapidly growing, as we become a unique, important, and long-overdue interdisciplinary educational program designed to help students and the general public better understand how music reflects the richly diverse ethnic and cultural heritage of the American Southwest.

In our brief life as the Institute for the History of Texas Music, we have initiated many exciting educational and cultural events:

-  *The Journal of Texas Music History* - a new journal featuring thought-provoking scholarly articles written by the region's best music historians.
-  "Texas Music History Unplugged" - a public lecture/concert series, its first event featuring celebrated Texas singer/songwriter Tish Hinojosa, multiple Grammy Award winner Ray Benson, rising star Terri Hendrix, producer Lloyd Maines, and accordion virtuoso Joél Guzman.
-  *Travelin' Texas*, a CD showcasing 18 selections from widely diverse Texas artists such as Shake Russell, Joe Ely, Marcia Ball, Slaid Cleaves, Step Rideau & the Zydeco Outlaws, Aztex, and W. C. Clark.
-  The acquisition of two important new archival collections, the Texas Heritage Music Foundation archives and the Guadalupe San Miguel, Jr. archives, valuable additions to our growing Texas Music Archives.

Because of help and hard work from many friends, we have achieved much in a short time. However, we do not yet have a budget to sustain biannual publication of our new journal, nor can we continue to offer public programs and build archives without substantial operating funds.

We want to continue our efforts to preserve the musical heritage of the Southwest, while helping increase awareness of how Texas music represents the unique historical development of the region. Please help us achieve our goals with your contribution.

YES I want to support the Institute for the History of Texas Music with a tax-deductible gift that will help to preserve and study the Southwest's musical heritage. Gifts of \$30 or more will include a subscription to *The Journal of Texas Music History* and news about upcoming "Texas Music History Unplugged" programs and other events.

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Texas Myth/Texas Music

By Bill C. Malone



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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

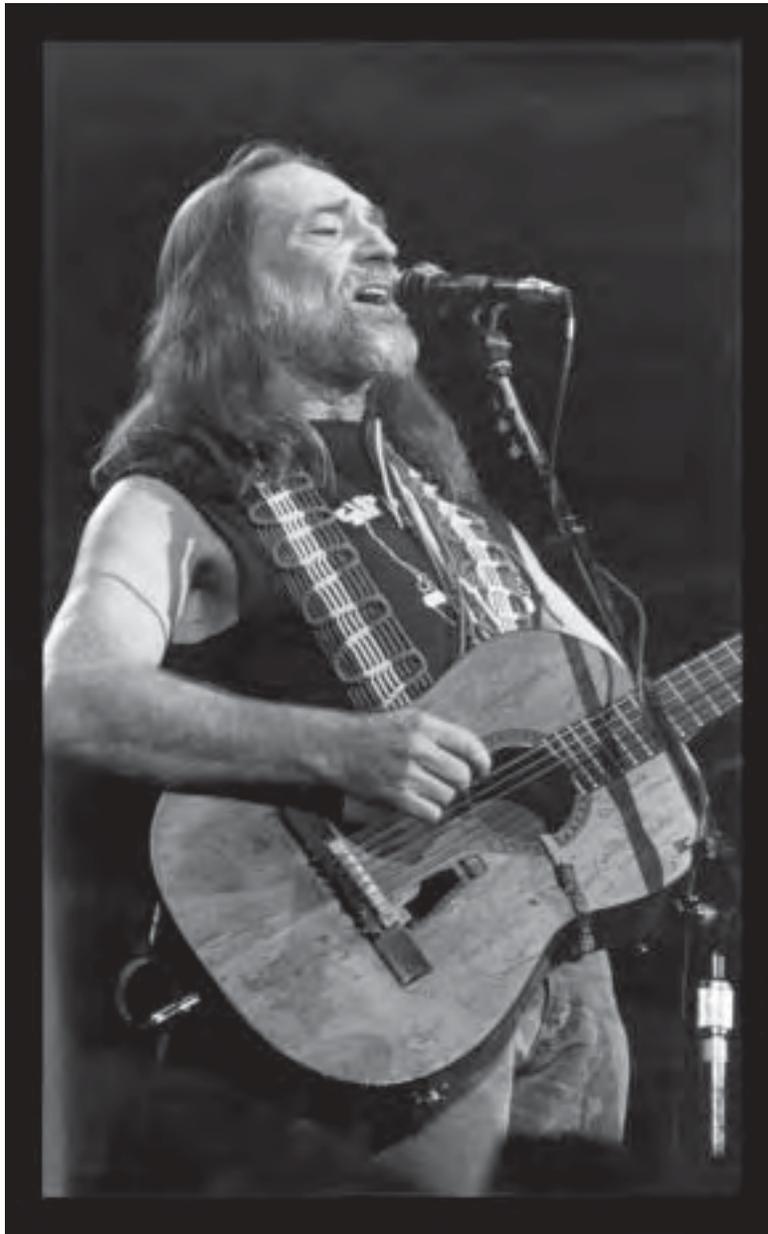


Photo Courtesy of: Media relations & Publications, SWT

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 consolations

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. ۛ

"Uno, Dos, One,

That count-off introduction to "Wooly Bully," the song that forever etched Sam Samudio into the institutional memory of pop as Sam the Sham, the turbaned hepcat who led his Pharoahs out of the east Dallas barrio to the big time, holds the key to understanding Tex-Mex and where it fits in the cosmos of all things rock and roll. The rest of the modern world may have perceived the bilingual enumeration as some kind of exotic confection, an unconventional beginning to a giddy rhythm ride of insane craziness. For Samudio, though, screaming "uno, dos, one, two, tres, cuatro" was just doing what comes naturally to a teenager growing up in two cultures in a place not far from the Rio Grande where the First World meets the Third World, and where the Tex meets the Mex.



Two, Tres, Quatro. . .” By Joe Nick Patoski

“Uno, Dos, One, Two, Tres, Quatro. . .”

It’s been an ongoing process since Germans and Bohemians bearing accordions arrived in the Texas-Mexico borderlands fresh off the boat from Europe as early as the 1840s. Their traditions and instruments were quickly embraced by Mexican Texans, or Tejanos, who picked up the squeezebox and incorporated polkas, waltzes, the schottische and the *redowa* into their dance repertoires alongside *rancheras*, boleros, and *huapangos*.

The diatonic button accordion and bajo sexto twelve string guitar, which provided the bass line and was imported from the Mexican interior, became the cornerstones of sound known as *norteño* in northern *México*, and *conjunto* on the Texas side of the Rio Grande. Its pioneers, who enjoyed significant record sales beginning in the 1930s, were accordionists Bruno Villareal; Valerio Longoria; Santiago Jiménez; Narcisco Martínez, *El Huracán del Valle* (the Hurricane of the Rio Grande Valley), whose polkas were also marketed to bohemians under the pseudonym of the Polski Kwartet and to Cajuns as Louisiana Pete; and Lydia Mendoza, *La Alondra de la Frontera*, the (Lark of the Border), who became the first Tejana singing star with a string of hit recordings, including her sizzling put-down of bad men, “Mal Hombre,” that sold across the United States and Latin America.

The emergence of these artists coincided with gringos in Texas soaking up Mexican sounds and selling them to their audiences, such as western swing’s Bob Wills & His Texas Playboys, who added standards such as “El Rancho Grande” and “Jalisco” to their dance cards. This tradition of borrowing and reinventing has been ongoing ever since. The story songs, or *corridos*, of Mexican *guitarreros*, for instance, inspired modern cowboy music and gave Marty Robbins something to croon about in “Streets of Laredo” and “El Paso.”

It took rock and roll to give Tex-Mex real currency. From the Tex perspective, Buddy Holly’s distinctive *vaquero* lilt that epitomized “Heartbeat” and “Brown Eyed Handsome Man,” a styling later recaptured by El Paso’s Bobby Fuller Four on “I Fought The Law,” and the saucy hip-shaking beat of “Tequila” by the Champs, an instrumental trio of white boys from Abilene, Texas, blazed the trail. The Mex half of the proposition was articulated to the world by Richie Valens, the pride and joy of East Los Angeles, California, who took a *son jarocho* classic from Veracruz state in Mexico called “La Bamba,” and revved and twanged it up into something new and completely different. It was no coincidence that Valens told Holly he wanted him to produce his next record just before both artists were killed in a plane crash in Iowa on February 3, 1959.

Before Valens stormed onto the charts, though, a handsome young man named Baldemar Huerta, performing under the name of Freddy Fender, was already honing a reputation in the Rio Grande Valley of deep South Texas as the Tex-Mex Elvis. Fender, also known as El Bebop Kid, played to his audience by singing rock and roll and blues in Spanish and English, and had already

broken into the mainstream with his 1956 Top 40 hit sung in English, “Wasted Days, Wasted Nights,” a guaranteed bellyrubber on the dance floor.

In fact, Mexican Americans all over Texas were doing their own interpretation of rock and roll, filtering it through an ethnic gauze that rendered the music slower and more rhythm-heavy, swaying and braying with backbeats that accentuated hip shaking and framed around a singer voicing sentiments forever sincere, my dearest darling, *con cariño*. Like all variations of early rock, black music provided the strongest influences—blues, rhythm ‘n blues, doo wop, soul—only Tex-Mex threw those sounds back into the mainstream simmered in spice and salsa. Groups from San Antonio’s El West Side, such as Charlie and the Jives and Sonny Ace y los Twisters, were just as fluent in Louis Prima, and just as prone to cover Bobby Blue Bland and Little Junior Parker as their white and black *compadres*, while doo-wop was the bread and butter of The Royal Jesters, Rudy and the Reno Bops, and Los Dinos. All of the above were regional stars, thanks to thriving recording scenes in San Antonio, Corpus Christi, and the Rio Grande Valley, and radio shows like Joe

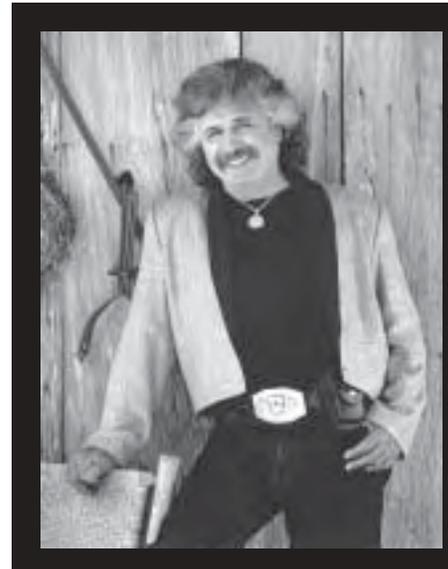


Photo Courtesy of: Reprise Records
Freddy Fender

Anthony’s Harlem Hit Parade in San Antonio, which devoted heavy airplay to South Texas acts. Their successes proved Mexican Americans were just as crazy about rock and roll in all its forms as anybody else, and affirmed how rock and roll transcended cultures and languages to become the first global music.

San Antonio’s Sunny and the Sunliners became the first Mexican-American group from Texas to earn an appearance on television’s American Bandstand with their 1962 hit “Talk to Me,” on which vocalist Sunny Ozuna emulated the vocal stylings of R & B singer Little Willie John. Ozuna’s previous group, the Sunglows, already enjoyed some notoriety for their peppy instrumental polka, “Peanuts,” which was the Chicano answer to the Bill Doggett Combo’s rhythm ‘n blues stroll, “Honky Tonk (Part Two),” cowritten by Clifford Scott, the San Antonio saxophonist in Doggett’s band who unwittingly influenced the Tex-Mex horn sound.

The same British Invasion led by the Beatles that put a damper on many American regional styles of music launched Tex-Mex into international prominence, led by Sam the Sham’s “Wooly Bully” in

From The Collection of the Buddy Holly Center. Photographer Dick Cole, 1958.

1965 and followed by "96 Tears" by Mark and the Mysterians, a band of Mexican-American teens from Michigan with deep family roots in Texas. Both songs shared more than a few dynamic similarities to English bands, such as Manfred Mann and the Zombies.

Sometimes Tex-Mex is more subtle, as in the case of ZZ Top, who've paid tribute to Tex-Mex with songs like "Heard It On the X" and "Mexican Blackbird," touring with a mariachi as opening act, dressing up in sombreros on album covers, and wearing their hearts on their sleeves, down to the foldout photograph of a Tex-Mex Number Two Dinner as the inside cover of their 1973 breakout album, *Tres Hombres*. This, too, is Tex-Mex. So was Stevie Ray Vaughan, with mariachi outfits worn at Carnegie Hall.

But no single performer grasped the atmospheric of Tex-Mex quite like Doug Sahm, a white boy from San Antonio who was a child prodigy on the steel guitar and whose life changed when he saw Freddy Fender perform at a San Antonio drive-in movie theater in 1958. "She's About A Mover" by Sahm's band, the Sir Douglas Quintet, was produced by Houston indie Huey P. Meaux, who'd also overseen Sunny & the Sunliners' "Talk To Me." "Mover" bore a striking beat-on-top-of-the-beat resemblance to *Rubber Soul* vintage Beatles, a connection underscored by Meaux's crafty determination to dress up the group in Carnaby Street fashions and pass them off as English, rather than Texan. "Just don't open your mouths," Meaux advised his clients (which they didn't until they made an appearance on television's "*Hullabaloo*" and blew their disguise forever). The "beat-on-the-beat" may have sounded British, but any Texas aficionado could hear Augie Meyer's trademark roller rink Vox organ for what it was—a chili bowl synthesis of bajo sexto guitar backbeat and accordion riffing on a modified polka.

The SDQ fled Texas for the freedom of San Francisco just about the same time a Rio Grande Valley cat with an eyepatch named Steve Jordan covered the Vanilla Fudge's "You Keep Me Hanging On" with his button accordion, singing in both English and Spanish in a style identified on the 45 rpm version as "accordeon psicodelico."

Sahm returned to Texas in the early seventies, setting up shop in Austin up the road from San Antonio, paying tribute to his hometown roots by assembling an all-star band including Meyers and saxophonist Rocky Morales and El West Side Horns. One track on the record, "Wasted Days, Wasted Nights," was dedicated to Freddy Fender, "wherever you are."

His followup, *Doug Sahm and Band* for Atlantic, was hyped for its superstar lineup of supporting musicians, specifically Bob Dylan. While sales were negligible, the recording was noteworthy for introducing San Antonio accordionist Flaco Jiménez to the world, the first time the much-maligned instrument was prominently featured as a rock and roll ensemble piece since Bill Haley & the Comets. Jiménez's participation was not lost on musicologist Ry Cooder, who spent several months in Texas learning bajo sexto guitar while following Jiménez to *conjunto* dances and issuing the album *Chicken*

Skin Music to show what he learned—this some twenty years before Cooder "discovered" the Buena Vista Social Club and Cuban roots music. Peter Rowan, a folk roots rocker from California, followed in Cooder's footsteps and moved to Texas where he collaborated extensively with Jiménez, while Sahm's next album for Atlantic included an original, "Soy Chicano," that was embraced by Mexican Americans in Texas as an anthem of brown pride.

In 1974, Sir Doug's shoutout to Freddy Fender led to the rediscovery of the old Tex-Mex rocker, whose career ended when he did time in Angola prison in Louisiana for possession of two marijuana joints. Fender, who was working as a mechanic and going to night clubs, came out of retirement to perform with Sahm in Austin while Huey P. Meaux produced recordings that led to Fender's rebirth as a country pop crooner, topping the Billboard pop charts with two number one hits, "Before the Next Teardrop Falls," and a reworked version of "Wasted Days, Wasted Nights."

Meanwhile, Tejanos, the term most often describing Mexican Texans in the wake of Chicano awareness, were lifting elements of rock and roll into their own regional style which was aimed at Mexican-American audiences, led by Little Joe Hernandez of Little Joe and the Latinaires. Hernandez, too, left Texas to do his own west coast residency in the early seventies, emulating the Latin rock of Santana and Malo before returning home as Little Joe y La Familia and adding salsa, rock, and a raised consciousness to the Tejano mix, ultimately setting the stage for the crossover stardom of the singer Selena in the early nineties before her tragic death in 1995 at the hand of her fan club president.

On the Tex side, Sahm was followed in the eighties by Joe King Carrasco's "Jalapeno con Big Red" and his punked up version of Tex-Mex called Nuevo Wavo and Brave Combo's nuclear polka and Sahm's own reborn Border Wave sound. Then, on the heels of supergroups such as the Traveling Wilburys, Sahm hooked up with sidekick Augie Meyers, his mentor Freddy Fender, and Flaco Jiménez to form the Texas Tornados, the Tex-Mex supergroup who racked up a couple of Grammys and the biggest chart action for Tex-Mex since the mid sixties.

The process of border hybridization has continued unabated, from Randy Garibay's chicano blues; the Tex-Mex ska of Plastina Mosh from Monterrey, Mexico, and Los Skarnales from Houston; the Mavericks' (from Miami) Latinized take on country, the South Park Mexican's version of rap; and Los Super Seven following in the footsteps of the Texas Tornados in carrying on the supergroup tradition. Flaco Jiménez has gone on to record with the Rolling Stones, Santana, Linda Ronstadt, Dwight Yoakum, and Steven Stills, Tex-Mexing their respective sounds as it were. His most recent collaboration with country singer Buck Owens on Jiménez's album *Sleepytown*, a cover of the Beatles's "Love Me Do," brings the whole Tex-Mex link to the British Invasion, full circle.

A bit convoluted, perhaps, but Sam Samudio can tell you, it's really all as easy as counting "one, two, tres, cuatro. ■"



Photo Courtesy of: Savoy Jazz Records

Texas Bebop Messengers to the World: Kenny Dorham and Leo Wright

By Dave Oliphant

*Coming as I do to the study of history as a student of literature, I have found that a little-known short story by Edgar Allan Poe aptly presents the "revisionist" attitude that I took toward my historical survey, *Texan Jazz*, soon after it was published by the University of Texas Press in 1996. Having traced the contributions of Texas musicians to jazz history over a period of almost one hundred years, from Scott Joplin's "Maple Leaf Rag" of 1899 through Blind Lemon Jefferson's 1920s country blues and on to Marchel Ivery and Cedar Walton's 1994 recording of "Every Time We Say Goodbye," I came, after the publication of my book, to appreciate greatly the views on revising a work of history as expressed by the Egyptian character in Poe's short story entitled "Some Words With a Mummy."*

According to Poe's character, who is literally shocked back to life by a group of American Egyptologists who jokingly apply to his mummified body a galvanic charge from a voltaic battery, the Egyptian philosophers of the mummy's distant day-following discovery of the embalming principle-were struck by the idea that it would much advance the interests of science if life were lived in installments. In this way,

An historian, for example, would write a book with great labor and then get himself carefully embalmed; leaving instructions to his executors pro tem, that they should cause him to be revived after the lapse of a certain period-say five or six hundred years. Resuming existence at the expiration of this term, he would invariably find his great work converted into a species of hap-hazard note-

book-that is to say, into a kind of literary arena for the conflicting guesses, riddles, and personal squabbles of whole herds of exasperated commentators.

Poe's mummy goes on to say that the revived Egyptian historian, after finding his work distorted by annotations and emendations of later historians, would rewrite it and thus prevent history "from degenerating into absolute fable."¹

What interests me about Poe's short story is not so much its satire of the way that historians question and perhaps distort the work of their fellow scholars, but rather the notion that, were we able to return to our writings five hundred years hence, we would surely see them differently and would feel the need to revise them thoroughly. As a matter of fact, in my own case, it



Courtesy of Savoy Jazz Records

took far less than a single year before I wished that I could revise what I had written, and especially what I had said, or failed to say, about a jazz trumpet player by the name of Kenny Dorham, who was born near Fairfield, Texas, on August 30, 1924, who attended high school in Austin and Wiley College in Marshall, and who became one of the preeminent figures in the bebop and hardbop periods of jazz history.

Even though, after finishing my book on Texan jazz, I believed that I had covered Kenny Dorham's career as fully as I could within the limitations of a history filled with numerous important figures, it was not long before I came upon a group of compact discs which had not been available at the time of my writing. Such a discovery of additional material is not unusual in any field of study, for new information often emerges only after a book is in print. And while further data need not change a writer's essential view of a historical figure, I immediately saw that the unknown CDs would have been extremely helpful in establishing more substantially a central thesis of my book, namely, that a Texas background influenced the kind of jazz produced by Texas musicians. These newly released CDs also altered my conception of Kenny Dorham as an artist, since they demonstrated to me that I had not given this jazzman the full credit he was due as an instrumentalist and a creative thinker.

What I discovered through one recording—originally made January 10, 1960, and reissued in 1995 as *The Kenny Dorham Memorial Album*—was that, as a boy growing up on a farm in Post Oak, Texas, the trumpeter had had “aspirations of becoming a top cowhand and being able to yodel and sing songs like the horsemen of the West.” As Dorham goes on to say, “The Gene Autry-type yodelers and the local cowboys were mostly white. I had a black satin two-year-old pony with a white, diamond-shaped spot in the middle of his forehead. He was equipped with a Sears & Roebuck western saddle, bridle and halter.”² One of the tunes included on the 1960 memorial album is entitled “I’m an Old Cowhand,” and the appeal of this piece for Dorham may be accounted for in part by his early attraction to ranch life, which, as he seems to suggest, was unusual for a Black in the Fairfield area, even though there had always been Black cowboys in Texas.³ But, more importantly, Dorham's performance of “I’m an Old Cowhand” reveals much about the jazz artistry of this native Texan who traded his bridle for Bebop.

Written in 1936 by Johnny Mercer, a native of Savannah, Georgia, “I’m an Old Cowhand” was conceived at the time during a trip that Mercer and his wife took across the state of Texas. Refer-

ence in the lyrics to the Rio Grande River establishes the specific setting, and this must have been important to Dorham as a Texan. Yet the melody itself—the only one ever composed by lyricist Mercer—was undoubtedly the most attractive feature of the piece. Curiously, Mercer's melody is based on a famous English tune, “Westminster Chimes,” which was itself inspired by the clock in the tower of the Parliament building in London. Dorham possibly heard Mercer's song when it was sung in a 1941 movie by Roy Rogers, but certainly it seems that the combination of the cowboy connection and the enduring English tune stimulated the trumpeter's musical imagination.⁴ Dorham's improvised variations on the Mercer tune are pure jazz, with his glissandos and flutter-tongued notes lending to the melody a unique quality that is so different from the song's British source or the lyricist's comic treatment of Dorham's Lone Star state. Indeed, the Texan's inventive handling of the theme represents a vital feature of the art of jazz.

What makes jazz so special is difficult to define, but hearing Kenny Dorham perform this type of music makes it clear that any definition would include the blend of varied sounds that has gone into its creation. As played by Dorham, this one piece, “I’m an Old Cowhand,” brings together two continents and a wide range of human expression, from joy and playfulness to technical and intellectual ingenuity. And this was characteristic of Dorham's work as a jazz artist by the time he spent two years as the trumpeter in the Charlie Parker Quintet, which in May of 1949 traveled to Europe for the first Paris International Jazz Festival where it proved to be “one of the greatest and purest bop units . . . producing . . . some of the finest small-group bop ever heard in France.”⁵ It was at that time that Dorham incorporated into his recorded solo on “Out of Nowhere” a phrase from Australian composer Percy Grainger's *Country Gardens*.⁶ The reach and all-encompassing nature of jazz are indicated not only by these examples of differing types of music coming together in the playing of a Texas jazzman, but also by the worldwide impact of jazz, which, as “the most democratic music on this planet” and a symbol of freedom, has even been credited in some quarters with the Glasnost movement that revolutionized the Soviet Union.⁷

On a smaller scale, we can witness the effect of jazz abroad through recordings that Kenny Dorham made in Norway and Denmark with jazz musicians from those two Scandinavian countries. In 1960 Dorham recorded in Oslo and in 1963 in Copenhagen. On the second of these visits, the trumpeter composed a piece entitled “Scandia Skies” as a tribute to the region that received him so warmly.⁸ On the earlier trip to Norway, Dorham recorded with three Norwegians a tune entitled “Lament,” by American jazz trombone virtuoso J.J. Johnson.⁹ “Lament” had already been recorded in 1957 by trumpet legend

Miles Davis on a landmark album entitled *Miles Ahead*, which brought wide-spread recognition to Davis's introspective, elliptical style of playing.¹⁰ Dorham's 1960 performance of Johnson's tune thus represents a jazz tradition which the Texan shared with his fellow musicians in Norway. However, Dorham's own interpretation of "Lament" is different from the Davis version but equally moving, a very personal approach which is characteristic of Kenny's more direct statement of feeling (an attribute as well of Hardbop) and which also exemplifies the individual expression possible within the larger jazz tradition. The highly expressive, emotive power of Dorham's playing comes through fully on this 1960 performance, in spite of the fact that the recording is marred by distortion from the taping and reproductive process in Oslo.

Even before Dorham traveled to Scandinavia in the 1960s, the trumpeter apparently had already exhibited a musical connection with this part of the world. On a recording made on December 15, 1953, of "Osmosis," a tune by Osie Johnson, Dorham had quoted from what sounds to me like Norwegian composer Edvard Grieg's incidental music to Henrik Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*.¹¹ As I have discovered since the publication of *Texan Jazz*, Dorham often incorporated in his trumpet solos the same phrase that seems to derive from the "Anitra's Dance" section of Grieg's *Peer Gynt Suite*. This phrase can be heard in the Texan's solos on his own tune "Minor's Holiday" and on "Basheer's Dream" from March 29, 1955; on his own tune "The Theme" recorded on November 23, 1955 (with Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers, of which Dorham was a founding member); on "Man of Moods," from May 22, 1956; on his tune "Mexico City" from May 31, 1956; and on "Why Not?" from March 13, 1961.¹² I hasten to add, however, that this is unusual in Dorham's playing, since in the dozens of solos that I have heard on his recordings, the trumpeter never really repeats himself. His solos are

all quite different in conception and style, ranging from his flowing, lyrical choruses to short, jabbing phrases, half-valve effects and flutter tonguing, dazzling runs, sudden leaps to piercing high notes, and everything in between.

Dorham's awareness of and fondness for the Grieg-like phrase could have come from any number of sources. Trombonist Jack Teagarden, a fellow Texan, recorded "Anitra's Dance" with his own big band in June 1941.¹³ Female trombonist Melba Liston, who was with the Dizzy Gillespie orchestra in 1949-Dorham having been a member of the first Gillespie big band in 1945-arranged the Grieg piece at the suggestion of the trumpeter-leader.¹⁴ My own father heard Grieg's music through a public school program in Fort Worth around 1930, and Dorham may well have first known the work while in secondary school or while he was attending Wiley College in Marshall in the early 1940s. Of course, it may simply be a coincidence that the phrase that I hear in Dorham's solos is much like a passage in Grieg and that in fact the phrase was of the trumpeter's own invention,

for he was an original improviser and a fine and prolific composer. Whether Dorham is quoting from Grainger or Grieg, his adoption of this bebop penchant for musical quotation is an indication of the Texan's capacity for entwining his blues-based jazz roots with a world-music heritage, which makes of him a regional artist with an international latitude. While his incorporation of motifs from classical works demonstrates his ability to utilize such repertoire for his own jazz objectives, a tune like his "K.D.'s Blues" makes evident the significance to his creation

of Hardbop during the 1950s of his own Texas background—that is, what jazz critic James Lincoln Collier has referred to in calling the state "a blues hotbed."¹⁵ Of course, the blues have long enjoyed in themselves a universal appeal, but in combination with Dorham's blues mode, his witty allusions to Grainger and Grieg add an intellectual



Courtesy of: Steeple Chase Records

dimension that lends to Bebop one of its uniquely alluring qualities.

The notion of a connection between jazz and a world-music tradition is close in spirit to the recent work of Black historian Robin D.G. Kelley, who, through his consideration of poly-rhythms in jazz, has conceived of the importance of polyculturalism in Black history, an idea which he elaborated during a lecture entitled “People in Me: On the

Polycultural Nature of Blackness.”¹⁶ Kelley’s point was that Black culture has drawn upon other cultures to develop its own way of life, with the historian’s particular examples limited to the Black use of Mao Tse-tung’s *Little Red Book* and the folk traditions preserved by Australian aborigines. Although Kelley did not mention Kenny Dorham, he may eventually do so, since this historian is reportedly writing a biography of jazz pianist Thelonious Monk, with whom in 1952 Dorham recorded three Monk compositions: the difficult and rarely performed “Skippy”; the early jazz waltz, “Carolina Moon”; and the classic “Let’s Cool One.”¹⁷

But to return to the Scandinavian connection. The motif possibly from Edvard Grieg’s “Anitra’s Dance” that Dorham worked into a number of his solos was either evoked somehow in the trumpeter’s mind while he was playing or was simply a favored phrase that served him in the construction of his solos based on the melody and chords of a tune related or unrelated to the *Peer Gynt Suite*. Such motifs can be the building blocks or linking devices of any music, and certainly the appropriation of others’ lines or phrases is not unheard of among jazz improvisers. Charlie Parker frequently quoted from Bizet’s *Carmen* and used the opening of Percy Grainger’s *Country Gardens* as a coda.¹⁸ But so far as I am aware, Dorham is the only bebopper to have drawn upon Grieg’s “Anitra’s Dance,” although in doing so he was clearly working within the bebop tradition practiced by Parker, whose tendencies Dorham obviously absorbed during his time with Bird’s quintet between 1948 and 1950. This assimilation of world-music sources in jazz was but one aspect of the bebop message that Dorham took with him to Scandinavia.

Just as Charlie Parker had been stimulated by his visit to Sweden in 1949 to create his piece entitled “Swedish Schnapps,” so too was Dorham inspired by his stay in Norway and Denmark



Courtesy of: Black Lion Records

to compose his “Scandia Skies.”¹⁹ Other American jazzmen were also inspired by their visits to Scandinavia—for example, Duke Ellington composed his “Serenade to Sweden” during his trip there in 1939, and in 1951 tenorist Stan Getz toured Scandinavia, picking up on a Swedish folk tune entitled “Dear Old Stockholm,” which subsequently was recorded so memorably by the

Miles Davis Quintet with tenorist John Coltrane and Texas pianist Red Garland.²⁰ But more than Parker or Ellington or Getz, Dorham, in visiting Scandinavia, forged in a way a more direct, personal bond between his own form of Bebop and one of what I take to have been its sources in the music of Grieg, which had figured structurally in his solos for more than half-a-dozen years prior to his trip to Oslo.²¹

All of Dorham’s highly melodic solos that contain the Grieg-like motif are long-lined, in what has been called his “running” style, which critic Michael James has suggested was an influence on Charlie Parker, who “tended to use longer phrases when partnered by Dorham.”²² As for Dorham’s impact on the Scandinavians, this is evident not only from the fact that Allan Botschinsky, who joined Dorham on fluegelhorn for the 1963 Copenhagen recording session, had long admired the Texan, but also from the way that on “My Funny Valentine” Botschinsky “picks up the mood [from Dorham’s solo] so completely as to maintain a virtually uninterrupted melodic flow.” Dorham’s “elegant melodic powers” were a large part of his contribution to Bebop and Hardbop, and this too he took with him on his Scandinavian visit.²³

In addition to Dorham’s “Scandia Skies,” another tune that he recorded both in Oslo and in Copenhagen, with Norwegian and Danish jazz musicians, was his tune entitled “Short Story.”²⁴ Reportedly this piece derives from “Tickle Toe,” a composition by the great tenor saxophonist Lester Young, which was first recorded by the Count Basie Orchestra in 1940. Young was an important influence on Charlie Parker, and this and the practice of basing a tune on the chords of an earlier work (referred to in bebop parlance as a “contrafact”) were again part of the jazz legacy that Kenny Dorham carried with him to Paris and the Scandinavian

capitals, as well as to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, where in 1961 he recorded with an all-star group that included saxophonists Zoot Sims and Al Cohn.²⁵ Dorham's effect on the Scandinavian jazz scene seems apparent from the inspired performances by the musicians with whom he recorded: Botschinsky, trumpeter Rolf Ericson, pianist Tete Montoliu, drummer Alex Riel, and bassist Niels-Henning Ørsted Pedersen. While many countries have built up substantial jazz traditions, the presence of a vital figure like Dorham among musicians of another culture always brings out the best in those native or immigrant players. As for the meaningfulness of Dorham's appearance on the Brazilian jazz scene, it may not be possible to gauge this so directly, since he did not record with local musicians but only with a group from the U.S. What is evident, however, is the impression made on the Texan by Brazilian music, for Dorham's hearing it resulted in a number of his compositions that "helped shape several schools of jazz for the next decade."²⁶ In addition to recording Brazilian composer Heitor Villa-Lobos's "Prelude" in an unusual duet with pianist Bobby Timmons (a combination that harks back to a recording of "Tom Cat Blues" by Joe "King" Oliver and Jelly Roll Morton made in 1924) and Brazilian Luis Bonfás "Manha de Carnaval,"²⁷ Dorham



Courtesy of: Atlantic Records

wrote two quite popular tunes based on his South American tours of 1960 and '61, "Una más" and the remarkable "Blue Bossa," as well as "São Paulo," "El Matador," "Afrodisia," and "Pedro's Time."²⁸ Both the Scandinavian and South American trips undertaken by Dorham suggest the reciprocal nature of his international experience, which in itself represents the openness that jazz has always fostered, regardless of its origins or where it has gone. This too was a message that Dorham, on his travels abroad, "preached"—to employ a favorite gospel analogy of hardbop adherents like brothers Nat and Cannonball Adderley and Horace Silver of the Jazz Messengers.

Beginning with his first trumpet lessons in Austin, Kenny Dorham slowly and steadily developed his musical talents, playing with most of the seminal groups and individual stars of the bebop and hardbop periods and serving in the process as a jazz ambassador to the world. As my own research has continued into his life and artistry, I have realized that there is a more profound, imaginative, and substantive expressiveness to the work of this modest, highly dedicated musician from my own state than I had previously recognized. As jazz critic Gunther Schuller has observed, "it is always a source of surprise to discover in what diverse regions of the country many of the major and lesser figures of jazz were born and/or grew up."²⁹ In the case of Kenny

Dorham, it is especially striking to learn that as a boy he took part in cattle round-ups, helping drive the herds to the dipping vat for five dollars a day, and that his most cherished dream was to become a hobo, thinking "it would be very exciting to . . . hitch rides on freight trains and [go] as far west as San Francisco and southwest to the border towns of Mexico."³⁰ Little did he suspect, perhaps, that one day by means of his own music—both through such compositions as his "Mexico City," "São Paulo," "Monaco," "Bombay," "Tahitian Suite," and "Scandia Skies" and by

virtue of his long-lined, "running"-style, solo-trumpet "rides," at what often has been identified as a Texan's "loping" trot—he would traverse the globe in the astonishing saddle of Blues and Bebop.³¹

Like Kenny Dorham, his fellow Texan Leo Wright, who was born in Wichita Falls on December 14, 1933, also transported his native musical heritage and his own "brand" of Bebop to a world audience. Wright's father, Mel, an alto saxophonist, played at the end of the 1930s with the San Antonio band called Boots and His Buddies,³² and also gigged professionally with the father of Buddy Tate, a tenor saxophonist from Sherman, Texas,

who was featured with the Count Basie band.³³ Leo first studied the alto with his father when they moved to California in the early 1940s, but on returning to Wichita Falls, the son was instructed during his senior year of high school by Texas tenorist John Hardee, who had been recorded in the 1940s by Blue Note, Savoy, and the newly formed Atlantic label.³⁴ Leo earned a scholarship to Huston-Tillotson College in Austin and later attended San Francisco State College before being drafted into the army. While stationed in Germany, Leo was in charge of a jazz group and met up with a number of important jazz musicians, including Dallas pianist Cedar Walton. On returning to the U.S., Wright enrolled again at San Francisco State, but when his money ran out he headed for New York to try his luck.

At New York's Half Note nightclub and at the Newport Jazz Festival, Wright performed with the Charles Mingus jazz workshop, which included three other Texas sidemen, tenorist Booker Ervin, altoist John Handy, and trumpeter Richard Williams. Although Wright did not record with Mingus, he did appear on albums with Dizzy Gillespie, whose quintet Wright joined in 1959, traveling in September to Copenhagen where the group was recorded in concert. Just as Kenny Dorham had formed part of the Charlie Parker Quintet, Leo Wright also worked with one of the two masters of the bebop movement.³⁵ Gillespie was especially attracted to Leo Wright for his facility as both an alto saxophonist and also as a flutist. Wright had studied the flute at San Francisco State, but "he had begun to resent the instrument," until Dizzy started featuring him on such pieces as "I Found a Million Dollar Baby" and the trumpeter's classic tune, "A Night in Tunisia."³⁶ Wright's performances on both flute and alto add much to Gillespie's music. Even though Gillespie recorded "A Night in Tunisia" innumerable times over the years following his first recording of the piece in 1946 with Don Byas on tenor and Milt Jackson on vibraphone, every Gillespie performance of this piece differs from all his others.

While the Copenhagen version is

similar to the one recorded at Newport in 1960, both differ from one another and also from the version the Quintet recorded on February 9, 1961, at the Museum of Modern Art, and especially from the big-band orchestration by Argentinian pianist-composer Lalo Schifrin (entitled "Tunisia Fantasy") recorded at Carnegie Hall on March 4, 1961, with Wright as usual on both flute and alto.³⁷ In every instance, Gillespie's classic remains an appealing, stirring piece, and Leo Wright contributes in several ways to convey the exotic flavor of this masterful composition.

Although neither Kenny Dorham nor Leo Wright was ever on the same level of originality or expressive power as Parker and Gillespie, each of these Texans had his own voice and both had been from the beginning of their careers drenched or baptized in the blues tradition, which invests their playing with a soulful, hardbop feeling. Gillespie himself confessed that he was not a blues man, contrasting his playing with that of Texas trumpeter Oran "Hot Lips" Page; Wright, on the other hand, was definitely a blues man.³⁸ On alto Wright at times sounds more like a tenor, his tone gruffer than Parker's and his ideas more ferocious. While Wright does not offer Parker's complex bebop locutions, he does at times reel off strings of breakneck runs that are reminiscent of the Bird's phenomenal musical flights. In tandem with Gillespie on "A Night in Tunisia," Wright flawlessly negotiates on alto the demands of the composer-trumpeter's exotic rhythms and harmonic changes. On flute, Wright evokes the Middle Eastern (or is it Caribbean?) mood of the piece, as he does on "Kush," Gillespie's self-described "African rhythm and tone poem," written on the Quintet's trip to Africa and performed at the 1961 MOMA concert.³⁹ Just as Poe's Egyptologists revived their 500-year-old mummy, Gillespie's "Kush" brings to life the rediscovered ancient lost Nile city of that name, and Wright's flute once again sets the mood for this African composition. On alto, Wright not only enters the spirit of the piece with his primitive-like screams but also at one point recreates something of an Arabic-sounding motif. Both "A Night in Tunisia" and "Kush" illustrate the comment by bassist Bob Cunningham that playing Gillespie's music showed him "the world," while "Kush" underscores the view of Lalo Schifrin that this piece demonstrates Dizzy's interest in "other cultures, and his African roots."⁴⁰ For his part, Wright aided Gillespie musically in exploring and expressing such cultures and roots.

Another work performed by the Quintet at the MOMA concert was Duke Ellington's "The Mooche," originally recorded by the composer and his orchestra on October 1, 1928, and characterized variously by Ellington as "a stylized jungle . . . a sex dance."⁴¹ Surely the source of much of Gillespie's own exotic music,



Ellington's piece remains a modern-sounding work and was a natural choice for the MOMA program, along with Gillespie's African-inspired "A Night in Tunisia" and "Kush." As for Leo Wright, one of his own inspirations on the alto was reportedly Ellington's star altoist, Johnny Hodges, who dialogues on the 1928 recording of "The Mooche" with growl-trumpeter Bubber Miley. However, Wright's alto solo on the Quintet version is stylistically quite different from Hodges's approach. Although both players share a certain austerity and clarity of tone, Wright's style is more "crackling," a term several commentators have used to describe his attacking, even somewhat tormented cry. Also, there is a blues quality to Wright's sound that is rather more aggressive than the lovely, floating style of Hodges. This

difference serves to point up the approach of earlier saxophonists with that of sidemen of the hardbop persuasion who were often more anguished and even perhaps more bitter than Hodges ever was in his solo or ensemble work. This distinction also makes evident that, through Gillespie's music, Wright brought to audiences here and abroad the more aggrieved manner of sixties jazz as it had developed out of the bebop revolution.⁴²

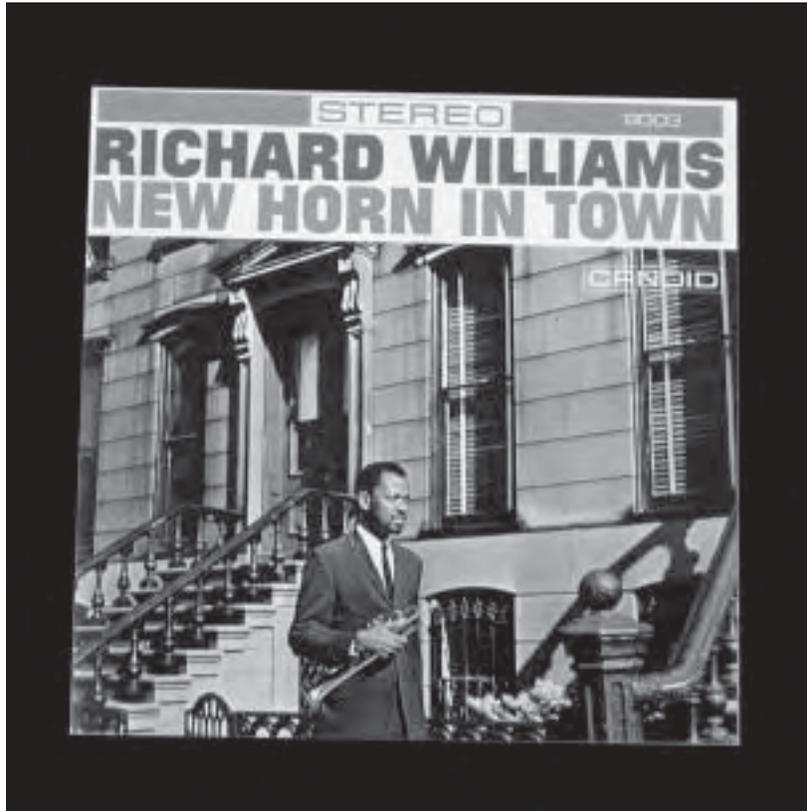
In 1960 Lalo Schifrin would write a suite for the Gillespie big band entitled *Gillespiana*, with the Quintet serving as soloists in something of a concerto format.⁴³ In the 1940s, Gillespie had incorporated Latin American elements in his music, especially through the percussion work of Cuban bongo player Chano Pozo. For the Gillespie big-band concert at Carnegie Hall in 1961, Wright solos along with the leader on the Gillespie-Pozo Afro-Cuban classic entitled "Manteca." (Wright is the featured soloist on the ballad, "This Is the Way," which he performs on alto with a magisterial sound and technique.) *Gillespiana* continued with the tradition in jazz of having a "Spanish tinge," a phrase used by Jelly Roll Morton to describe what he considered to be the necessary Latin American element

in the music. Leo Wright, the only reedman on the recording, solos on alto with intense swing in the Prelude, Panamericana, and Toccata sections and adds his lovely flute voice to the Blues and Africana sections, which combine Latin American rhythms

with a jazz blues feeling. In 1962, Wright left Gillespie and recorded with his own group a piece by Schifrin entitled "Dionysos," which the Argentinian composer had created for and dedicated to the Texan, thus bringing together the music of South America and the American Southwest. Prior to going off on his own in 1962, Wright had already helped to bridge the music worlds of the two Americas, touring there with the Gillespie Quintet. From this experience he necessarily came to share with Kenny Dorham an affinity for Brazilian music, later recording his

own version of "A Felicidade," a bossa nova by Brazilian composer Antonio Carlos Jobim, from the film *Black Orpheus*.⁴⁴

In *Texan Jazz*, I discuss Wright's work with his fellow Texan, trumpeter Richard Williams of Galveston, whose first and only album under his own name, *New Horn in Town*, was recorded in November, 1960. Wright in turn enlisted Williams for the altoist's own first album, his 1960 *Blues Shout*.⁴⁵ The title tune of the album, by Gigi Gryce, shows most clearly Wright's blues roots, as well as what Leonard Feather calls his manner of cutting "through with knife-like clarity, his dynamics more flexible, more a part of his personality than on flute."⁴⁶ Wright's version of Gillespie's "A Night in Tunisia" has him playing the accompaniment figure to Williams's theme statement in a rhythmic, phrasal manner that is unlike any other rendition recorded with Gillespie. "The Wind," a beautiful tune by pianist Russ Freeman, reveals Wright's ability to slip convincingly from a very touching ballad mood to bluesy, twisting, bop-like lines. The final tune on this first album, a Wright original entitled "Two Moods," likewise shows the altoist moving from something of a ballad feeling to a boppish jump style. Capable of a



Courtesy of: Candid Records

wide range of expression, on both flute and alto, Wright was certainly a master of the bebop genre, yet he was equally effective on a lush, more mainstream touchstone like "Body and Soul," which was given its classic reading by Coleman Hawkins in 1939. Wright's rendition of "Body and Soul," accompanied by another fellow Texan, pianist Red Garland, was recorded in San Francisco in 1978, and is a tour de force performance that exhibits the altoist's total control of his instrument and his amazing musical imagination.⁴⁷

Leo Wright emigrated to Europe in 1963, and apparently his wife Sigrid, with whom he performed duets and from whose name he derived the title for his composition "Sigi," was German or Scandinavian.⁴⁸ Living first in Berlin and later in Vienna, Wright became a member of the Radio Free Berlin Studio Band, performed at festivals in Germany, Switzerland, and Finland, and appeared with jazzmen like Lee Konitz in Paris, continuing in all of these venues to spread the good word of Bebop and his own native Texas blues. Like Kenny Dorham, Leo Wright played a significant role in the creation of jazz during the late bebop period, although both were overshadowed at the time by the startling arrival of their fellow Texan, Ornette Coleman, and his avant-garde Free Jazz. Both Dorham and Wright have been described as quiet-mannered, cooperative men, even as their jazz comes across as urgent, dynamic, assertive. Both musicians also shared a sense, as Wright put it, that "jazz is the greatest medium for bringing people together—here, and all over the world."⁴⁹

To what degree their Texas upbringing determined either their admirable personal qualities or their impressive and treasurable music making may remain an open question, but what seems important to bear in mind is that from their early years in Texas, they went on to participate in the creation of a world-renowned art that continues to be valued beyond the borders of the state. Hopefully, the contributions of Kenny Dorham and Leo Wright (and their fellow Texans) to jazz history will become more fully appreciated now and in the future, and not just as they already are abroad, but right here in their own "stomping grounds." ■

Notes

- 1 Edgar Allan Poe, "Some Words With a Mummy," *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe* (New York: Modern Library, 1938), p. 543. Coincidentally, in writing about the effect of jazz according to "an elite predatory audience of white hunters," i.e., white writers on black jazz, David Meltzer, in his *Reading Jazz* (San Francisco: Mercury House, 1993), has employed a similar metaphor: "The slave music bags its hunters, turns them into pale-skinned savages in wild spasms juiced by galvanic bolts of electricity à la Frankenstein; the victim is hurled back into a primal state of being and, as such, repudiates the progress dynamo for the tom-tom of regress . . ." (p. 22).
- 2 Mark Gardner, insert notes, *The Kenny Dorham Memorial Album* (Xanadu Records, XCD 1235, 1975, 1995). According to Gardner's notes, Dorham's statement about his youthful ambition was taken from his *Fragments of An Autobiography*, but where this had been published was not revealed. Only later, thanks to another CD entitled *Kenny Dorham: Blues in Bebop* (Savoy, SVY-17028, 1998), did I find that this autobiographical work was published in the *Down Beat Music Yearbook* for 1970, although to date I still have been unable to see this volume.
- 3 See Sara R. Massey's Preface to *Black Cowboys in Texas* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2000), where she writes that it is "plausible that the total number of African-American cowboys herding cattle up the trail 1866-95 was 8,700, or twenty-five percent" of all the cowboys involved, white, Mexican, and African American (p. xv).
- 4 It may be that Dorham had been inspired by an earlier version of "I'm an Old Cowhand" by his fellow jazzman Sonny Rollins, who recorded the Mercer tune for his 1957 album entitled *Way Out West* (Contemporary, OJCCD-337-2, 1988). Dorham appears with Rollins on a 1954 recording entitled *Moving Out* (Prestige Records, OJCCD-058-2, 1987), and the trumpeter's playing on this occasion is truly superb.
- 5 Sinclair Traill, "Boppin' in Paris," *Jazz Journal* 26, no. 1 (1973): 16. Traill remarks of Kenny Dorham that he "was one of the best bop trumpeters, a musician who had an immediately identifiable sound and more than the average quota of original ideas. His brisk 'running' style was a good foil for Parker's lucidity, and it has always seemed true that Dorham was one of Bird's better trumpet partners."
- 6 *Bird in Paris* (Yard Records, CP3, n.d.).
- 7 *Russian Jazz: New Identity*, comp. and ed. by Leo Feigin (London: Quartet Books Limited, 1985), p. 2.
- 8 Kenny Dorham Quintet, *Scandia Skies* (SteepleChase, SCCD 36011, 1993).
- 9 *Kenny Dorham: New York 1953-1956 & Oslo 1960* (Landscape, LS2-918, 1992). The Oslo session was recorded in January at the Metropole Jazz Club.
- 10 *Miles Ahead: Miles Davis + 19, Orchestra Under the Direction of Gil Evans* (Columbia, CL 1041, 1957).
- 11 "Osmosis" is on *Kenny Dorham Quintet* (Debut Records, DLP-9, 1953; reissued as OJCCD-113-2, 1993).
- 12 "Minor's Holiday" and "Basheer's Dream" are on *Kenny Dorham: Afro-Cuban* (Blue Note, BLP 1535 and 5065; reissued as CDP 7 46815-2, 1987); "The Theme" is on *The Jazz Messengers at the Café Bohemia, Vol. 1* (Blue Note, BLP 1507, 1955; reissued as CDP 7 46521 2, 1987); "Man of Moods" is on *Kenny Dorham: Blues in Bebop* (originally on Signal LP 1203, 1956; reissued by Savoy as SVY-17028, 1998); two takes of "Mexico City" are included on *Kenny Dorham: 'Round About Midnight at the Café Bohemia* (Blue Note, BLP 1524, 1956; reissued as CDP 7243 8 333576 2 8, 1995); and "Why Not?" is on *Kenny Dorham: West 42nd Street* (Black Lion, BLP 60119, 1961; reissued as BLCD 760119, 1989).
- 13 See *Swingin' the Classics* (Viper's Nest Records, CD-VN-1010, 1996).
- 14 See Dizzy Gillespie's autobiography, *To Be or Not . . . to Bop*, produced with the aid of Al Fraser (New York: Doubleday, 1979; rpt. Da Capo Press, 1985), p. 415.
- 15 James Lincoln Collier, *Benny Goodman and the Swing Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 233.
- 16 This lecture was delivered by Dr. Kelley on December 4, 1997, at the University of Texas at Austin, as part of The Texas Union Distinguished Speakers Series.
- 17 *Thelonious Monk: Genius of Modern Music, Vol. 2* (Blue Note, BST-81511, n.d.).

- 18 See Thomas Owens, *Bebop: The Music and the Players* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 34-35.
- 19 One version of "Swedish Schnapps," from August 8, 1951, is included on *Bird's Best Bop on Verve* (Polygram Records, 314 527 452-2, 1995).
- 20 Duke Ellington, "Serenade to Sweden," included in *The Ellington Era, 1927-1940, Volume Two* (Columbia, C3L39, n.d.); Stan Getz, "Dear Old Stockholm," on *Miles Davis' Round About Midnight* (Columbia, CJ 40610, 1956). Davis first recorded "Dear Old Stockholm" in 1952 with his All-Stars.
- 21 A different type of personal connection with Norway is found in Dorham's association with Randi Hultin, a jazz buff in Oslo whose account of her relationship with and hospitality toward jazz musicians is recorded in her book, *Born Under the Sign of Jazz: Public Faces / Private Moments*, trans. Tim Challman (London: Sanctuary Publishing Limited, 1998). Hultin's book includes a CD with Dorham playing piano and singing in her home in 1964. Hultin taped Dorham performing his song entitled "Fair Weather," which was used in the 1986 movie, *'Round Midnight*, starring tenor saxophonist Dexter Gordon. Hultin's 1964 taping was the only time that Dorham performed his song, for which he composed the music and wrote the lyrics. Hultin also mentions Leo Wright as having visited her home and as having been amazed by her young daughter who did improvised dancing to jazz. See pp. 227-228 for Dorham and p. 132 for Wright.
- 22 Max Harrison, et al., *Modern Jazz: The Essential Records* (London: Aquarius Books, 1975), p. 18.
- 23 Chris Sheridan, insert notes to *Kenny Dorham: Short Story* (SteepleChase, SCCD 36010, 1993).
- 24 "Short Story" is included on *Kenny Dorham: New York 1953-1956 & Oslo 1960* and on *Kenny Dorham: Short Story*.
- 25 Kenny Dorham, *Hot Stuff From Brazil* (West Wind, 2015, 1988).
- 26 Michael Cuscuna, insert note to *Kenny Dorham: Una más* (Blue Note, BLP 4127, 1963; reissued as CDP 0777 7 46515 2 0, 1995).
- 27 Heitor Villa-Lobos's "Prelude" (recorded in November 1961) is included on *Kenny Dorham: Matador/Inta Somethin'* (Blue Note, CDP 7 844602 2, 1991); "Manha de Carnaval" (recorded on December 19, 1963) is included on *Kenny Dorham: Short Story*. Of a performance of "Manha de Carnaval," Dorham noted in an article that he wrote on the Longhorn Jazz Festival, held in Austin on April 28-30, 1967, at which he also played his trumpet, that it was "frolicking and basking in the Brazilian-Texas sun. I have a special affection for this music-seems to be the music of many languages-internationale" ("With K.D. in Texas," *Down Beat*, June 15, 1967, p. 29).
- 28 "Una más" (first recorded in November 1961) is included on *Kenny Dorham: Matador/Inta Somethin'* and (as recorded on April 1, 1963) on *Kenny Dorham: Una más*; "Blue Bossa," as well as Dorham's "La Mesha" (recorded on June 3, 1963), are included on *Joe Henderson: Page One* (Blue Note, 84140, 1963; reissued as 7243 4 98795 2 2, 1999); "São Paulo" is included on *Kenny Dorham: Una más*; "Afrodisia" is on *Kenny Dorham: Afro-Cuban*; and "Pedro's Time" (recorded on September 9, 1963) is on *Joe Henderson: Our Thing* (Blue Note, BLP 4152, 1963; reissued as 84152, 2000).
- 29 Gunther Schuller, *The Swing Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 562.
- 30 Quoted in insert notes to *The Kenny Dorham Memorial Album*.
- 31 "Monaco" is on *Kenny Dorham: Round About Midnight at the Café Bohemia*; "Bombay" (recorded on August 23, 1946) is on *Opus de Bop* (Savoy MG 12114, 1991) and *Kenny Dorham: Blues in Bebop*, and "Tahitian Suite" (recorded on April 4, 1956) is on *Kenny Dorham and The Jazz Prophets, Vol. 1* (Chessmates, GRD-820, n.d.). This last album is one of Dorham's very finest recordings, with his solo work on his own tune, "The Prophet," a marvelous piece of improvisation and his "pecking" with tenorist J.R. Monterose a thrilling interchange between these two highly complementary hornmen.
- 32 Although Boots and His Buddies recorded during the 1930s, Mel Wright was not in the band at the time of the group's recording sessions. Two CDs by the Clifford "Boots" Douglas band are now available: *Boots and His Buddies 1935-1937* (Classics, 723, 1993); *Boots and His Buddies 1937-1938* (Classics, 738, 1993). Leo Wright recalled that his father taught him "a lot-two things he used to say I'll never forget.' Those things were 'learn your horn' and 'don't forget what came before. . . . And believe it or not, one of the first altos I became conscious of was Jimmy Dorsey-my father used to play his records'" (quoted by Dan Morgenstern, "Introducing Leo Wright," *Metronome* 78, no. 1 [1961]: 26).
- 33 Buddy Tate can be heard soloing on "Super Chief" from 1940 (included on *Count Basie and His Orchestra 1937-1943: Jumpin' at the Woodside* [Jazz Roots, CD 56015, 1991]) and on "Seventh Avenue Express" from 1947 (included on *Basie's Basement* [RCA Camden Records, CAL-497, 1959]).
- 34 See *The Complete Blue Note Forties Recordings of Ike Quebec and John Hardee* (Mosaic Records, MR4-107, 1984).
- 35 So far as I am aware, Dorham and Wright never recorded together, even though Dorham did record with most of the major and minor saxophonists of postwar jazz, among them Coleman Hawkins, Charlie Parker, Sonny Stitt, Sahib Shihab, Musa Kaleem, Sonny Rollins, John Coltrane, Hank Mobley, Harold Land, Lucky Thompson, James Moody, Cannonball Adderley, J.R. Monterose, Joe Henderson, Jackie McLean, Eric Dolphy, Jimmy Heath, Ernie Henry, Ernie Thompson, George Coleman, Cecil Payne, Junior Cook, Charles Davis, Oliver Nelson, Zoot Sims, Al Cohn, Frank Haynes, Rocky Boyd, and Joe Alexander. Dorham appears in a photograph on stage with Ornette Coleman during the November 1960 Newport Rebels concert in New York City, organized by the Jazz Artists Guild in protest of the regular Newport Jazz Festival of the same year. But so far as I know, Kenny and Ornette never recorded together. Dorham does appear on piano on a recording from the Newport Rebels concert but not with Coleman (*Newport Rebels* [Candid, CCD79022, 1991]).
- 36 Chris Sheridan, insert notes to *Dizzy Gillespie Quintet: Copenhagen Concert* (SteepleChase, SCCD 36024, 1992).
- 37 *Four Jazz Legends: Live at Newport 1960* (Omega, OCD 3025, 1994); *The Dizzy Gillespie Big Band: Carnegie Hall Concert* (Verve, V6-8423, 1961; reissued as part of Dizzy Gillespie and His Orchestra, *Gillespiana* [Verve, MGV83914] by Polygram Records [314 519 809-2, 1993]).
- 38 Gillespie is quoted as having said, "I know the blues, but Hot Lips Page is a blues man. When he plays trumpet, he plays it like a blues player would play. My music is not that deep-not as deep as his-not as deep as Hot Lips Page or Charlie Parker, because Yard knew the blues" (*To Be or Not to . . . Bop*, p. 310).
- 39 Quoted by Mark Gardner, insert notes to *An Electrifying Evening With the Dizzy Gillespie Quintet* (Verve, V6-8401, 1961; reissued by Polygram Records, 314 557 544-2, 1999).
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Duke Ellington, quoted by Stanley Dance, album notes to *The Ellington Era 1927-1940, Volume One* (Columbia, C3L27, 1963).
- 42 For a discussion of jazz from this period, see David H. Rosenthal, *Hard Bop: Jazz & Black Music 1955-1965* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).
- 43 Dizzy Gillespie and His Orchestra, *Gillespiana*. In the original liner notes to the album, Gunther Schuller refers to the work as "one of the few successful large-scale attempts to blend authentic South American rhythms and sonorities with those of jazz" and as being "in the eighteenth century 'Suite' form . . . namely the Concerto grosso format, as exemplified in this instance by a quintet featured within a large accompanimental brass and percussion group."
- 44 Both "Dionysos" and "A Felicidade" are included on Leo Wright's *Suddenly the Blues* (Koch Jazz, KOC CD-8544, 2000; originally Atlantic, 1393, 1962). An additional side on this album that has ties with another culture is entitled "Tali," a piece composed by Tom McIntosh, based on the name of his Iranian friend, which means "dawn" in Persian. In Kenny Dorham's article in *Down Beat* for June 15, 1967 (cited in footnote 27 above), he speaks of performing "A Felicidade" and also refers to Art Blakey as his favorite drummer because, in Dorham's own Spanish, Blakey exhibits "*Fuerte y mucho fuego*" (pp. 26 and 28).
- 45 Leo Wright, *Blues Shout* (Atlantic, 1358, 1960; reissued on Hank Crawford, *The Soul Clinic* / Leo Wright, *Blues Shout* [Collectables, COL-CD-6281, 1999]).
- 46 Leonard Feather, liner notes to the 1960 Atlantic album, *Blues Shout*, reproduced in the Collectables reissue.
- 47 Red Garland, *I Left My Heart . . .* (Muse, 5311, 1978; reissued by 32 Jazz, 32107, 1999).
- 48 See insert notes by Leonard Feather to *Blues Shout*.
- 49 Quoted by Morgenstern, "Introducing Leo Wright."

Música Tejana: Nuestra Música

By Guadalupe San Miguel Jr.



Photo Courtesy of: UT Institute of Texas Cultures and The Guadalupe Acosta Family

Música Tejana, or Texas–Mexican music, is contagious and makes you want to dance. Its diverse beat can be a polka, a cumbia, a bolero, or a ranchera. It can also have influences from other musical styles such as disco, pop, rap, country, and reggae. Música Tejana sounds come from a variety of instruments, including accordions, synthesizers, electric guitars, congas, or “pitos” (horns). This type of music, known as “Tejano” in the contemporary period, is extremely popular in Texas and other parts of the United States and Mexico.

Despite its popularity, a great deal of misunderstanding about this music persists. Is *música* Tejana, for instance, a particular form of music that has lost its ability to “connect” with its audience because of its commercialization or is it still “culturally meaningful” to Tejanos? Is this music, in other words, an “organic” symbol of Tejano culture, or has it become a “superorganic” commodity to be consumed by an anonymous mass disconnected from the history and culture of Tejanos?¹ Is *música* Tejana based on the accordion, the saxophones, the keyboards, or is it a mixture of these? What types of songs comprise this music? Some commentators, for instance, have argued that “Tejano” is *conjunto* or accordion-based music that has been “urbanized” and modernized. By modernization, these commentators generally argue that the traditional *conjunto* sound incorporates more instruments, especially the keyboards, and bor-

rows heavily from other music forms like rock and country.² Others argue that Tejano is either an extension of Mexican music in general, a modified form of *música norteña*, that is, *conjunto* music from northern México, or a mixture of *conjunto* music and country and western sounds.³ Manuel Peña argues that Tejano is a particular type of music that is “synthesizer-driven.”⁴ Vilma Maldonado, a journalist for the McAllen *Monitor*, states that Tejano music also includes the styles popularized by *orquestas* and *grupos* of the 1960s and 1970s.⁵

Which of these is a more accurate definition of this complex music? Is *música* Tejana culturally significant for Chicanos and Chicanas? What is the relationship between *música* Tejana and *norteño* music, or *música* Tejana and Mexican music? What about American musical forms? How do they relate to *música* Tejana? This essay is aimed at answering these types of questions.

Before I begin, let me clarify several key terms. One of these is “Tejano,” and the other is Texas–Mexican music or *música Tejana*, its Spanish equivalent. Tejano is not the same as *música Tejana*. Tejano is a term of recent vintage that refers to the music played by Tejano artists in the latter part of the twentieth century. It came into common usage in the 1980s, but most commentators do not agree on what it means. The term Tejano, then, generally means whatever one chooses it to be. In my view, it is not a useful term for understanding the historical complexity and diversity of this music.⁶

Música Tejana, on the other hand, is not specific to any particular time period. It is also much broader and more inclusive than Tejano and allows for the existence of other possible musical forms and styles. As used in this essay, *música Tejana* comprises all the musical genres, forms, and styles that have existed in the Tejano community, at least since the nineteenth century.⁷

Other terms to clarify are Tejanos, Mexican Americans, and Anglos. Tejanos are individuals of Mexican descent who were born and raised in Texas. The term Mexican American refers to individuals of Mexican descent who are born or raised in the United States. Tejanos are all Mexican Americans, but not all Mexican Americans are Tejanos. Anglos generally are individuals of northern European descent, but the term refers to the entire white population residing in Texas. The definition of Anglo varies throughout the southwest. In New Mexico, for instance, an “Anglo” was anyone who was not Indian, Spanish-Indian, or Mexican descent. According to Nostrand, even blacks were considered “Anglos.”⁸

Música Tejana, then, is not a single music but a complex set of musical forms, styles, and genres. It is comprised of five distinct essential elements.

First, *música Tejana* is a particular form of border music. Its unique sounds were created or performed by Tejanos living along the Rio Grande border and those who are “on the border” of two distinct cultural worlds. The concept of the border includes two dimensions, a physical and a metaphysical.

The physical notion of the border refers to a particular location encompassing those communities along both sides of the Rio Grande. In other words, it includes the areas of South Texas and northern México. The latter includes the northern Mexican states of Tamaulipas and Nuevo León.⁹ The former encompasses a geographical area of the state that extends from Corpus Christi on the east, to San Antonio on the north, to Laredo on the west, and to Brownsville on the south. From the Spanish colonial era in the mid-1700s to the middle of the nineteenth century, South Texas actually encompassed the region from the Nueces River to the Rio Grande border.

According to Armando C. Alonzo, this area was considered a part of the “*gobierno*,” or government, of Nuevo Santander (1797-1824) and later Tamaulipas (1824-1845). Spanish/Mexican authorities and colonists, in turn, generally viewed the smaller territory occupying the space from San Antonio to the Louisiana border as “Texas.” After the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 and the establishment of an international border, San Antonio came to be recognized as part of the South Texas “homeland.”¹⁰

Música Tejana, although originating along both sides of the border, was nurtured mostly in South Texas. This is particularly true in the twentieth century. Distinct areas of this region contributed in their own ways to the development of its content and style. The lower border region, for instance, became the music’s historical “breeding ground.” It produced the originators of the *conjunto* ensemble such as Bruno Villarreal, Narciso Martínez and Valerio Longoria and created many of the corridos popular in the Tejano community.¹¹ The San Antonio area, in turn, became a center of strong support and active promotion of the various forms of *música Tejana*, especially *conjunto* music, probably because it had the largest concentration of Tejanos in the state for most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Sam Suniga, archivist and researcher for the Tejano Music Awards, also argues that San Antonio historically has had one of the highest per capita rates of Tejano composers and songwriters in the state.¹² Alice and its surrounding communities,



Photo Courtesy of: Tejano Artist Music Museum, Inc.

Conjunto Bernal

including Corpus Christi on the Gulf Coast, on the other hand, became the creative centers of this music.¹³

The Alice area, in particular, played a key role in the creation, promotion, and popularity of *música* Tejana during the past six decades.¹⁴ In addition to consolidating the *conjunto* style of playing, musicians from this area created two distinct ensembles—the *orquesta* Tejana and the *grupo Tejano*. Alice also was the home to Ideal Records, one of the most significant Tejano recording companies of the post-World War II era. From 1946 to the 1960s, it popularized the various forms of *música* Tejana and recorded many of the leading conjunto, orquesta, and female musicians. In the 1970s, Corpus Christi continued and expanded this rich tradition of musical recordings. In the early years of this decade, it became and continues to be the home to Freddie Records and Hacienda Records, two of the most influential forces in the Tejano music industry during the 1970s and 1980s. Together these three studios

recorded most of the major artists that shaped the contours of *música* Tejana during the twentieth century. Among the most influential musicians recorded by these companies were Lydia Mendoza, Laura y Carmen, Beto Villa, Isidro López, Tony de la Rosa, Conjunto Bernal, Los Relámpagos del Norte, Ramón Ayala y Los Bravos del Norte, Los Fabulosos Cuatro, Carlos Guzmán, Laura Canales, Sunny Ozuna, Freddie Martínez, Augustoín Ramírez, and Selena.

Música Tejana has also been created or performed by Tejano musicians who do not live in South Texas. Two of the most popular Tejano musical groups of the 1980s and 1990s, La Sombra and La Mafia, for instance, were from Chicago, Illinois, and Houston, Texas, respectively. Despite their distance from South Texas, these musicians continued to play border music because they were on the “border” of two clashing cultures. Used in this manner, the concept of “the border” means more than simply a geographical or physical space. It also refers

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to a series of “sites” or arenas that are present “wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle, and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy.”¹⁵ Those who live on “the border,” then, refers to those living the contradiction of being socially and culturally distinct in a society that despises differences. It also applies to those trying to negotiate the ever-present pressures of assimilation and ethnic loyalty. An example of this is the *orquesta* Tejana of the post-World War II era and the music it developed in response to the Tejano’s “middle” position between an unappreciative dominant society and a large group of working-class *Méxicanos*.¹⁶

Second, *música* Tejana is a Tejano creation; that is, it has been created, adapted, or performed by Tejanos to meet the musical sensibilities of other Tejanos. As early as the 1920s, Tejanos were demanding that traditional Mexican music reflect their sensibilities by including instruments and singing styles with which they could identify and appreciate. In the early part of the twentieth century, much of this focused on the sounds of the accordion. In post-World War II years, Tejano musicians continued to adapt Mexican music to meet Tejano musical sensibilities in several ways. They incorporated vocal singing in general and female duet singing in particular into *música* Tejana, which had been mostly instrumental. They also supported the continued use of the accordion and the bajo sexto instrumentation in *conjuntos*. Finally, they incorporated the unique sounds of the saxophone and the trumpet (*los pitos* or horn section as it came to be known years later) to create the *orquesta Tejana*. In the second half of the 20th century, Tejanos continued to adapt this music by adding organs, brass instruments, electric guitars, and keyboards. Additionally, they played and sang the lyrics of these songs in a style unique to them.

Because it is an “indigenous” creation, *música* Tejana has reflected this community’s unique historical experiences in the state. Prior to the middle of the twentieth century, most of these experiences were based on a rural economy, a subordinate social status, a traditional patriarchal culture, and constant conflict with Anglos. In the second half of the twentieth century, the Tejano community became more urbanized, acculturated, occupationally diverse, and less patriarchal. They also experienced better relations with the dominant Anglo group and with mainstream institutions.¹⁷ In all its various forms and through its content, music reflected these experiences.

Corridos, for instance, played a key role in expressing and reflecting the historical conflict between Anglos and Mexicans in South Texas in the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth century.¹⁸ *Corridos*, as several scholars have noted, are ballads that narrate a story and are sung to a simple tune.¹⁹ They emerged and developed during a century of profound and violent changes along the Rio Grande and South Texas that em-

braced the years from 1836 to the 1930s.²⁰ In many ways, *corridos* were the product of a subordinate society whose only means of fighting the dominant Anglo powers was symbolic.²¹ Representative of this type of *corrido* and its hero was “The Corrido of Gregorio Cortez,” an individual who single-handedly fought the Anglo law and won.²² After 1930, the *corrido* remained culturally significant, but it declined in popularity. It also shifted its focus from the cultural hero to the helpless victim. By portraying helpless victims rather than potent cultural heroes, the newer *corridos* after the 1930s aroused sympathy for the victim and spurred Texas-Mexican communities to take collective action for the benefit of all. The real hero in these *corridos* turned out to be the organized and politically active community as a whole, not the individual.²³

Canciones, or traditional Mexican songs, on the other hand, reflected the continuity and change of Mexican culture in the state.²⁴ *Canciones* were comprised of several types and, in addition to *corridos*, included, among others, *canciones típicas*, *canciones rancheras*, and *canciones románticas*. Throughout most of the nineteenth century, the *canción típica* and the *corrido* dominated the vocal music of Tejanos.²⁵ The *canción típica* became increasingly important by the latter part of the nineteenth century, but by 1900 the *canción romántica*, a *canción* “subtype” was rapidly becoming dominant among Tejanos.²⁶ In the twentieth century, the *canción ranchera* emerged as a dominant type of song among Tejanos.

Canciones dealt with a variety of themes, most of which focused on non-political topics, especially love. For this reason, they tended to reflect the continuity of traditional Mexican rural culture in the state. They rarely reflected the profound changes within Mexican culture as did *corridos*. Although *canciones* tended to reflect the traditional cultural practices of Tejanos, in some cases this was not so. The “treacherous woman” theme popular in the *canción ranchera*, for instance, consistently portrayed Mexican women as traitorous and unfaithful to men. However, reality indicated that men, rather than women, were more likely to be unfaithful. These types of songs reversed existing gender norms in the Tejano community and thus did not accurately reflect them.²⁷

Música Tejana also reflected the emerging social differences within Tejanos. Instrumental dance music, for instance, reflected the growing class distinctions of this community. The *orquestas* and *grupos* reflected the rise of the Tejano lower and middle classes, whereas the *conjunto* reflected the dominance of the working classes.²⁸

Likewise, *canciones*, especially the *canción típica* and the *canción romántica*, reflected social differences within the Tejano community. The former was associated with working-class aesthetics and the latter with a middle-class one. Stated differently, the former was generally of a folk or working-class nature, with simple tune and lyrics, of anonymous composition, and often of ancient ori-



Photo Courtesy of: Tejano Artist Music Museum, Inc.

Flaco Jiménez

gins. The latter was more specifically associated with modern Latin American urban culture and its attraction to European music imported to the Americas, especially Italian music. These distinctions remained submerged among Tejanos until the 1920s, when the *canción típica* acquired a new label and became known as the *canción ranchera*. The new *ranchera* then became the property of the disfranchised masses on both sides of the border.²⁹

After World War II the *canción ranchera* and the *canción romántica* solidified their positions within the social class structure of the community.³⁰ Despite these differences, there was never a rigid dichotomy.³¹

Finally, *música* Tejana reflected the specific ethnic identity of the Tejano population. This music was more than simply a response to subordination or a reflection of social differences. For many, it was also an expression of pride in the *México* ethnic identity as it developed along the border and throughout the state of Texas. The use of distinct in-group labels for this music reflects this pride. Under pressure to assimilate in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, they used Spanish-language terms such as *fandangos* and *bailes* to indicate pride in their music. In the post-World War II period, they called their music by distinct labels such as *conjunto*, *orquesta*, or, more generally, Tex-Mex music or *música* Tejana. In the 1960s and 1970s, Tejanos referred to the diverse styles of music as La Onda Chicana. Re-

cent uses of the term “Tejano” and all its derivatives, for example, Tejano proud, totally Tejano, and puro Tejano reflect this ethnic pride. “Tejano (in the 1990s) is, as much as anything, an attitude,” argues Hector Galan, the noted Mexican-American cultural videographer. “It’s as if to say: ‘This is us.’”³²

Because Tejanos have created, produced, and performed this music, it has remained culturally meaningful to them. Commercialization and internationalization has definitely impacted this music over time, especially in the last several decades, but

it has not lost its ability to affirm and reaffirm distinct ethnic and social bonds. *Música* Tejana, in other words, has not succumbed to the dictates of the capitalist markets and become a mere commodity as suggested by Manuel Peña.³³ It is not a “detached form of entertainment,” nor is it a “commodity that is consumed atomistically.” Instead, it is a powerful symbol of Tejano ethnic and cultural identity and an instrument of purposeful and meaningful social interaction for a people who live along the border and who are on the border of two distinct worlds.

Third, *música* Tejana is mostly Mexican music sung in Spanish. Because it is based on Mexican music, it is rooted in the history of the Americas. More specifically, its roots lie in the musical heritage of Spain and indigenous America and in the interactions between these two major groups.

Música Tejana is also intimately related to *norteño* or northern Mexican culture. Between the 1700s and the mid-1800s, this music was an integral part of the Spanish and Mexican culture brought by settlers to the northern frontier of México and shaped or influenced by local and regional conditions. In the period after 1848, however, northern Mexican culture was fractured as a result of the establishment of the Rio Grande as an international border. Although this culture was similar on both sides of the border, commentators soon began to make distinctions between the Mexican culture found in

South Texas and the Mexican culture found in northern Mexico. The former eventually came to be known as Tejano culture, the latter as *norteño* culture. Both, however, came from one primary source—central Mexico. This phenomenon helps to explain the presence of similar cultural and musical forms on both sides of the border.

Unfortunately, little is known about how this music (and the culture of which it is an integral part) was brought to Texas, how it was played, or what instruments were used to play it. The little information available we have is from the last one hundred years. Much of the following comments are thus based on the music's development since the latter part of the 1800s.

Generally speaking, Texas-Mexican music has been comprised of a diverse and changing repertoire of songs and dances. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, polkas, *huapangos*, *vales* (waltzes), *schotises* (schottisches), and mazurkas were the major dance forms in *música* Tejana. Since the 1940s, new ones such as *boleros*, mambos, *danzones*, and *cumbias*, as well as fox-trots, rhythm and blues, soul, funk, rock, country, and pop have been added to Tejano music.

Tejano music also is comprised of a variety of *canciones* or songs, such as *canciones típicas*, *románticas*, *corridos*, and *rancheras*, sung to a variety of beats including polkas, *vales*, *baladas*, and *cumbias*.

Despite this diversity, *música* Tejana in the twentieth century has been based primarily on the polka beat. Polkas, like other Mexican folk dances such as the *vals* (waltz) and the *schotis* (schottische), are European in origin. They were brought to México by the elite in the early nineteenth century and to the Southwest by the German, Bohemian, Italian, and Czech immigrants who settled in central Texas and in northern Mexico during the first half of the nineteenth century. Sometime after the 1850s, Mexican musicians on both sides of the border appropriated these dance forms and made them their own. The French invasion of Mexico in the 1860s most likely reinforced these and other European musical and dance traditions throughout northern Mexico and the southwestern United States.³⁴

The polka emerged as a dominant form of Tejano dance music sometime in the early twentieth century, probably as a result of the rise of recorded music and of desires for dancing among the Mexican origin population. The dominance of the polka is reflected in the historical recordings made by Arhoolie Records in the early 1970s. According to these comprehensive and representative recordings, 37% of all *conjunto* music recorded in the years from 1927 to 1941 were polkas. The next largest categories of dance forms were the *schotis* and *vals* at 19% and 12%, respectively.³⁵

In the post-World War II period, the polka continued its dominance as all types of groups constantly played it. The polka beat also became more popular during these years with the rise of the *ranchera Tejana*. This type of song is quite different from the *ranchera Mexicana*. In México, the *ranchera* is a particular

type of rural-based *canción* that became popular during the early twentieth century.³⁶ The content of these songs spoke about male notions of honor, love, and life in a rural environment, usually the *rancho* (ranch).³⁷ Mexican *rancheras* were sung to a variety of beats and played mostly by mariachi groups. The Texas *ranchera* retained its emphasis on male notions of honor, love, and life, but the rhythms and the type of groups that played this music were different. Unlike the Mexican *ranchera*, the Tejano version was sung mostly to a polka beat. It was performed by the three major types of Tejano groups, none of which were mariachis: female-based duets, accordion-based *conjuntos*, and saxophone-based *orquestas*.

In the post-World War II period, the *ranchera*, that is, the polka with lyrics, as well as the instrumental polka, became the dominant form of song and dance in *música* Tejana. The increased demand for dancing among the Tejano population and the easy steps accompanying the polka probably led to its dominance. Despite its popularity, by the end of the twentieth century, the *cumbia* became a strong competitor to the *ranchera* and emerged as the most popular type of song and dance in the community.³⁸

Another essential element of this music is its language. For all intents and purposes, Texas-Mexican music is Spanish-language music. Although a few songs have been recorded bilingually or in English only, the vast majority of them are sung in Spanish.³⁹ The Spanish language, in association with the polka and *ranchera*, keeps this music rooted in Mexican culture.

Moreover, Spanish-language music is the most important means for preserving Tejano culture in the United States. Although Spanish-language institutions, such as the press or the TV, are readily found in Tejano communities throughout the state, most of these are aimed at the immigrant population. Tejanos, most of whom are native born for the most part, are exposed to and socialized by English-speaking institutions such as public schools, radio, or print media. Tejano music is the only means currently available within the English-speaking Tejano population that promotes Spanish. For this reason, this music has become a crucial instrument for preserving the community's link to its cultural heritage in a country that is rigidly assimilationist and non-appreciative of ethnic differences.

Fourth, although *música* Tejana is mostly Mexican music, it has consistently been updated and modernized over the decades. The notion of "modernization" has changed over the years and depended, in many cases, on what has been popular in American or Mexican music at different points during the twentieth century. The modernizing of *música* Tejana occurred in complex ways involving several overlapping processes.⁴⁰ One of these was its selective incorporation of American, Caribbean, and Latin American rhythms and instruments. Another was the appropriation, adaptation, and inclusion of other distinct musical styles. I discuss some of these processes below to illustrate their

complexity in a tentative effort to illustrate the diverse ways in which Mexican music has been modernized, rather than to give a comprehensive list of all these possibilities.

1. Incorporation of different types of instruments

Some groups utilized instruments and styles associated with American or Latin American groups to play Mexican music. During the post-World War II era, for instance, Beto Villa and Isidro López utilized the saxophones, trumpets and other instruments associated with both American and Latin American *orquestas* of that period to play their music. Little Joe, Sunny Ozuna, and Freddie Martínez in the 1960s and 1970s also used

the saxophones and trumpets, but they added organs and electric guitars to the instrumental mix. These musical instruments were associated not with orchestras of that era, but with rock and soul groups.

Grupo musicians of the most recent period, for example, Mazz, Selena, and La Mafia, modified the instrumental mix while adding keyboards to their ensembles. In the 1970s, a few

groups such as Country Roland and Country Roland, Jr., utilized the violin, the steel guitar, and the vocal singing style of country music to play Tejana tunes. Despite the diversity of instruments associated with various musical styles, these groups continued playing mostly traditional Mexican music. The addition of these instruments as well as the unique ways of playing them led to the creation of an evolving Texas-Mexican sound over the decades.

2. Incorporation of other musical influences

Throughout the twentieth century, a few innovative performers took selective rhythms from diverse musical styles and incorporated them into Mexican music. They chose from a wide variety of styles and from the instruments, songs, and dances associated with them. Most of these rhythms came from two major strands of popular music within the United States, rhythm and blues and rock and roll, and from Latin America and the Carib-

bean. These rhythms were creatively crafted onto traditional Mexican tunes. The result was an updated style of Mexican music such as “jazzy” *boleros*, “rock-influenced” polkas, “pop” or “rap” *cumbias*, “bluesy” *baladas*, and “big-band style” *rancheras*.

Occasionally, Tejana musicians provided only “touches” of music from other styles. Their incorporation into Tejana music was brief enough so that it did not interrupt the beat of the song. Let me cite two examples, one from Letty Guval and the second from El Conjunto Bernal. In the mid-1990s, Guval, a popular Tejana performer, recorded a *ranchera* entitled “Sentimiento.” At key points in the song and only for a few brief seconds, she incorporated some *banda* rhythms. The *banda* rhythms, in turn, were

played by a tuba, an instrument not usually associated with *música* Tejana. This *ranchera* then only had “touches” of *banda* in it; it was not a *banda* song nor was it a “tuba-based” *ranchera*.⁴¹

In the late 1970s, El Conjunto Bernal recorded a *balada* with touches of rock. In the song entitled “Senda Sin Luz,” Bernal opened up with a couple of seconds from the Doors’ most popular song, “Riders of the

Storm.” Bernal continued using the well-known organ rhythms of this popular rock group throughout the song, but without losing the flavor of the ballad.⁴²

3. Addition of other rhythms

Most Tejana groups were quite diverse with respect to the music that they played. In addition to polkas, *rancheras*, and *baladas*, they also played dance tunes from other musical styles. Again, the tunes selected were diverse and varied between groups and across time. Beto Villa, for instance, recorded a variety of Latin American tunes such as mambos, *boleros*, *danzones*, *porros*, and *guarachas*. He also recorded several fox-trots and ragtime tunes.⁴³ During the 1950s, Little Joe and Sunny recorded rhythm and blues and rock and roll songs.⁴⁴ In the last several decades, *grupos* Tejanos such as Mazz, Selena, and Emilio recorded a variety of mariachi, *banda*, disco, rock, dance, and country music. In many cases, the American popular tunes were sung in



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Carlos Guzman

both Spanish and in English. *Conjunto* groups were not as experimental as *orquestas* or *grupos* but they occasionally recorded *boleros*, *cumbias*, and rock and roll.⁴⁵

Although Tejano musicians were quite versatile and played all types of music, non-Mexican tunes comprised only a small percentage of the total songs that they performed. The vast majority of songs in their repertoire, in other words, were Mexican tunes. This distinguished them from Mexican Americans in other parts of the country. In places such as Los Angeles, for instance, Mexican-American groups played mostly English songs and either ignored, rejected, or grudgingly played Mexican music.⁴⁶

4. Adaptation and appropriation of non-Mexican and Mexican tunes

The more creative artists at times recorded tunes from various styles, reinventing them to meet Tejano musical sensibilities. In other words, they “Tejanoized” the songs for their fans.⁴⁷ Steve Jordan, for instance, recorded a Buck Owens song “Together Again” and added the accordion to it so that it could be danced in Tejano nightclubs.⁴⁸ Mingo Saldivar, a *conjunto* artist from the 1960s took the popular Johnny Cash song “Ring of Fire,” rearranging it as a *ranchera* and adding bilingual lyrics.⁴⁹ Priscila y sus Balas de Plata took the popular disco song, “I Will Survive,” and transformed it into a *cumbia* with lyrics.⁵⁰

Traditional Mexican songs, on occasion, have also been reinvented for a Tejano audience. Ricardo Castillo, lead vocalist for La Diferenzia, for instance, in the late 1990s took a popular Juan Gabriel ballad, “Querida,” and rearranged it as a *ranchera* for Tejano audiences. It was extremely well received throughout the state, as indicated by its constant playing on Tejano radio stations in places such as Corpus Christi and Houston.⁵¹

5. Blending of ensembles and styles

Under some circumstances, Tejano groups blended diverse vocal traditions, ensembles, and musical styles. The *orquesta* and *conjunto* musicians of the late 1940s and early 1950s combined the vocal singing tradition with the social dance music of Tejanos to create contemporary *música* Tejana. A few musicians such as Conjunto Bernal, the Royal Jesters, and Los Dinos incorporated three and four-part harmony sounds into Tejano music in the 1960s and 1970s.⁵² Isidro López in the 1950s, on the other hand, blended the *conjunto* and the *orquesta* ensembles to create a new sound that he called “Texachi” (a mixture of mariachi and Tejano).⁵³ Roberto Pulido, in the 1970s, blended the *orquesta* and the *conjunto* sounds to create progressive *conjunto*.⁵⁴ Emilio in 1989 added a new element to this progressive *conjunto* sound when he incorporated the *grupo* sound of the synthesizer into the *conjunto*.⁵⁵ In the 1970s, Country Roland and others combined the country music of Anglo America with Mexican music to create Chicano country.⁵⁶

6. Local rhythms

Not all the musical traditions incorporated or combined with *música* Tejana were “foreign” in origin. A few of them were indigenous to Mexico. The most well known of these traditions in the contemporary period, I would argue, is the *huapango*, a dance form and song type from southern Tamaulipas and northern Vera Cruz. The drums of the early twentieth century likewise were of indigenous origins.

The incorporation, adaptation, appropriation, or blending of ensembles and styles, as shown above, has occurred throughout the twentieth century, leading to the distinct sounds known as *música* Tejana.⁵⁷ Undoubtedly, more research needs to be conducted on these processes if we are to truly understand its complexity and nature.

Fifth, *música* Tejana is played by a variety of musical ensembles, not simply just *conjuntos*. By this I mean that different types of groups using particular mixes of instruments and vocalists play this music. It includes vocal groups of varying sizes as well as four distinct ensembles—*conjuntos*, *orquestas*, *grupos*, and country bands.⁵⁸ Most of this music is for dancing purposes. The only exception to this is the vocal singing tradition. This type of musical performance, unlike the others to be discussed later, is sit-down or listening music, not dancing music. Historically, vocal singing has occurred in intimate family settings, in theatrical productions, and in a few selected community gatherings.⁵⁹

Vocal singing, as the name implies, was based on individuals singing a variety of songs including lyrical hymns, children’s songs, *canciones de amor*, *corridos*, and *rancheras*. The number of individuals who have sung these lyrics historically has varied between one and three. If only one person sang, he or she was known as a *solista*. If two persons sang, it was known as a *dueto*, if three of them sang, it was known as a trio.

Prior to the 1940s, vocal singing in Texas was usually male-dominated and accompanied by a guitar, a violin, or, on occasion, an accordion. After the 1940s, females were added to the mix of vocal singers. Female singers, both duets and *solistas*, were accompanied by a variety of instruments, including accordions and saxophones or trumpets. Beginning in the late 1940s, the vocal singing popularized by *las mujeres* (women) was incorporated into existing musical ensembles such as the *conjunto* or the *orquestas*. This in effect led to its decline as a viable tradition in Tejano music. It also led to the gradual exclusion of Tejanas from the recording industry since most of the vocal singers for the *orquestas* and *conjuntos* were male.⁶⁰

Although *música* Tejana encompasses the vocal singing tradition, it is mostly made up of musical ensembles devoted to social dance music. Over the last century and a half, four distinct ensembles have played Texas–Mexican music: *orquestas*, *conjuntos*, *grupos*, and country bands. The Spanish terms “*orquesta*,” “*conjunto*,” and “*grupo*” generally make reference to

a group or association of musicians, but, in Texas, they have distinct meanings.⁶¹

The nineteenth-century *orquesta* was based primarily on string instruments such as violins, psalteries, vihuela, mandolins, guitars and contrabass. Occasionally, other instruments such as trumpets, trombones, clarinets, or tubas were used. If brass or wind instruments were used with the former, the ensemble was called an *orquesta típica* (typical orchestra). If only brass and wind instruments were used, they were *orquestas de "pitos"* (wind/brass orchestras) and called *bandas*. Those that used only string instruments were known as *orquestas de cuerda* (string orchestras). *Bandas* emerged in the latter part of the nineteenth century and were not as popular as the other types of *orquestas*, especially among Tejanos. The other two types of *orquestas*, on the other hand, were readily found among the elite and working-class groups in México and in South Texas during the 1800s. *Orquestas*, in general, however, came to be identified with the middle classes in México by the latter part of the nineteenth century and in Texas by the early twentieth century.⁶²

In the post-World War II era, the *orquestas* changed as some musical instruments were either dropped or replaced by new ones.⁶³ In the two decades after the Second World War, saxophones, among other instruments, became extremely important in the modern *orquestas*. Organs and electric guitars were added to this particular ensemble in the 1960s and 1970s. These types of *orquestas*, in combination with other ensembles and the music that they played, came to be popularly known as "La Onda Chicana" during these two decades.⁶⁴

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The *conjunto* was divided into two structurally distinct groups. One of these was known as a traditional *conjunto*, the other one as a progressive *conjunto*. The difference between these two types of *conjuntos* was not in the types of music they played, but in the particular types of instruments used.

The traditional *conjunto* was based primarily on the one-row or two-row button accordion, but it also consisted of two gui-

tars, one of which was a bajo sexto, and a drum. Several theories as to the origins of the accordion have been proposed. One of these is that German and Czech immigrants who settled in San Antonio introduced it to Mexicans in the mid 1800s. The popularity of this instrument then spread southward. Manuel Peña says that German immigrants most likely introduced it to Mexi-

cans in Monterrey in the same time period and it traveled northward.⁶⁵ Chris Strachwitz states that it was probably introduced to Mexicans in the Rio Grande Valley during the same time period and that it traveled both north and south.⁶⁶ Still another scholar argues that it came by way of the Gulf Coast.⁶⁷

The other important instrument of the traditional *conjunto* was the bajo sexto, a twelve-string

bass guitar. Scholars are unclear about how the bajo sexto reached Texas. Unlike accordions, which for the most part are made in Germany or Italy, bajo sextos are made in Texas and México.⁶⁸

The progressive *conjunto* adds one or more instruments to the basic four instrument ensemble. Among the instruments added, especially in the last three decades of the twentieth century, were the "pitos" (a set of saxophones and/or trumpets) and the keyboards (both organ and synthesizers). Roberto Pulido y Los Clásicos initiated the progressive *conjunto* tradition in the 1970's when he added two saxophones to the traditional *conjunto*. Emilio Navaira added a new sound to the progressive *conjunto* ensemble in 1989 when he deleted the horns and instead added keyboards, especially the synthesizer, to the traditional *conjunto*.

The *grupo Tejano*, a relatively new innovation, is anchored in the keyboards, especially the organ and the synthesizer. Additionally, it utilizes a variety of string and wind instruments, drums (percussion), and vocal singers. Prior to the early 1990s, these types of groups did not utilize the accordion in their music.

The *grupo Tejano* is slightly different from the *grupo* phenomenon in Mexico. In Mexico, *grupos* are keyboard-driven as in Texas, but the musicians specialize in romantic ballads or in *cumbias*.⁶⁹ In Texas, they do not specialize in *baladas* only; *grupos*



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Roberto Pulido

also sing or play a variety of other tunes such as *cumbias*, *rancheras*, country, and pop. Their repertoire, in other words, is more diverse than that of *grupos Mexicanos*.

Grupostejanos originated in the 1960s with the formation of Los Fabulosos Cuatro, but they did not emerge as a powerful force until the 1980s. The number of *grupos* expanded significantly during the last two decades of the twentieth century. Among the most popular *grupostejanos* in the 1990s were Mazz, La Mafia, and the former Selenia y Los Dinos.

The Chicano country bands are unique to *música Tejana*. These types of groups have at least three general characteristics. First, they are small and have between four and six persons to the ensemble. They also depend on two important instruments for their sound, a violin and a steel guitar. Second, the vast majority of vocalists sing with a country twang. Third, these bands play traditional country music and traditional Mexican music but in their own style. For the most part, they “Mexicanize” traditional country music and “countryfy” traditional Mexican songs such as “Los Laureles” or “Las Margaritas.” The former is done by singing the lyrics in Spanish or bilingually, the latter by playing Mexican tunes with these instruments and by singing them with a country twang.

Little is known about the Chicano country bands or where they originated. The earliest recording of country music by a Tejano artist is in 1949. In this year, Johnny Herrera, from Corpus Christi, recorded the country music standard “Jealous Heart” in English and in Spanish for the Melco label. Two years later, he recorded the same song as “Corazon Celoso” for Decca Records. Herrera’s recording, however, was done with saxophones, trumpets, and the accordion, instruments associated with the *orquesta* style popularized by Beto Villa in the late 1940’s.⁷⁰ He did not utilize the steel guitar and violin of traditional country groups.

The Chicano country bands, that is, those that sang with a country twang and used the violin and steel guitar in their recordings, probably originated sometime in the 1950s or 1960s along the lower Rio Grande Valley and became popular in the following two decades.⁷¹ One of these groups, The Country Roland Band, became extremely well known in the early 1970s and influenced other Tejano groups such as Rudy Tee Gonzales y Sus Reno Bops, Snowball & Co., Roberto Pulido y Los Clásicos and Mazz.⁷²

Música Tejana, then, is a particular form of border music developed by Tejanos for Tejanos. Because it is an “indigenous” creation, this music reflects the musical sensibilities of Tejanos, their complex historical experiences, their internal differentiation, and their ethnic identity. *Música Tejana* has been and continues to be a culturally significant symbol of collective pride, although it is extremely popular among non-Tejanos and in areas outside of South Texas. It is an organic symbol of Tejano life

and not merely a commodity to be sold on the capitalist market. Several different types of ensembles, not merely *conjuntos*, also play *música Tejana*. In addition to *conjuntos*, this music is comprised of the vocal singing tradition and three other dance ensembles: *orquestas*, *grupos*, and Chicano country bands. Each of these ensembles has emerged at particular periods of time, competed with each other and other musical styles popular in the Tejano community, and risen or fallen from public view because of important social forces such as shifting aesthetic desires within the Tejano population, the introduction of new technologies, urbanization, and commercialization. In the early part of the twentieth century, for example, various types of *orquestas* and *conjuntos* emerged as popular musical forms in the Tejano community. In the latter part of the twentieth century, *grupos*, Chicano country bands, and other hybrid ensembles with different mixes of musical instruments emerged and competed with *orquestas* and *conjuntos* for dominance.

Música Tejana likewise is rooted in select Mexican musical traditions comprised of many different types of songs and dances. Despite this diversity, the Mexican polka and the polka-based *ranchera* Tejana dominated for most of the twentieth century. This, however, began to change in the 1990s as a result of the increased popularity of the *cumbia* dance rhythm and the perceptible decline of the *ranchera*.

Finally, although *música Tejana* is rooted in Mexican musical traditions, it has been significantly modernized and updated over the decades. A variety of instruments and dance rhythms from other musical styles, for instance, have been incorporated into *música Tejana*. Texas–Mexican performers have also appropriated, adapted, or added a variety of distinct but different styles to this music and fashioned a sound that reflects their sensibilities and experiences. No one can say for sure what the future holds for *música Tejana*, but whatever new forms and styles emerge will definitely relate to the historical experiences, internal differences, and ethnic identity of the Tejano community. This music, in other words, will continue to be culturally significant to the Tejano population, regardless of its popularity or commercialization, because it is, in essence, an indigenous creation. ■



Notes

- 1 Manuel Peña, *Música Tejana* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1999), 3-14.
- 2 Ramiro Burr, "Conjunto faithful to converge at San Antonio festival," *Houston Chronicle*, May 11, 1997, 10.
- 3 For different definitions of Tejano see Jon Pareles, "Niche Music..." *New York Times*, late edition, Sun May 14, 1995, Sec. 4, 2; Burr, "Conjunto faithful..." 1997, 10; Marty Racine, "Making the Music," *Houston Chronicle*, August 16, 1992, 8; and Thaddeus Herrick, "Go Tejano!/Music's appeal oversteps traditional boundaries," *Houston Chronicle*, February 9, 1995, 5.
- 4 Peña, xi, 184-186.
- 5 Vilma Maldonado, "Defining Tejano hard because it encompasses so much," *The Monitor* (McAllen, Texas), October 14, 1997, 4A.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 See Peña.
- 8 See Richard L. Nostrand, *The Hispano Homeland* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 99.
- 9 For an overview of the distinctiveness of the border in Tejano history see Américo Paredes, *With His Pistol in His Hand* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1957), 7-32.
- 10 Armando C. Alonzo, *Tejano Legacy: Rancheros and Settlers in South Texas, 1734-1900* (Albuquerque, N.M.: University of New Mexico Press, 1998, 3.
- 11 Joe Nick Patoski, *Selena: Como La Flor* (New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 1996), 12.
- 12 Sam Suniga. Personal interview with author, San Antonio, Texas November 18, 2000.
- 13 Patoski, 12-13.
- 14 Alice, Texas, a rural community 45 miles west of Corpus Christi, in fact, was officially declared in the summer of 2000 as the "birthplace" of *Música Tejana* by the state legislature. Carlos Truan, State Senator from the Corpus Christi area, discussed this legislative proclamation at an induction ceremony honoring over twelve artists and pioneers of the Tejano music industry. The author was chosen to be one of the presenters at the induction ceremony on Friday, August 25, 2000 at the Knights of Columbus (KC) Hall in Alice, Texas.
- 15 Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mextiza* (1987), preface.
- 16 Manuel Peña, *The Texas-Mexican Conjunto: History of a Working Class Music* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), 24.
- 17 For a historical overview of Mexican Americans in Texas see Arnoldo De Leon, *Mexican Americans in Texas: A Brief History*, 2nd ed. (Wheeling, Ill.: Harland Davidson, Inc., 1999) and David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987).
- 18 Peña, *The Texas-Mexican Conjunto*, 24.
- 19 Dan William Dickey, *The Kennedy Corridos: A Study of the Ballads of a Mexican American Hero* (Austin: Center for Mexican American Studies, University of Texas, Austin, 1978), 7. On *corridos* in general see also Américo Paredes, *With His Pistol in His Hand: A Border Ballad and its Hero* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1958).
- 20 Paredes, 129-150.
- 21 Peña, *Música Tejana*, 30.
- 22 This as well as other corridos can be found in *Corridos y Tragedias de la Frontera: First Recordings of Historic Mexican American Ballads*, Arhoolie, CD 7019 and CD 7020. For an analysis of the "Corrido of Gregorio Cortez" see Paredes, 1958.
- 23 Peña, 77.
- 24 Peña, 39. Peña notes that in the latter part of the century a new type of *ranchera* emerged. He argues that this "Texo-centric" *ranchera* was a variant of the *ranchera* that accepted the Texan myth of bigness. See p. 39.
- 25 Peña argues that the *canción típica* was also known as a *canción Mexicana* in the early part of the century. Peña, p. 50.
- 26 Peña, 39.
- 27 Peña argues that the treacherous woman theme was a form of ideology displacement that transposed issues of class relations to the gender domain. Peña, 54. Lydia Mendoza bucked the practice of casting women as deceitful lovers. For some examples see the collection of hits during the 1930s. Lydia Mendoza, *Mal Hombre*, Arhoolie CD-7002, 1992.
- 28 The unique instrumentation of the *orquesta*, *grupo*, and *conjunto* ensembles will be explained in a later section.
- 29 Peña, 50-51.
- 30 *Música romántica* acquired the label of *música moderna* in the post-WWII era. Peña, 60.
- 31 The *ranchera* and the *romántica* illustrated a much larger relationship between the country and the city and its ideological articulation. The concepts of *lo ranchero* and *jaiton* encapsulated the ideological contradictions embodied in the concepts of the city (capitalism) and the country (feudalism) an idealized rural communitarian experience accompanied by backward, uncivilized peon and an idealized modernizing urban middle-class experience. Peña, 63.
- 32 Thaddeus Herrick, "Go Tejano!/Music's appeal oversteps traditional boundaries," *Houston Chronicle*, February 9, 1995, 1.
- 33 Peña, 3-14.
- 34 Burr, 1999, 105.
- 35 See Strachwitz, Vol. 4, n.d. (ca. 1973)
- 36 Sordo Sodi notes that there are various types of *ranchera* songs. One of these is the *canciones norteñas* played by *norteño groups*. These songs were at one time accompanied on the vihuela. Beginning in 1850, harp, vihuela, and psaltery were used in the accompaniment of these songs. Around 1890 the *jarana* and guitar came into use; the accordion appeared still later. *Canciones norteñas* became popular in the capital in the 1920s. From there they radiated all over the country. The *norteño* ensemble, as it is known in the 1970s, thus was not more than 25 years old. Cited in Antonio Gonzalez, *Mexican American Musicians; A History* (Houston: Privately printed, no date), p. 98.
- 37 Peña, 51-53, argues that the *canción ranchera*, sung primarily by vocal duets, became powerfully charged with class and gender implications in the second quarter of the twentieth century. The songs were gender biased and coalesced around the theme of the treacherous woman. This theme, however, reversed existing gender norms, rather than reflected them.
- 38 For examples of the relative increase in *cumbias* during the 1990s see the following two albums: Intocable, *Intocable*, Capitol EMI, CD-H2724349517820, 1998; Selena, *Baila Esta Cumbia*, Capitol-EMI, Casette 4077990524, 1992.
- 39 Little Joe, for instance, recorded the song "Las Nubes" bilingually in the late 1970s. Ram Herrera recently recorded "A Never Ending Love," a *ranchera* with English lyrics. For a sophisticated cultural and musical analysis of "Las Nubes" and several other songs by Little Joe see Manuel Peña, *Mexican American Orquesta* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), 244-259.
- 40 These processes have been called "bimusicality" by Peña and "hybridity" by Burr. For a complex analysis of the former see Peña, *The Mexican American Orquesta*, especially 227-274. On hybridity see Burr, 1999, 15-39.
- 41 Letty Guval, Miles de Suenos, A.B. Wick Records 001, 1994.
- 42 *Conjunto Bernal*, Aurora, GS160, 1983. This is probably the date of its re-issue. I originally heard the album in the summer of 1978 when I moved to Santa Barbara, California. My cousin, Elias Soto, a displaced Tejano living in California, had gone to Texas and bought it for his listening pleasure. He introduced it to me the first day I visited him in Santa Barbara. This album then must have been recorded in the late 1970s.
- 43 To hear some of his original recordings issued between 1948 and 1954 see *Beto Villa: Father of Orquesta Tejana*, Arhoolie CD 364, 1992.
- 44 For examples of this type of music see Sunny & the Sunliners, *Little Brown Eyed Soul*, Key-Loc, KL-3005, n.d. and Little Joe and the Latinaires, *Unbeatable*, Tomi Records, tlp1002, n.d. All the songs in these albums are in English and recorded during the early 1960s.
- 45 In 1957, for instance, El Conjunto Bernal recorded a rock and roll song entitled "La Novia Antonia." This selection can be found in *Tejano Roots: Raíces Tejanas*, Arhoolie, CD 341, 1991.
- 46 Peña refers to this development as the "triumph of the anti-ranchero. See Manuel Peña, *The Mexican American Orquesta* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), 166-199.
- 47 Some groups have Tejanoized other styles so that they reflect the experiences of Mexican Americans in the barrio but have not rearranged the tunes so that Tejanos can dance them. One of these is Randy Garibay, the great Tejano bluesman. He records old-time blues but with lyrics that reflect the experiences of Mexican Americans in the barrios of San Antonio, Texas. See, Randy Garibay, *Barbacoa Blues*, Angelita Mia Production Company, [no CD number], 1997 and *And Cats Don't Sleep*, Angelita Mia Production, RGCD-3943, no date.
- 48 The song can be found in *Steve Jordan: The Many Sounds of Steve Jordan*, Arhoolie, CD-319, 1990. See selection number 19.
- 49 This song can be heard in *The Best of the 11th Annual Tejano Conjunto Festival*, (1992). (San Antonio: Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center Produc-

- tion, 1992).
- 50 See selection number 7, "Sobrevivire," in Priscila y Sus Balas de Plata, *Todo Por Ti*, Fonovisa, B000009R4V, 1999.
- 51 Throughout the fall of 1999 I constantly heard this song on KQQK, 106.5 FM in Houston and in several radio stations in Corpus Christi, including KUNO, 1400 AM, KSAB, 99.9 FM, and KMIQ/Majic 105.1 FM.
- 52 For an example of three-part harmony in the *orquesta* style of Música Tejana see Los Dinos, *Los Dinos*, Falcon Records, FLP-2057, n.d.
- 53 Burr, 1999, 135.
- 54 Pulido has countless of albums and CDs illustrating his unique combination of the *orquesta* and the *conjunto* sounds. For an example from the late 1970s see Roberto Pulido y Los Clásicos, *El Primo*, Falcon, ARVLP-1056, 1979.
- 55 See, for instance, Emilio Navaira & Rio Band, *Sensaciones*, CBS, CRC-80329, 1990.
- 56 Country Roland recorded a large number of albums in the 1970s and early 1980s. For one example of his music see Country Roland, *Mr. Chicano Country*, Falcon, ARVLP-1062, 1980. For an example of the variety of Chicano country bands that recorded during the latter part of the 1970s and the early 1980s see Various Artists, *The Best of Chicano Country, Vol. 2*, Falcon, ARVLP-1075, 1982. This latter album has songs by Roberto Pulido y Los Clásicos, Texas Country Band, Cactus Country Band, Country Roland Sr., and Country Roland, Jr.
- 57 For an excellent analysis of this process as reflected in the modern *orquesta* see Peña, *The Mexican American Orquesta*, 1999, especially 227-274.
- 58 One other type of group was the *banda*. *Bandas* utilized mostly wind-based or brass instruments such as clarinet, cornet, flutes, trumpets, trombones, and tubas. Many of them also had one or two sets of drums. Although some *banda* groups have been popular in the Tejano community, especially along the border, no *banda* group recorded Tejano music during the 20th century. The association of *banda* music with military functions or marching bands among the popular imagination probably accounts for this lack of popularity among Tejanos.
- 59 Americo Paredes, *A Texas-Mexican Cancionero: Folksongs of the Lower Border* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995).
- 60 Guadalupe San Miguel, Jr. "The Rise of Recorded Tejano Music in the Post-World War II Years, 1946-1964," *Journal of American Ethnic History*, Vol. 19, Number 1 (Fall 1999): 26-49.
- 61 Several scholars have used the term "Tejano" synonymously with what I call "*grupo*." Tejano however is an ambiguous and confusing term that encompasses all groups currently playing Música Tejana. Even Peña himself provides two confusing definitions of "Tejano." In the preface, he argues that Tejano is comprised of "the most recent crop of synthesizer-driven ensembles and their styles," XI. Later he expands this definition and argues that Tejano is comprised of "the various Texas-Mexican musical groups and their styles" played in the 1990s. (184). Ramiro Burr, the well-known music columnist for the *San Antonio Light* argues that "Tejano" includes all types of musical styles, including the *orquestas* that originated in the post-World War II era and the progressive *conjuntos*. See Burr, 1999, 197.
- 62 Chris Strachwitz, [liner notes], *Tejano Roots/Raíces Tejanas: The Roots of Tejano and Conjunto Music* Arhoolie, CD341, 1991; Chris Strachwitz, [liner notes], *Mexican American Border Music: Volume 5-Orquestas de Cuerdas: The End of a Tradition*, Arhoolie, CD7018, 1996; Chris Strachwitz, [liner notes], *Mexican American Border Music, Vol 4-Orquestas Tipicas, The First Recordings, 1926-1938*, Arhoolie, CD7017, 1996; Peña, 1999, 118-127.
- 63 The songs and dances played by these *orquestas* also changed over time. The changing repertoire is discussed in a later section.
- 64 For a history of "La Onda Chicana" and the major *orquestas* playing this music during the 1960s and 1970s, see Peña, 1999.
- 65 Peña argues that it most likely originated in Mexico. Violent confrontations between Anglos and Mexicans in Bexar discouraged its use in the Mexican community. German settlements, especially workers in Monterrey probably introduced it to the community. Peña, *The Texas-American Conjunto*, 33.
- 66 Chris Strachwitz, [liner notes], *Texas-Mexican Border Music, Vol 4: Norteno Accordion, Part 1: The First Recordings*, Folklyric Records, LP9006, n.d. (ca 1973).
- 67 Adrian Trevino, *Tejano Music, 1830-1930: An Informal History* (Albuquerque, New Mexico: Trellis Publishing Company, 1990).
- 68 The bajo sexto has a thicker neck than a regular guitar and has a feature called a "cutaway," which improves resonance. The electric bass replaced the bajo sexto's bass function in many *conjuntos* in the 1950s, and today the bajo sexto mainly serves as a rhythm instrument. Burr, 1999, 58.
- 69 They also do not give billing to any members of the group. Burr, 1999, 102.
- 70 Patoski, *Selena*, 23.
- 71 For a sampling of this music see the following LPs: Country Roland, *Las Margaritas*, Falcon, ARVLP-1057, 1979; Country Roland Band, *Rancho Grande*, Falcon, ARVLP-1052, 1978; Country Mingo, *The Outlaw*, Falcon, FLP-5041, 1980; The Texas Country Band, *Valle de Palmas*, Falcon, ARVLP-1065, 1980; Country Roland, Jr. *Mucho Macho*, Falcon, ARVLP-1064, 1980; Various Artists, *The Best of Chicano Country, Vol. 2*, Falcon, ARVLP-1075, 1982.
- 72 For a sampling of the country music recorded by these artists see Rudy Tee Gonzales y Sus Reno Bops, *Country, Teardrop*, TD-2030, (ca. 1972); Snowball & Co., *Snowball & Co.*, Fireball, FLP-1001, n.d.. (see especially "Just Because," a Chicano country ballad); Roberto Pulido, in Various Artists, *The Best of Chicano Country, Vol. 2*, Falcon, ARVLP-1075, 1982; and Mazz, *Perfect 10*, Cara, CA-10B, 1977. Mazz recorded three country songs in their first album in 1977, "Algo Bonito," (Something Pretty) "El, (He)" and "Laura Ya No Vive Aqui" (Laura Doesn't Live Here Anymore). Unlike other Tejano artists, Mazz abandoned the use of the steel guitar and violin and played these songs using the synthesizer and rhythm guitar as its primary instruments.

Texas Centennial 1936: African-American Texans and the

By Kevin Mooney

NEGRO SPIRITUALS

Arranged for Solo Voice by

H. T. BURLEIGH

<p>Ain't Goin' no Study 'Wae No Mo' Two keys Bala in Gilead Two keys By An' By Two keys Can'te's Here Nobody Pray Two keys De Biko' Man Stood on De Road An' Crist Two keys De Gospel Train Two keys Deep River Three keys Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel One key Don't Be Weary Traveler Two keys Don't You Weep When You Goss One key Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit Two keys Give Me Jesus Two keys Go Down in the Louisiana Valley Three keys Go Down Moses Two keys Go Tall in de Mountains Hard Trials One key Hear de Larks a-Cryin' One key Heav'n's Home Two keys He's Just de Same Today Two keys I Don't Feel No-Ways Tired One key I Got a Horse in A-Dar Rock Two keys I Know de Lord's Laid His Hands On Me Two keys I Stood On de Ribber Ob Jordan Two keys I've Been in de Street So Long</p>	<p>I Want To Be Ready One key John's Goss Down On de Island Two keys Joshua Fit de Battle Ob Jericho Let Us Cheer The Weary Traveler Two keys Little David Play on Your Harp Two keys My Lord What A Morning Two keys My Way's Cloudy One key Nobody Knows de Trouble I've Seen Two keys Oh Didn't It Rain Two keys Oh Wasn't dat a Wide Ribber One key Oh Peter Go Ring dem Bells Two keys O Rocks Don't Fall On Me Two keys Ride on King Jesus Sweet Home Down Let de Harvest Pass One key Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child Three keys Stea' Still Jordan Three keys Steal Away Two keys Swing Low, Sweet Chariot Two keys 'Tis Me O Lord One key Weepin' Mary Two keys Were You There Three keys Walk in de Water Two keys You May Bury Me in de Ear Two keys</p>
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African-American Texans expressed ethnic as well as regional pride by their efforts to participate in the 1936 celebration of the state's centennial. Business and educational leaders, primarily from the African-American community in the Dallas area, lobbied the state legislature and Centennial officials to ensure proper representation of their race. Their efforts were manifest in the erection of the Hall of Negro Life Building—an exhibit displaying the progress of African-Americans in Texas and throughout the nation¹—and the unprecedented participation of African-American performers at the third National Folk Festival held from the 14th through the 21st of June 1936 at the Texas Centennial Exposition in Dallas. The significance of their actions went beyond the Centennial era. Indeed, Texas Civil Rights leader A. Maceo Smith recalled that, for many African-American Texans, the Centennial “was the kickoff of the real Civil Rights thrust in Texas.”²

Joseph Tilden Rhea, in his 1997 book *Race Pride and the American Identity*, argues that “recognition of the role of minorities in American history has increased not because of a general drift toward cultural pluralism, as is often believed, but because of concrete actions which can be documented.”³ In this essay, I will suggest further evidence in support of this view. Focusing on the National Folk Festival as a site for the presentation of ethnic identity, I will examine the goals, organization, and achievements of the Festival with particular emphasis on the participation of African Americans, thus documenting one minority's cultural activism as reflected in their role in this particular celebration.

A brief discussion of Sarah Gertrude Knott, founder and organizer of the National Folk Festival, her efforts to encourage Texan involvement, and the active role of African Americans in

the selection and organization of their programs presented at the Festival will serve to contextualize the dialectic between this particular ethnic minority group and the mainstream (Anglo-Texan) society.

Inspired in part by Bascom Lamar Lunsford's Mountain and Dance Folk Festival in Asheville, North Carolina, and also recognizing a need for a national organization for the encouragement and preservation of traditional folk expression, Kentucky native Sarah Gertrude Knott (1895-1984) organized the first National Folk Festival which premiered in St. Louis in 1934.⁴ While Lunsford's festivals were primarily a celebration of Southern Appalachian music and dance, Knott produced a conceptually expanded version adding exhibits of folk arts, crafts, dramatic productions, performance workshops, and lectures.⁵

The Third National Folk Festival

One of Knott's objectives was to demonstrate the diversity of American folk culture, and she believed that "[The] picture of our folk life today would not be complete without the contributions of the Negro."⁶ In a bold, unprecedented move, Knott challenged racial segregation and the status quo by presenting African-American performers on the same stage with whites. At the Third National Folk Festival in Dallas, African-American Texan performers were on the stage with greater frequency than Anglos. But before I address the specifics of the African-American involvement in 1936, a description of the genesis and organization of the third National Folk Festival is necessary.

Sarah Gertrude Knott was an educated, energetic, and indomitable promoter, and in her proposal to the Texas Centennial Commission, she appealed to both the Commission's senses of patriotism and commercialism, two motivating forces behind all official decisions.⁷ By New Year's Day 1936, a little more than six months before opening day, Knott had arrived in Dallas with office space and an expense account provided by the Exposition.

Knott's foremost challenge was to assemble a program of performers and presenters that together would represent both national and regional folk traditions.

In addition to the groups that had become a permanent part of her traveling troupe, Knott's method had been to organize preliminary community festivals as a means both to locate suitable participants and also to provide her National Folk Festivals with local/regional color. For the first National Folk Festival (St. Louis), eighteen "small gatherings" were held in the Arkansas and Missouri Ozarks region, and prior to the second Festival (Chattanooga), four regional festivals were held in Tennessee. In Texas, thirty preliminary festivals were ultimately held in various cities throughout the state, including Galveston, Stam-

ford, San Antonio, Waco, Austin, Midland, Paris, Port Arthur, San Angelo, Amarillo, Ft. Davis, El Paso, and Bandera.⁸

Lacking knowledge about the unique folklore traditions of Texas and the Southwest, Knott solicited the Texas Folklore Society for direction and assistance. On 3 January 1936 Knott sent her "very first letter" since she came to Dallas to Texan novelist and folklorist J. Frank Dobie.⁹ "I do not particularly know the Southwest," Knott admits, "so I shall gladly appreciate your guidance and support in the work we are attempting to do in your region." It is not surprising that Knott contacted

Dobie first. Besides being the secretary and editor of the Texas Folklore Society, she had met Dobie in 1934 when he was one of several lecturers on folklore at her first National Folk Festival in St. Louis. His presentation at this Festival, however, proved to be his last significant involvement with Knott's Festivals. Although Dobie declined participation in Knott's third NFF ("for I have my hands full"), he supplied Knott with a list of officers and members of the Texas Folklore Society, offered to meet with her, and suggested that she con-



Courtesy of: University of Texas Library

tact William A. Owens, a young English teacher who harbored a growing interest in Texas folklore.¹⁰

Knott had hoped to encourage officials and members of the Texas Folklore Society to organize preliminary festivals. Like Dobie, however, most members of the Society were busy with their own work and unwilling to commit to such extensive involvement. Ultimately, the State Board of Education and various regional Departments of Recreation sponsored most of the thirty preliminary festivals held throughout the state.¹¹

Thus, those who dominated the social order largely controlled these local festivals. Knott and others from the hegemonic class selected the performers to be included on the Festival program.

While the objective of the Festival was to give a voice to the folk and their traditions, the particular articulation of that voice and the context of the speech were highly influenced by the organizers.¹² The selection of African-American groups to perform at the Festival, however, is one notable exception.

Knott received greater response from her calls for Texan involvement from the African-American community than from any other ethnic group or, as noted, from members of the Texas

Folklore Society. At Knott's request, W. H. Pace, the editor of the African-American run *Dallas Express*, and A. Maceo Smith, a Dallas high school teacher, member of the Negro Chamber of Commerce and the Texas Negro Centennial Commission, and future state president of the NAACP,¹³ formed the Dallas Negro Folk Festival Committee made up of about fifteen African-American educators and leaders whose primary objective was to "formulate plans for the Negro participation [at the Festival]."¹⁴ Other committees with similar objectives included the Dallas Negro Chamber of Commerce, the Texas Negro Centennial Committee, and the Executive Committee of the Texas Association of Negro Musicians.

African-American Texans were proud of their accomplishments in the state and anticipated an opportunity to take part in the celebration. Under the front-page headline, "Invited to Participate Every Day," the *Dallas Express* reported that "Enormous interest in all phases of Negro participation . . . is being displayed by Texas Negroes."¹⁵ Such publicity, in addition to school programs centering on Texas history, inspired several Dallas African-American students to write poems dedicated to the Texas Centennial. Their pride in the state is reflected in several of the poems printed in a pamphlet titled *Patriotic Moments*, edited by the state's first African-American folklorist, J. Mason Brewer.¹⁶ Two poems by Booker T. Washington High School students are typical. (See Figure 1).

Figure 1:

Our State

*Our state has everything to make you swell with pride,
The riches of its crops and mines cannot be well denied.
I will always be loyal to Texas our state
And be one of the first at the Centennial gate.
During all of the summer I'll always be found
Talking and walking on the Centennial grounds.
I'll see the great things Texas Negroes have done
And to go along with this I'll have me some fun.¹⁷*

The Centennial Exposition

*The Texas Centennial is going to be
A great Exposition for all you see
In it the Negro will play his part
Just look at the Negro in Farming and Art.*

*Texas is a wonderful place to live
A place where you learn to love and to give
But Look not at this—the Centennial see
And just what it means to you and me.*

*There will be visitors from all around
From countries and cities and different towns
They will be coming in and out
To see what the thing is all about.*

*We all can help as Texans you know
By telling our visitors where to go
We want them to visit our colored schools
And see how the children observe the rules.¹⁸*

These student poems, the activities of the civic and business leaders, and newspaper reports suggest a strikingly significant degree of cultural and political activism in 1930s Texas, largely motivated by a desire to participate in the representation of their heritage in the third National Folk Festival as well as other centennial related activities.

Knott described the format for the eight-day Festival as "somewhat like a three-ring circus."¹⁹ The main events began each night at the Amphitheater (Band Shell) with Knott officiating at the microphone.²⁰ The objective of the nightly programs was the presentation of "Ur-themes" of the people who have contributed to Texas history such as "Indians, Mexicans, Negroes, and Anglos."²¹ The overwhelming majority of Texan-ethnic groups on the main stage were Anglo and African-American; both represented with fourteen different ensembles. (See Table 1.) The African-American programs scheduled for June 19, one of the three "Negro Days," were repeated on another day. With the repeated performances taken into account, the African-American groups actually took the stage more often than the Anglo groups.



Courtesy of: University of Texas Library

Table: 1**Texas Groups**

(according to ethnicity)

Anglo

Square Dance, "Centennial 8" (Dallas), June 14
 Cowboy Songs and Fiddle Tunes (Lubbock and Amarillo), June 15
 Singing Games (Houston), June 15
 Ring Games, Ballads, Spirituals (Austin), June 16
 Play Party Games and Square Dances (Commerce), June 16
 Cowboy Christmas Ball (Anson, Abilene, and Stamford), June 16
 Cowboy Band (Hardin-Simmons University, Abilene), June 16
 Fiddle Tunes (Athens), June 17
 Cowboy Ballads and Music (San Antonio), June 17
 Anglo-Texas Folk Songs (; San Antonio), June 20, (Oscar J. Fox)
 Old Trail Drivers Dances, Ballads, and Stories (San Antonio),
 June 20, (Oscar J. Fox)
 Cowboy Ballads (San Antonio), June 20, (Oscar J. Fox)
 Anglo-Saxon Ballads (Quanah), June 21
 Sacred Harp Songs (Dallas and Ft. Worth), June 21

African-American

El Paso Pioneer Club Singers, June 14
 Negro Spirituals, Booker T. Washington High School (Dallas),
 June 14
 Square Dances (Farmers Branch, Dallas, Ft. Worth), June 15
 Old Time Music by Dallas Group, June 16
 Negro Singing Games (Ft. Worth), June 16
 Lullabies (Dallas), June 18
 Lining Hymns (Dallas), June 18, 19
 Square Dances (Dallas) June 18 (same Dallas group of June 15)
 Negro Work Songs (Farmer's Branch), June 18, 19
 Cake Walk (Farmer's Branch), June 19
 Negro Singing Games (Ft. Worth), June 19
 Negro Spirituals (Marshall), June 19, 20
 Negro Spirituals (Dallas), June 19, 21
 Evolution of Negro Music (Dallas), June 20

Mexican

Mexican Orquesta Típica (El Paso) June 14
 Mission Hymns, Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish (Dallas), June 14
 Orquesta Típica (San Antonio), June 15
 Mexican Songs and Dances (Dallas), June 15
 Lariat Dance (El Paso), June 17
 Lullabies (Ft. Worth), June 18

German

German Folk Songs and Dances (Fredericksburg), June 18
 Lullabies (Fredericksburg), June 18

Indian

Tigua Indians from El Paso, June 14

Unknown Ethnicity

Accordian Player (Dallas), June 16

The attention that Knott gave to the African Americans did not go unnoticed by some of the Anglo participants. According to William A. Owens, stage manager for the Festival, the contact between ethnic groups on the main stage was met more often with prejudice than with an open hand. In 1950, Owens recalled that

The ladies of the Dallas music clubs had been invited to sing Stephen Foster songs. Some Negro choirs had been invited to sing spirituals. It so happened that the Negro choirs were assembled on stage to sing their spirituals first. The white ladies waiting down in the audience were indignant. Their remarks about the "niggers first" arrangement were loud all through the spirituals. Then, finding no place on the program for their numbers, they began singing "Old Folks at Home" from where they sat, with their director, beautifully dressed for the occasion, standing up and marking off the rhythm with exaggerated movements. They had come to sing, and sing they did!²²

Indeed, the National Folk Festival in Dallas highlighted racial boundaries as opposed to dissolving them.²³ It was as much a site of confrontation as a place for communication and understanding. The purpose of the event—to provide a forum for the interchange of folk expressions in order to break racial barriers—went unfulfilled.

Another forum organized by Knott for the interchange of ideas was the series of lectures on folk music and folklore. Ten of the twenty-five presentations given on three days were by Texans. (See Table 2.) Of these ten, seven presenters were members of the Texas Folklore Society.

Table: 2**National Folk Festival Sessions**

(Texan participants and their lecture topics)

June 16

John Lee Brooks, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Vice-President, Texas Folklore Society [TFS], Presiding.*

Mabel Major, Texas Christian University, Ft. Worth, "British Ballads in Texas," Vice-President, TFS.*

William A. Owens, Wesley College, Greenville, "Music of the Play-Party Games in Texas," member, TFS.

Martha L. Emmons, Waco, "Negro Wisdom," President, TFS.

Grace Dupree Ridings, Sherman, "Ballads - Johnny Sands, I Love Somebody, and I Wish I Were Single Again."†

June 17

Jovita Gonzalez, Del Rio, "Legend of the Vaqueros," member, TFS.

A. S. Jackson, Dallas, Director of Music, Booker T. Washington High School, "The Place of the Negro Spiritual in American Music."†

June 18

Rebecca Smith, Texas Christian University, Ft. Worth, Presiding, member, TFS.

Dan Storm, Austin, "Mexican Tales," member, TFS.

Helen Hagan, "Negro Lore," Bishop College, Marshall†

Julia Estill, Fredricksburg, "Superstitions in Gillespie County," member, TFS.

Martha L. Emmons (see June 16)

June 19

no session

*The three vice-presidents of the TFS at the twenty-second annual meeting, held at The University of Texas at Austin, 24 and 25 April 1936 were Brooks, Major, and A. W. Eddins.

†TFS affiliation not known.

African-Americans A. S. Jackson, Jr., music director at Booker T. Washington High School, and Helen Hagan, dean of the School of Music at Bishop College in Marshall, Texas, presented two of the three papers on African-American topics. Neither presenter had any formal affiliation with the Texas Folklore Society.²⁴ I have not been able to locate their papers (if extant), so the details of their presentations await further discovery. Nevertheless, the historical significance arguably lies less in what they had to say than in their presence.

Despite an emphasis on "Negro" folklore reflected in the presentations and publications of the Texas Folklore Society prior to 1936, the majority of these studies were by white folklorists. The first active African-American in the society was J. Mason Brewer, who presented for the first time at the nineteenth annual meeting in Waco, April 1933.²⁵ Martha Emmons, a white folklorist whose interests included African-American folklore, organized the meeting and later recalled that while she had hoped to sit next to him at the banquet following the presentations, Brewer left the meeting directly after giving his paper "probably

as he thought he should, considering racial attitudes in 1933."²⁶ Ralph Yarborough, then assistant Texas Attorney General, later U.S. Senator, and an important figure in the Texas Progressive tradition, recalled that Brewer need not have felt that way. According to Texas folklorist and historian of the Texas Folklore Society Francis Abernethy, Yarborough believed that "the Texas Folklore Society and the Texas State Historical Association were the only Southern academic associations that had welcomed Brewer and other blacks during that time."²⁷

Would Brewer and other African Americans have felt welcome hearing members of their race referred to as "old time darky"²⁸ or the "lusty, phallic, Adamic' Negroes of South Texas, shiftless and shifting day laborers and small croppers who follow Lady Luck, Aphrodite, and John Barleycorn?"²⁹ With few exceptions, stereotype and prejudice influenced the attitudes of white folklorists toward African Americans. Abernethy admits that the attitudes toward African Americans represented by the Society's first thirty years of presentations on the subject would be unacceptable today and warns that we should not succumb to "generational chauvinism, the belief that only the values of one's own generation are valid."³⁰

I agree. What I question is his view that these prejudiced presentations were "instrumental in preparing the way for racial desegregation."³¹ It is my contention that such writings as the first publication of the Society, "Some Current Folk-Songs of the Negro," by Will H. Thomas (1880-1935)³² did more to perpetuate stereotypes and racial divisiveness than to represent what Abernethy considers "the first steps toward racial understanding and eventual integration."³³ Consider the excerpt below from Thomas's essay, reprinted and thus endorsed by the Society in 1936. In order to contextualize his collection of songs, Thomas contrasts the "colored semi-rural proletariat" with the white man.³⁴

The white man rises early and eats his breakfast. My proletariat doesn't rise at all for the chances are that he has never gone to bed. At noon they "knock off." While the white man is preparing to eat his lunch, the "nigger" has already done so and is up in the bed of a wagon or on a plank underneath a tree fast asleep, usually with his head in the sun. At nightfall, the white man eats supper and spends the evening reading or with his family. Not so my proletariat. He generally borrows thirty-five cents from the white man, steps out the back gate, gives a shrill whistle or two, and allows how he believes he'll "step off a piece to-night."³⁵

Attempting to find value in Thomas's words beyond their reflection of bigotry and prejudice against African Americans, Abernethy considers Thomas's views "one person's sincere interest in the culture of a group from which (at that time, only

fifty years after the Civil War) he was culturally separated.”³⁶ But not all Anglo-Texans shared Thomas’s views.

The Anglo-Texan folklorist and writer Harold Preece (b. 1906; d.?) was not as forgiving in 1936 as Abernethy is today. In an essay published in *The Crisis*, the journal of the NAACP, Preece criticized white folklorists who in his opinion exploited and distorted the traditional culture of the “Negroes” they studied. “The folklore school has never outgrown [its] snobbish origin,” writes Preece. “I have attended meetings of professional folklorists where all the ancient jokes about the Negro’s supposed incompetence and unthinking amiability were told with the usual gusto of the educated illiterate.”³⁷ Preece did not name the particular association of “professional folklorists,” but based on his biography, it is likely that he was referring to the Texas Folklore Society.

Preece was born in 1906 near Austin, Texas. He began his career as a cub reporter for the *Austin Statesman* in 1922, started selling articles to magazines in 1925, and became a free-lance writer and specialist in American and Texas folklore. He was a theology student at Texas Christian University (1926-1927) and studied writing at the University of Texas (1932-33). In 1936 he assisted Knott in her unsuccessful efforts to organize a festival in Austin in conjunction with the Texas Folklore Society meeting scheduled for April.³⁸ He became a member of the Society in 1937 and, according to membership lists in the Texas Folklore Society Records, did not renew his membership thereafter. Preece worked with John and Alan Lomax collecting archives of American folk music for the Library of Congress in 1936 and 1937. Concurrently, he was the folklore editor of the Federal Writers’ Project in Texas. Between 1936 and 1947 he published several essays on southern culture and racial attitudes as reflected in contemporary literature and folklore studies.³⁹ In the early 1940s Preece moved from Austin to Monteagle, Tennessee, where he was associated with the Highlander Folk School. In 1946 the Ku Klux Klan chased him and his family out of the state, and they moved on to New York, where he wrote books and essays on various subjects in-

cluding religious cults, pioneer life, the Texas Rangers, and the American West.

The inclusion of Jackson and Hagan provided the neglected African-American perspective on their traditions. Of course, Jackson and Hagan’s presentations for the National Folk Festival would have to be studied in order to compare and contrast their perspectives to those of the Anglo’s. Their participation, however, challenged boundaries of segregation and white hegemony in the area of African-American folklore studies.

Despite the apparent significance of the unprecedented African-American involvement on the main stage and as part of the lectures associated with the National Folk Festival, African-American newspapers such as the *Dallas Express* and the *Houston Informer* did not publish reviews of the event. Surprisingly, besides the announcement of the formation of the

Dallas Negro Folk Festival Committee, no mention was made of the National Folk Festival. With such a lack of primary evidence, African-American attitudes toward their participation in the Festival are difficult, if not impossible, to determine. There are several factors that contributed to African-Americans’ failure to recognize the significance of their involvement with the Festival. First, it is likely that they did not view the National Folk Festival as an event separate from the Exposition. Knott herself recalled that “Though much interest had been aroused in communities throughout the state, most of those on the Centennial grounds had never heard of the National Folk Festival and to them was just another show—a free one at that. Since there was no admission fee, those who made up the audiences came and went at will.”⁴⁰ Second, perhaps the segregated and prejudicial treatment at the Exposition as well as negative images of their race printed in Anglo-run newspapers overshadowed the significance of their involvement with the Festival.

The Anglo-run newspaper coverage of the African-American Texan participation at the Exposition in Dallas presented demeaning, contemptible reports that incited a response from the *Chicago Defender*, at the time perhaps the most widely circulat-



Courtesy of: University of Texas Library



Courtesy of: University of Texas Library

42

ing African-American newspaper. In an open letter to the editors of the *Dallas Morning News*, *Dallas Journal*, and *Dispatch*, A. N. Fields wrote:

Was it necessary to refer to the intelligent colored citizenry of your state as "Mandy," "Rastus," and to the intelligent colored women as "dusky country merrymakers, who had deserted catfish streams and left fiddle-faced mules, idle farm work, etc.?" . . . If we are to judge by what is reflected in your newspapers and in the conduct of those who managed and handled your centennial, instead of advancing in culture and refinement, Texas is receding into barbarism.⁴¹

Knott believed that her Festivals served to eliminate prejudice. Tensions among racial groups stemmed from ignorance, and festivals, Knott assumed, could educate participants and spectators about the differences as well as similarities among the diversity of races that contribute to the fabric of the American nation. It was her contention that "Better acquaintance with folk traditions and what they mean to those who possess them inevitably improves the capacity to deal with people. . . [and provides] a basis for understanding."⁴² Segregation and racial prejudices, however, challenged her integrated displays of ethnicity.

Besides the Hall of Negro Life building, the eight-day National Folk Festival was the site for African-American Texans' most extensive involvement with the Exposition. The participation of Jackson and Hagan at the series of workshops and lectures associated with the Festival provided the typically ne-

glected African-American perspective and at the same time challenged boundaries of segregation and white hegemony in the area of folklore studies. Likewise, African-American performances at the Amphitheater allowed displays of ethnicity to exist within the larger umbrella of segregation prevalent in mainstream society. Despite this opportunity, the lack of newspaper coverage of the Festival suggests that African-American Texan identity was affirmed more at the pre-festival, organizational stage of the event than on the performance stage. Inspired by ethnic and state pride as well as a desire for assimilation, African-American Texan business and educational leaders mobilized other members of their community in the organization of several committees in order to ensure proper representation at the Exposition and, more specifically, at the Festival. Although the challenges of segregation and racial prejudice ultimately overshadowed any success at social assimilation and racial understanding, their political and cultural activism, in this case motivated by a desire to participate in the representation of their heritage in the third National Folk Festival, documents African American Texans' efforts for cultural recognition and also underscores the significance of festivals and celebrations as sites for the construction and negotiation of identity. Indeed, commemorations serve both unifying and divisive forces. They provide opportunities to exhibit shared cultural expressions while at the same time highlighting tensions and debates between groups aligned with the organizing elite and those peripheral to the hegemonic center. ♪

Notes

- 1 John Boswell, *The Negro Participation in the 1936 Texas Centennial Exposition* (unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1969) and Jesse O. Thomas, *The Negro Participation in the Texas Centennial Exposition* (Boston: Christopher Publishing House, 1938).
- 2 A. Maceo Smith. Interview with Kenneth B. Ragsdale, 3 November 1977.
- 3 Joseph Tilden Rhea, *Race Pride and the American Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 7.
- 4 For a review of the first National Folk Festival, see Lillian Freeman Wright, "Notes and Queries," *Journal of American Folk-Lore* 47 (1934): 262-263.
- 5 A general comparison between Lunsford's and Knott's festivals is included in Joe Wilson's and Lee Udall's Folk Festivals, 6-7.
- 6 Sarah Gertrude Knott, "The National Folk Festival—Its Problems and Reasons," *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 3/2 (June 1939), 117; quoted in Whisnart, *All that is Native & Fine*, 245.
- 7 For a general history of the Texas Centennial celebration with particular emphasis on the dual themes of patriotism and commercialism, see Kenneth B. Ragsdale, *Texas Centennial '36: The Year America Discovered Texas* (College Station, Texas: Texas A & M University Press, 1986).
- 8 Knott, "The National Folk Festival after Twelve Years," *Western Folklore* 5 (1946): 87. A list of community festivals to be held in Texas is located in the Texas Centennial Collection, Box 151, folder: Folk Festival, Dallas Historical Society, Dallas, Texas.
- 9 Knott to Dobie, 3 January 1936, Dobie Papers, Knott Correspondence 1936-1942, Harry R.ansom Humanities Center (HRC). This letter also confirms that Knott solicited the Centennial and not the other way around as some public statements indicate. Knott informs Dobie that "A good many of our people in the Southwest were interested in us having our third Festival in this region. We considered several places in the Southeast, but our Executive Committee decided that the Exposition to be held in Dallas gives us our best opportunities this year." In contradiction to this statement on 14 June 1936, the *Dallas Morning News* reported that "Suggestions by Charles E. Turner, head of the special events department, and Frank N. Watson, director of promotion, led to the third festival being scheduled at the centennial."
- 10 Knott continued to write to Dobie to seek his advice and input with regard to the National Folk Festival. See Dobie Papers, Knott Correspondence 1936-1942, HRC.
- 11 Knott, "The National Folk Festival after Twelve Years," *Western Folklore* 5 (1946): 87.
- 12 For more on the power relations in festivals and celebrations, see Manning, *Cosmos and Chaos*; G. S. Metraux, "Of Feasts and Carnivals," *Cultures* 3/1 (1976): 7; and Abner Cohen, "A Polyethnic London Carnival as a Contested Cultural Performance," *Racial and Ethnic Studies* 5/1 (1982), 23-41.
- 13 For more on Smith's contributions to the Civil Rights movement in Texas, see Michael L. Gillette, "The Rise of the NAACP in Texas," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 81 (April, 1979): 393. Cited in Ragsdale, *Centennial '36*, 65.
- 14 Inter-Office Communication, 8 January 1936.
- 15 *Dallas Express*, 11 April 1936.
- 16 J. Mason Brewer, editor, *Patriotic Moments* (Dallas, Texas: Booker T. Washington High School, 1936). For information regarding Brewer's biographical information, see James W. Byrd, *J. Mason Brewer: Negro Folklorist* (Austin, Texas: Steck-Vaughn Co., 1967).
- 17 Maoma Caxson, "Our State," in *Patriotic Moments*, 14.
- 18 Hazel Martin, "The Centennial Exposition," in *Patriotic Moments*, 22. Note the anticipation of inclusion, particularly in stanzas one and four.
- 19 Knott, "Texas—The Happy Hunting Ground," Unpublished manuscript, n.d. (Sarah Gertrude Knott Collection, Department of Library, Special Collections, Folklife Archives, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, KY), 5.
- 20 *Dallas Morning News*, 31 May 1936.
- 21 *Ibid.*
- 22 William A. Owens, *Texas Folk Songs* (Austin, Texas: The Texas Folklore Society, 1950), 18. Owens witnessed racial tension between other ethnic groups. He described an incident between Texas-Mexican musicians and Native-American dancers from Oklahoma as follows. "Having discovered that a Mexican *típica* orchestra was followed on the program by Kiowa Indian dancers from Oklahoma, I decided to save time by having the orchestra members take their chairs and move to the back of the stage for the dancing numbers, at the end of which both groups could exit at once. I should have known there was no way to avoid trouble or save time. The Mexicans played their numbers and moved back all right. Then the Indians, dressed in feathers and carrying tomahawks, came out dancing a wild chase. First the Mexicans laughed. Then they put their hands over their [c] mouths and 'oo-oo-oo-aw-aw-awed' until the Indians were fighting mad and ready to use their tomahawks on every sombreroed Mexican in sight. At first I tried to calm the disorders from the wings. Finding that neither group paid any attention to me, I dashed out on stage and ran up and down, shaking my fist at the Mexicans while the Indians finished their dances. No doubt some members of the audience tried to figure out the folk symbolism involved" (Owens, 19).
- 23 For more on the articulation of racial boundaries during this festival, see James McNutt, "Mapping the Terrain with Folk Songs," in *Texas Humanist* 7 (July/August 1985): 19-20.
- 24 Martha Emmons, "Negro Wisdom," is the only person to present twice, June 16 and 18. Her paper was also part of her "President's Address" for the Texas Folklore Society, April 1936 meeting in Austin. Francis E. Abernethy, in *The Texas Folklore Society 1909-1943, Vol. 1* (Denton, TX: University of North Texas P, 1992) includes Emmons with A. W. Eddins and J. Mason Brewer as "the best known collectors and tellers of Negro tales in the Society" (130). Of these three, Brewer was the only African-American. See also Texas Folklore Society Records, Minutes of Meetings, Box 3F150, folder: 1936-1937, CAH.
- 25 Abernethy, 158, 171-172. Brewer's biographer, James W. Byrd, considers him to be the first African-American "member" of the Society. See Byrd, (1967), 5. Based on Texas Folklore Society membership lists for the years 1935-1970, Brewer's name first appears on the 1970 list. These lists are part of the Texas Folklore Society Records, Box 3F151, CAH.
- 26 *Ibid.*
- 27 Abernethy, 158. Yarborough was one of the few Southern U.S. Senators to press for legislative action in the field of civil rights. See "Yarborough, Ralph Webster (1903-1996)," *The New Handbook of Texas, Vol. 6* (Austin, Texas: Texas State Historical Association Press, 1997), 1110-1111.
- 28 Natalie Taylor Carlisle, "Old Time Darcy Plantation Melodies," cited in Abernethy (1992), 132.
- 29 Gates Thomas, "South Texas Negro Work Songs," cited in Abernethy, *The Texas Folklore Society*, 133.
- 30 Abernethy, *The Texas Folklore Society*, 131.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 129.
- 32 Will Thomas, "Some Current Folk-Songs of the Negro" (Austin, Texas: Texas Folklore Society, 1936). This essay was initially read before the Folk-Lore Society of Texas and published by the Society in 1912.
- 33 Abernethy, *The Texas Folklore Society*, 129.
- 34 Thomas limits his discussion to "the semi-rural proletariat" because, according to him, "the property-holding negro never sings. You see, property lends respectability, and respectability is too great a burden for any literature to bear, even our own" (Thomas, 3).
- 35 Thomas, 6.
- 36 Abernethy, *The Texas Folklore Society*, 37.
- 37 Harold Preece, "The Negro Folk Cult," *The Crisis* 43/12 (1936): 374.
- 38 Preece mentions Dobie's involvement in "The Living South: Dobie of Texas," *The Houston Informer*, 14 January 1947.
- 39 "Some Aspects of Southern Culture," *Southwest Review* (1936): 217-222; "The South Today: The Southern Folk Culture" (syndicated column, unidentified clipping) 28 February 1937, "Preece, Harold," vertical file, CAH, and "The South Stirs," *The Crisis* 48 (1941): 318; "The Living South: Dixie Saw the Wheel" (for release 16 April 1945); "The Living South: Dobie of Texas," *The Houston Informer* (14 January 1947), 15. Preece sent the latter two essays to Dobie (J. Frank Dobie Collection, Recipient, HRC). Preece expressed his indebtedness to Dobie for his encouragement and interest in at least two letters. On 29 December 1946 Preece notes Dobie's influence: "You were the very first Austinite to take an interest in my writing and to seek me out to encourage me to continue it at a time when the local snobs were making it pretty tough for me, economically, and otherwise." And on 18 November 1962 he writes: "Of all my colleagues who have helped shape my style and thinking, I value highest Mari Sandoz and yourself. Thank you for that influence you have been upon me." Both letters are in the Dobie Collection, Recipient, HRC.
- 40 Knott, "Texas—The Happy Hunting Ground," 6.
- 41 *Chicago Defender*, 27 June 1936. The headline for the 20 June 1936 *Dallas Morning News* article read: "Dallas eats cold supper and cotton patches neglected."
- 42 *Ibid.*, 90.

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"Hardy Pioneers" and Amarillo's Panhandle Fiddle Contests

By Joe Carr

In the period from 1928 to 1931, at least six fiddle contests were held in Amarillo, Texas, most under the auspices of the Tri-State Fair Association. Contemporary newspaper reports offer interesting insights into the workings of the contests and the activities of the contestants, giving us a fascinating glimpse into the lives and fortunes of numerous early Panhandle fiddlers, including noted musicians Eck Robertson, J. T. Wills - father of Western Swing legend Bob Wills, Jess Morris, and others.¹ Census statistics indicate just over 15,000 Amarillo residents in 1920, and the town had grown to a city of 43,000 by 1930.² Amarillo's older citizens who noticed the changing landscape may have had fond memories of the old days, and the Old Fiddler contests gave them an opportunity to enjoy what was perceived as a fast dying art.

44 The first All Panhandle Old Fiddlers Contest in Amarillo was sponsored by the Tri-State Fair Association and directed by Dr. O. H. Loyd. It was held March 20, 1928, a Tuesday night, at the city auditorium in conjunction with the Cattlemen's Convention. The first mention of the contest in the newspaper appears to be March 12.³ The following day another article appeared, which included this excerpt from a letter by director Dr. Loyd:

Most of the Panhandle counties are taking an active interest in the old fiddlers' contest and will, by elimination contests or otherwise, send the very best fiddlers in every interested county to compete, thereby giving those who attend an opportunity to hear in one evening all the real old fiddlers in this whole country.

Loyd declared the contest would present a demonstration of old time fiddling "such as Panhandle people have not heard since the days of the cowboys." Loyd continues in the flowery style of the day with a romanticized description of the frontier fiddler:

The cowboys who were youths twenty to forty years ago are old men now. As young men, their only companion many a lonely night was an old violin. And when they sat and looked at the bare walls of their little huts or dug-outs, they heard their fiddles talk as they could not have done had company been present.

These conditions developed some of the best fiddlers on the Plains that ever attempted to draw a bow. They played for the old square dance to which lads and lassies would ride bucking broncs as far as fifty miles to attend. Where is there a cowboy who does not remember these dances and long to be at one again.

Loyd obviously felt an appeal based on memories of the "old days" was the best approach to draw a crowd. His language presents the frontier days as the long distant past while, in truth, only twenty years had past since the "days of the cowboy." He concludes his pitch for customers:

Every person who is interested in the development of this great Panhandle country should lend every possible assistance to the men who are so liberally giving of their time and energy to make a success of the Tri-State Fair, and should, therefore, make it a point to attend the old fiddlers' contest.⁴

By March 18, two days before the event, there were 25 entries. Reserve ticket sales were heavy, with ticket prices ranging from fifty cents to one dollar. Several contestants wrote letters to the *Amarillo Sunday News and Globe* detailing their personal histories. These letters contain stories of the old fiddlers' lives in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Interest in the frontier days appears to have been strong, as considerable space was devoted to histories of fiddlers such as Jess Giles of Vega, Texas, Marcellus Bates of Claude, and Jess Morris of Dalhart.⁵

Morris is best known as the "author" of the cowboy anthem "Goodbye Old Paint." He was an active semi-professional musician in the Amarillo area as well as a working cowboy.⁶ Morris's account in this article of his learning "Old Paint" differs somewhat from a later account to folksong collector John Lomax, who recorded Morris singing and fiddling "Old Paint" in 1942. Morris told Lomax that he learned the song from Charlie Willis, a black cowboy who worked for Morris's father. Willis, according to Morris, learned the song on a trail drive in the 1880s and played it on a jew's harp.⁷ In his letter to the *Amarillo Daily News*, however, Morris related:



Buddy Holly Center

Fiddler Entertainer Tonight



Eck Robertson, one of the best-known old-time fiddlers of today, will be one of the star entertainers at the Old Fiddlers' contest tonight at the Municipal Auditorium.

Eck is considered the champion old fiddler of the United States. His family, all good entertainers, will be with him. They are also on the program.

Photo Courtesy of: Panhandle Plains Museum

I learned to play "Old Paint" (Goodbye Paint, I'm Leaving Cheyenne) in a dugout a mile from Vega. I lived in that section eight or nine years playing for dances from 1891 to 1900. I also lived in Vega for a time playing for dances. I learned all my old fiddling tunes in the dugout. I will sing the old tune "Old Paint" and play it on the fiddle at the convention . . . I wrote the music to "Old Paint" and gave it to Mr. Fox of San Antonio who will put it in his old cowboy songs. I learned the "Old Paint"

song from an Oklahoma cow puncher in 1892. The old boy played it on a french harp.

The two accounts do not necessarily conflict, except for references to Willis playing the jew's harp in the Lomax account and the french harp in the letter to the *Amarillo Daily News*. "French harp" was the common name for the harmonica, while the jew's harp is a metal instrument which a player presses against the mouth and plucks rhythmically to produce sound. This inconsistency remains unexplained. Also in his letter, Morris requested help finding local musicians to serve as "seconds" (accompanists) for the contest. The article continues, "He [Morris] wants some of the Mexican guitar or cello players in Amarillo for his sides, saying they know how to put real life into old cowboy and Spanish music."⁸

The rules for the contest were printed in a separate article in the same edition of the *Amarillo Daily News*.

RULES: OLD FIDDLER'S CONTEST

1. Each contestant will draw place by lot, giving him his order on the program.
2. Each contestant shall be 40 years old, but not over one hundred ten.
3. Each contestant shall play one piece only, unless requested by the judges to play more, but shall be required to have ready at least five selections for emergencies.
4. Each selection offered shall be not less than three minutes nor more than five minutes.
5. Each contestant is to play old fashioned music, preferably quadrilles, as this is more closely associated with the old breakdown dance.
6. Each contestant to be allowed not to exceed two accompanists.
7. In forming conclusions of the merit of each contestant, the judges shall pass on a percentage basis, taking 100 per cent as perfect, and that no man is perfect. They shall judge each separate selection under its column, giving it the percentage that in their judgment it is entitled and the final total of these added percentages will show the winner in order. If any ties should develop, and the judges require, then those who are tied for place shall play another selection, or until such tie is settled.
8. The judges at their discretion may use the applause of the audience in reaching a decision if it is declared necessary.
9. Being an Old Fiddler's contest, credit shall not be allowed to the modern jazz.
10. Contortions of the body of the artist shall not be given undue credit, patting of the feet justified.
11. Each contestant shall furnish, by March 16, information giving his birth place, date of birth, incidents of his life, and his picture, late photo if convenient.⁹

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Although many of these rules are similar to those in modern contests, several are curious, including the provision excluding contestants over 110 years of age. One wonders whether this restriction was necessary. The oldest participant in this whole series of contests was 89. The stipulation that fiddlers be at least forty had a profound affect on the nature of the contest. While it enabled the old time fiddlers to compete, it eliminated a number of younger fiddlers who were able to compete successfully in subsequent contests after this rule was changed. Rule ten tries to ensure the contest would be judged on musical merits rather than choreography.

Contestants included several notable fiddlers. W.C. Massey of Roswell, New Mexico was very likely related to the Massey Family of Roswell, from which came the well known Louise Massey and the Westerners.¹⁰ Pat Hooker of Shamrock, Texas was a cowboy fiddler whom Eck Robertson often cited as his first fiddle teacher. Louis Franklin of Vernon was perhaps an early member of the famous Franklin family of Texas fiddlers.

On March 21, the day after the contest, an article headlined "Louis Franklin of Wilbarger Wins Old Fiddlers Contest" ran in the *Amarillo Daily News*. Franklin, who was a left-handed fiddler, won after a play off between himself, H. E. Welchel of Amarillo (variously spelled Whetchel, Whelchel, and Welchel in these articles), and Milt Trout of Dimmit. In the final decision, Trout and Welchel placed second and third respectively. The other place winners included W. T. Walker, Endee, New Mexico, fourth; W. C. Massey, Roswell, New Mexico, fifth; J. T. Marshall, Canyon, sixth; and A. F. Copeland, Lubbock, seventh. Franklin was awarded one hundred dollars cash for the first place finish.

Twenty fiddlers and about thirty accompanists participated in the program. Several other contestants were singled out for mention. W. J. Brewer, an 89-year-old Confederate veteran, played "Napoleon's Retreat" to tremendous audience response. Hugh Roden of Childress, was a big hit with his presentation of stunt fiddling, and Jess Morris's rendition of "Goodbye Old Paint" apparently brought down the house. Of Morris's performance, the reporter observed, "the audience forgot all dignity and joined in a hearty, lusty yell on the chorus."¹¹

Organizer and contest emcee O.H. Loyd presented numerous "talks" between the performances. The subjects of his comments included the fair, the old fiddlers, and the opportunities in the Amarillo area. His part of the program must have been well received; it was reported that he kept the audience "in an uproar."

In addition to the \$250 prize money, local businesses made donations of services and supplies to the contest. A belt, a shirt, a pair of cuff links, a pair of silk hose and a watch chain were among the clothing items donated. Music stores provided a violin bow and some old time fiddle records. A studio provided a pho-

tograph of the contest winner and forty-pound sacks of flour were given to the first three place winners.¹²

The success of this contest, with reportedly over 2,000 paid attendees, apparently prompted O. H. Loyd to hold another contest only one month later. This event offered an expanded program with stunt fiddling, some popular music selections played by Miss Anna Merrick (a local violin instructor) and a short political talk from Tom Connally, a candidate for United States Senate. Eck Robertson, who promoted himself as a world champion fiddler and a Victor recording artist, was prominently featured in an article the day of the contest. Robertson was apparently well known in Amarillo at this time, and his entry into the contest must have been a source of pride for contest organizers. Louis Franklin, winner of the March contest, also registered to compete, although he was mistakenly identified as "Felix Robertson of Vernon."¹³ The promise of a run off between the recently crowned Panhandle champion Franklin and the self proclaimed world champion Robertson must have been an exciting prospect for fiddling fans.

That neither of these two fiddlers competed in the contest produced unexpected results. Thomas G. Crawford of New Mexico won the one hundred dollar first prize before an estimated crowd of 2,000. Crawford, who played left-handed with the fiddle braced by his knee, was a late entry whose registration only arrived the day before the contest. Previous champion Franklin's absence was unexplained, but Robertson arrived late to the event and was not allowed to compete. He and his son, Eck, Jr., were allowed to perform however, and Eck Jr. reportedly filled his banjo with money thrown to the stage by appreciative fans. A list of contestants, their home counties, place, and selection performed was given in this order:

- Charles Grouce, Palmer Co., "Drunkard's Hiccoughs"
- J. T. Marshall, 5th place, Randall Co., "Fisher's Hornpipe"
- K. W. Jackson, Swisher Co., "Forked Deer"
- John S. Ray, Crosby Co., "Cotton-eyed Joe"
- Jim Chapman, Deaf Smith Co., "Fisher's Hornpipe"
- Louis J. Propps, Roosevelt Co., NM, "Sally Goodin"
- F. M. Beach, 3rd place, Hale Co., "Tom and Jerry"
- W. F. Walling, 4th place, Donley Co., "Arkansaw Traveler"
- W. C. Massey, Chaves Co., NM, "Pretty Polly Ann"
- Milt Trout, Castro Co., "Cattle in the Cane Break"
- H. F. Whelchel, 6th place, Potter Co., "Sally Goodin"
- J. O. Kelly, 8th place, Quay Co. NM, "Stay All Night"
- Babe Barker, 7th place, Armstrong Co., "Tom and Jerry"
- Babe Helton, 2nd place, Wheeler Co., "Jenny Nettle"
- W. D. Fulton, Ochiltree Co., "Irish Washerwoman"
- Joe McPherson, Lincoln Co. NM, "The Lone Star Trail"
- T. G. Crawford, 1st place, Eddy Co. NM, "Meledy Hornpipe"
- A. M. Murray, Collingsworth Co., "Arkansaw Traveler"

uddy Holly Center

R. L. Hunter, Dawson Co., "Where are You Going, My Pretty Gal"¹⁴

The day after the contest, at the invitation of an old friend, Eck Robertson and his son performed an impromptu concert at the Potter County Jail for the sheriff, his officers, and the prisoners. According to the newspaper article, they were joined in their music-making by Eck's first fiddle teacher, Pat Hooker, who had served as one of the contest judges the night before. Here it is also related that Robertson arrived late to the contest due to car troubles in route to Amarillo.¹⁵

The following day's paper (Sunday) includes an article about J. O. Kelly of Tucumcari, New Mexico, who placed eighth in the contest. Kelly, 77 years old, drew special attention during the contest when he broke into an animated clog dance on stage during another contestant's selection.¹⁶

The second annual Tri-State Fair Association Old Fiddler's contest was held March 7, 1929. Eck Robertson won this year, again accompanied by his eight-year-old son on banjo. Second place went to Milt Trout, who had also placed second in the contest the year before. Although there were twenty-five contestants registered, only twenty competed. The contest was broadcast over WDAG radio. After the competition, Robertson played "Brilliantcy", and the grand finale was led by Trout, who was joined by all the fiddlers and their seconds in a rendition of "Turkey in the Straw."¹⁷ Also reported was another contest held a few weeks after the March 7th event. Milt Trout won this contest.¹⁸

Many of the contestants for the first and second contests of 1929 returned for the Third Annual Old Fiddler's Contest on March 6, 1930. It was noted that Eck Robertson was not entered as of the March 1st deadline.¹⁹ While not mentioned in the article, it seems the significant rule requiring contestants to be over forty years old was changed for the 1930 contest. The article begins:

*A new champion stepped into the limelight Tuesday night when Major L. Franklin, youthful fiddler of Dosier community in Collingsworth County, beat the old-timers at their own game and walked away with first prize of \$75 in the annual Old Fiddler's Contest.*²⁰

This seemingly simple rule change reflects a major shift in the focus of these events. Newspaper coverage of the earlier contests was generally focused on the age of the participants and their connection to the frontier days of the Panhandle. Intentionally or not, the dropping of the age requirement changed the contest focus from a nostalgic gathering of early settlers to a competition designed to determine the best fiddler regardless of age. It is significant that the first winner after the rule change was well under forty years of age. This suggests the fiddling art was perhaps not dying after all and that, at least in Major

Franklin's case, younger players were capable of winning performances when competing against the older fiddlers.

Major Franklin, along with Benny Thomasson, is considered a shaper of the modern Texas contest style. Franklin, who was 26 years old in 1930, surely would have seemed a kid to most of the "old timers" at the contest. According to the report, Major was not related to the elder Louis "Lefty" Franklin who won the 1928 contest, but he did have a nephew named Louis, born 1923, who became well known in contest circles. The 1930 contest winners were:

1st - Major Franklin	\$75	"Sally Johnson"
2nd - George C. Cockrall	\$50	"Dusty Miller"
3rd - Zeke Welchel	\$25	"Sally Goodin"
4th - Babe Helton	\$10	
5th - Henry Leste	\$7.50	
6th - Ed Hardin	\$5	
7th - Delmer Shirley		
8th - Babe Barker		
9th - F. M. Beck		
10th - F.W. Jackson		

The audience was estimated at 2,000, most of whom stayed until the winners were announced shortly before midnight.²¹ That the audience would stay so late on a weeknight is testament to their interest in the outcome of the contest.

The Fourth Annual Old Fiddler's contest was perhaps the largest event of the series with sixty-one pre-registered contestants. The program was expanded to include a square dance contest that attracted ten sets of dancers. Notable contestants included Pat Hooker, Eck Robertson, J. T. Wills, C. E. "Shorty" Loter, Jess Morris and Mrs. Eva Deadwiley, the only female contestant.²² The winner of the \$50 first prize was A. E. Rusk of Canyon. Jess Morris of Dalhart took second place, while Eck Robertson placed third. Robertson and son once again drew special attention from the press:

None of the fiddlers were allowed to play enchores [sic] although Eck Robertson and Eck Jr. were applauded several minutes. Eck, Jr., 12 year old, Eck, Sr., accompanist, seemed to be the main attraction. His ability to strum a banjo was outstanding.

Attendance was over 1,000, reduced no doubt by a blizzard which blew in on the afternoon of the contest. The president of the Fat Stock show announced that the top ten winners of this contest would compete again in another contest to be held several weeks later.²³

Eck Robertson won this next event, which was held April 3, 1931. A professional publicity photograph depicting Robertson

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in a trick fiddling pose appeared in the *Amarillo Daily News* on the day of the contest. The caption read:

*Fiddler Entertainer Tonight; Eck Robertson, one of the best known old-time fiddlers today, will be one of the star entertainers at the Old Fiddlers' Contest tonight at the Municipal Auditorium. Eck is considered the champion old fiddler of the United States. His family, all good entertainers, will be with him. They are also on the program.*²⁴

Finishing behind Robertson were W. E. Walling in second place and J. T. Wills in third. The crowd was estimated at 700. Robertson and Family performed a thirty-minute program of music and there were contests held for both square and tap dancing. O. H. Loyd, who directed many of the contests, was the emcee.²⁵

While numerous typographical errors and other misinformation are apparent in these articles, they are important documentation of early contest activity in the Panhandle. The contests were obviously popular both with the paying audience and the fiddlers. Interestingly, over the four years covered by these articles, the number of entrants grew, even as the prize money decreased. Perhaps the onset of the Depression accounts for smaller cash prizes. While admission ranged from a dollar to fifty cents in the 1928 contest, ticket prices are not mentioned in later articles for any of the other contests. The author found no evidence of an Old Fiddlers Contest in Amarillo after 1931.

From the winner's lists it can be seen that, while many of the same fiddlers entered these contests, no one dominated the top places. Whether it was due to uneven judging, audience voting, or other factors, the results of each of these contests is unique even when the participants were similar. Even Eck Robertson, who is the best known of this group and, as evidenced by his recordings, a great fiddler, placed third in the March 1931 contest.

Students of Robertson's career will find his home listings interesting during this period. Robertson was reported as being from Oklahoma in 1928, Lubbock in 1929, and Borger in 1931. Robertson's title, "World's Champion Fiddler," was much used and unquestioned in this newspaper coverage. His announced appearance at or absence from one of these contests was always noted, as were his performances with his son. That he provided a posed publicity photograph to the newspaper is evidence of Robertson's professional savvy.

Newspaper reports are, in many cases, the only record of early fiddle contest activity. While the accuracy of specific information has to be considered carefully, these articles nonetheless provide important information about the contest repertoire, hometowns of participants, details of contest presentations, rules, names of judges, and anecdotes of fiddlers lives, which otherwise would be unavailable. Through the reading of the achievements of these early fiddlers, they become more than names on the page. In a small way, it gives them and their victories new life.

Notes

1. These articles were found at the Panhandle Plains Museum Library in Canyon, Texas during research for *Prairie Nights To Neon Lights*, Texas Tech University Press, Lubbock, Texas, 1995, a history of West Texas country music written by the author and Alan Munde.
2. *Texas Almanac*, A. H. Belo Corporation, Dallas, 1951, 75.
3. "Many Old Fiddlers Entering Contest Here for March 20," *Amarillo Daily News*, 12 March 1928.
4. "Old Fiddler's Contest Here Will Be Great," *Amarillo Daily News*, 13 March 1928.
5. "Hardy Pioneers of Panhandle Compete As Old Fiddlers," *Amarillo Sunday News and Globe*, 18 March 1928.
6. Lillie Mae Hunter, *Book of the Years*, Pioneer Book Publishers, Hereford, Texas, 1969, 111-112. Dallam County History
7. Jess Morris in correspondence to John Lomax, quoted in booklet accompanying *Cowboy Songs, Ballads and Cattle Calls from Texas*, Library of Congress Folk Recordings L28, 1952. Recorded by John A. Lomax and others.
8. "Hardy Pioneers . . ."
9. "Best Fiddlers of Nation To Compete In Program Here," *Amarillo Sunday News and Globe*, 18 March 1928.
10. Elvis Fleming, archivist, Historical Center for Southeast New Mexico, telephone conversation with author, Roswell, New Mexico, 10 November 2000. Mr. Fleming found a listing for W. C. Massey in a 1920s Roswell telephone directory and concluded he was possibly the brother of Henry Massey, father of Louise.
11. "Louis Franklin of Wilbarger Wins Old Fiddlers Contest," *Amarillo Daily News*, 21 March 1928.
12. Ibid.
13. "Fiddlers Gather In Amarillo for Contest Tonight," *Amarillo Daily News*, 27 April 1928. Reporters for the *Daily News* apparently mixed up the names of Eck Robertson and Louis Franklin. Felix Robertson of Vernon is reported as having won the contest held one month earlier. The winner was actually Louis Franklin (see note 11). On April 28th (note 13), the confusion continued with a reference to "Felix Franklin, winner of the recent contest held during the Cattlemen's convention." The names Felix Robertson and Felix Franklin do not appear in the lists of contestants.
14. "Southpaw from New Mexico Is Champ Fiddler," *Amarillo Daily News*, 28 April 1928. Louis J. Propps is likely the Louis H. Propps who was recorded by John Lomax in 1936 in Pleasanton, Texas for the Library of Congress.
15. "Oklahoma Fiddler Touches Hearts of Veteran Officers," *Amarillo Sunday News and Globe*, 29 April 1928.
16. "Veteran of Adobe Walls Battle Can Clog Dance at 77," *Amarillo Sunday News and Globe*, 29 April 1928.
17. "Lubbock Man Is Winner Of Fiddler Prize," *Amarillo Daily News*, 8 March 1929.
18. "30 Registered For Fiddlers' Contest Here," *Amarillo Daily News*, 1 March 1930.
19. Ibid.
20. "Winners' List In Fiddlers' Contest Given," *Amarillo Daily News*, 6 March 1930.
21. Ibid.
22. "61 Fiddlers To Play Here On Saturday," *Amarillo Daily News*, 25 February 1931.
23. "Rusk of Canyon Wins Old Fiddlers' Contest," *Amarillo Daily News*, 2 March 1931.
24. "Fiddler Entertainer Tonight," *Amarillo Daily News*, April 3, 1931.
25. "Eck Robertson of Borger Carries Off First For Fiddlers," *Amarillo Daily News*, 4 April 1931.

Ridin' Old Paint: Documenting the Canadian River Breaks Fiddle Tradition

By Andy Wilkinson

I did the best part of my growing up and got the best part of my education around the cowboys in the Canadian River Breaks of Texas. We lived on a relatively small outfit, but we were surrounded by the big outfits—the Bivins Coldwater Cattle Company, the Killgores, the upper Matadors down the road. When we went to Channing to get supplies cowboys still tethered their horses and walked the short main street, and the air was filled with the sound of spurs jingling in unison with the clop of boot heels on the old boardwalk where the cowboys strolled in full regalia. When I was very young I thought of these cowboys as gods and wanted to walk and talk like them, be like them, know and live by their ways.

The Breaks were full of music. My four sisters sang like angels in the shape-note harmonies of the old gospel music. I would discover that there were many fine musicians, poets and even laymen scholars steeped in the classics among the cowboys. We were Primitive Baptists and I was in my teens before I could devise my itinerary in such a way that I could go to the cowboy dances. I had already learned from them some of the old songs, but when I heard their string band ensembles playing the old fiddle music, I knew I would always be a better listener than performer.

There are still cowboys in the Breaks who perform the old string music wonderfully...
Buck Ramsey, 1997

Though he died shortly after he'd written those words and long before he'd gathered all the pastures in the vast country he'd marked as his own, Buck Ramsey numbers among the very best of the singers and poets of the cowpunch revivalist movement. "Anthem," the prologue to "Grass," his epic poem of the cow country, is already regarded by scholars and cowboys alike as one of the classic works of the genre, and his few recordings have set a high mark for those who would sing the cowboys' song. He had a brilliant and expansive mind that formed and shaped his own works, but what truly sets him apart from the remainder of the outfit is his unabashed admiration for the genuine, and the humility which such admiration engendered within him.

Not long before his untimely death, Buck had conspired with Charlie Seemann—then with the Fund for Folk Culture in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and now director of the Western Folklife Center in Elko, Nevada—to document the musicians that had earliest inspired him, the cowboy fiddlers of the Canadian River Breaks of Texas. Through the Fund for Folk Culture, a grant was secured from the Lila Wallace Reader's Digest Community Folklife

Program, and Buck set out a plan to record the fiddle players from the Breaks who still lived, worked, and made music in that country. Buck planned to play guitar with them, and sing on such tunes that required it. The Smithsonian agreed to send their Grammy Award-winning recording engineer, Pete Reiniger, to handle the technical side of things, and arrangements were made to do the recording in the old adobe-walled Tascosa School House, an historic venue for the music where its originators had once played community dances and is now fully restored as an integral part of Cal Farley's Boys Ranch, the charitable institution that grew up on the site of one of the toughest towns in the old West.

Buck had lined up the fiddlers, cowpunchers who still worked the range and still played the old tunes, all of them cultural descendants of the titans of the Texas fiddle tradition—Eck Robertson and Jess Morris. Among them were Frankie McWhorter, brothers Bobby and Fred Thompson and Fred's son Tybo, Karen Walters, the renowned Mayfields (brothers Herb and Smokey, and son and nephew Clint), and Jess Morris's great-

West Texas Fiddlers and the Buddy Holly Center

nephew, Rooster Morris. Besides Buck, they were to be backed-up on guitar by Dale Burson, Ivan Cates, and Glen Spiller.

But Buck died before the project could get underway, and I was asked to see it through to conclusion. So early in 1998, we began with a week-long recording session where Buck had wished it done, at the historic school house on the Canadian River. Pete Reiniger brought his digital recording equipment from the nation's capitol, and over several days we were able to capture a number of excellent tracks from all but one of the performers on Buck's list, including the welcome surprise of having a drop-in guest performer, one of the Texas Panhandle's best fiddle stylists, Alvin Crow.

We were missing Frankie McWhorter, who had recently suffered injuries from a horse-wreck, and, compounded with surgery for other problems with his fiddlin' limbs, was unable to participate. As he had a central role in the project, Pete mixed what we had, and we put completion of the project on hold until Frankie could get healed up and haired over. It wasn't until the following year that I was able to take some recording equipment to his camp house in Lipscomb County. After gathering cattle all day, Frankie pulled out his fiddle and set down the tracks that can be heard on this project.

In the meantime, Charlie Seemann located several old recordings of Jess Morris, made by John Lomax in 1941. Also, Don Champlin and Lillian Turner unearthed some recorded comments that Buck had made during a session at one of the Cowboy Songs and Range Ballads festivals, held annually at the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in Cody, Wyoming. We reprocessed parts of both of these recordings for inclusion in the project.

While all that was brewing, Joe Carr—one of the bright lights in acoustic music and one of its ablest historians—had been rummaging around in the Southwest Collection at Texas Tech University and had come across handwritten scores of two of Jess Morris's original, unrecorded compositions. Since Jess had written the arrangements for piano and fiddle, that's the way we elected to do them, enticing Karen Walters to play the fiddle part (which we recorded on her ranch just south of the Canadian River) and Rusty Hudelson to do the piano (which we recorded at my studio in Lubbock). To finish up the project, Charlie Seemann put together notes and comments about the songs, a well-known pastel artist from that country (Pernie Fallon) was commissioned to do an original painting of the Breaks to illustrate the cover, and the whole works came together by the end of last year.

Because we wanted to share this music and its history with a wide variety of people, we began to search for a suitable way to announce the completion of the project. We had considered several predictable venues for debuting the recording—such as cowboy music gatherings, or those devoted to bluegrass or country-western—but because Texas fiddle music has had far-reach-

ing impact on several musical genres, we chose, instead, to premiere this documentary album in a place dedicated to promoting the history of America's most vibrant music crossroads, the place where fiddle music and country music and rhythm and blues music all came together to emerge as part of the foundation of rock and roll: The Buddy Holly Center.

The Buddy Holly Center in Lubbock, Texas, opened its doors in September of 1999. Housed in the city's remodeled and expanded historic Fort Worth and Denver Railroad depot, it has a broad mission in the arts of the region of the Llano Estacado. As its name suggests, it is first and foremost the principal site for commemorating what is arguably the region's most famous musician. It features an extensive collection of Buddy Holly memorabilia, including artifacts owned



Photos Courtesy of The Buddy Holly Center, Lubbock

by the City of Lubbock as well as many in private ownership but on loan for the permanent exhibit on his life and music. Tuesdays through Saturdays, visitors can see Buddy's Fender Stratocaster guitar, his trademark horn-rimmed glasses, and a songbook that he and The Crickets used in their performances. The collection also features clothing, photographs, recording contracts, tour itineraries, and even Buddy's homework assignments.

The Center also hosts a wide range of changing exhibits in the visual arts in three additional galleries. Past shows, for example, have included: "Y2Klay," contemporary ceramic works created in celebration of the new millennium; "Full Deck Quilts," a traveling exhibition of 54 fine art quilts representing a full deck of cards; and "Celebracion," the Center's annual invitational exhibition featuring works centered around the history and meaning of the Day of the Dead, done by artists from across the nation. Before the year is out, it will also host "State of the Blues," an exhibition of Jeff Dunas's powerful, yet intimate, large-format Iris print photographs, portraits of the men and women who are living legends of the Delta blues; alongside these portraits, Dunas has documented the landmark juke joints and byways of the Blues Highway, a heritage trail that runs from New Orleans through the Mississippi Delta to Chicago. A fourth gallery, the Texas Musicians Hall of Fame, features changing exhibitions and programs on the music and music history of Texas and West Texas.

The Buddy Holly Center also has a series of music education and outreach programs, which include a full slate of live performances in its outdoor courtyard each summer. The popularity of

Buddy Holly Center

these programs, and their focus on the music and musicians of the Llano Estacado, has made it the venue of choice for the releasing of new recordings and for the debuting of new performances. It seemed a natural choice for celebrating the music that powered much of the Texas fiddle tradition, a music born and bred in the environs of the Texas Panhandle.

Until the exhibit comes down at the end of May, visitors can segue from Buddy's Stratocaster-driven rock-and-roll to the fiddle-driven music of the Canadian River Breaks, simply by walking from the sock hop and roller rink and Surf Ballroom milieu of the Buddy Holly Permanent Exhibit to the ranch house front porch in the Texas Musicians Hall of Fame.

The Center's designers fastened on the notion of the front porch as a focal point of the exhibit because such places were not only where rural music was created and enjoyed, but also where the travelling guest was first welcomed. Lubbock artist John Chinn was commissioned to build a replica porch that



Photos Courtesy of The Buddy Holly Center, Lubbock

would make the visitor feel at home, while still serving as a showcase for the artifacts on loan to the exhibit, things such as Jess Morris's original hand-written scores and a half-dozen instruments intimately related to the music of the Canadian River Breaks. After the welcoming ambiance of the porch, the walls of the gallery first lead the visitor to a display of photographs depicting a century's worth of music along the Breaks, and then on to the side of the room opposite the porch, crafted into a Wall of Fame honoring

the major influences of this fiddle tradition.

The Buddy Holly Center is open Tuesday through Friday 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., and Saturday, 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. It is closed Sundays and Mondays. The Buddy Holly Center is located on the corner of 19th Street and Avenue G in Lubbock. For more information, call (806) 767-2686, or check out www.buddyhollycenter.org. ■

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If you'd like more information about the compact disk recording of *Ridin' Old Paint: Documenting the Canadian River Breaks Fiddle Tradition*, you can contact the Buddy Holly Center or the National Ranching Heritage Center, both in Lubbock, Texas; the Western Folklife Center in Elko, Nevada; or one of several online services (Laid-Back West at www.laid-back.com, the Western Folklife Center at www.westfolk.org, or Grey Horse Press at www.grey-horse.com). It is worth noting that this is a non-profit endeavor, with net proceeds to go to the Buck Ramsey Memorial Fund at the Western Folklife Center in Elko, Nevada.

The recording was engineered by Pete Reiniger, of the Smithsonian Institute, was produced by Andy Wilkinson. It was funded by the Lila Wallace Reader's Digest Community Folklife Program, administered by the Fund for Folk Culture. Local administration was by the Lubbock Arts Alliance.

Following is a listing of the tunes and the performers:



1. "Ridin' Old Paint and Leadin' Old Ball," Jess Morris (Jess Morris), 6:22.
2. "XIT Ranch Cowboy Polka," Karen Walters, fiddle; Rusty Hudelson, piano (Jess Morris), 3:07.
3. "Taters In the Sandy Land," Frankie McWhorter, 1:56.
4. "Crippled Turkey," Frankie McWhorter, 0:46.
5. "The Waltz of Wolf Creek," Frankie McWhorter ([c] Frankie McWhorter), 1:32.
6. "Canadian River Waltz," Fred Thompson, fiddle; Tybo Thompson, guitar; Ivan Cates, guitar ([c] Fred Thompson and Buck Ramsey), 2:16.
7. "Tennessee Wagoner," Rooster Morris, fiddle; Dale Burson, guitar; Ivan Cates, guitar, 1:45.
8. "When You and I Were Young, Maggie," Rooster Morris, fiddle; Dale Burson, guitar; Ivan Cates, guitar, 2:42.
9. "Prettiest Girl In the County," Frankie McWhorter, 1:45.
10. "Ten Pretty Girls," Rooster Morris, fiddle; Glen Spiller, fiddle; Ivan Cates, guitar; Dale Burson, guitar, 3:27.
11. "Rye Waltz," Rooster Morris, fiddle; Glen Spiller, fiddle; Ivan Cates, guitar; Dale Burson, guitar, 1:49.
12. "Uncle Tommy," Rooster Morris, fiddle; Glen Spiller, fiddle; Ivan Cates, guitar; Dale Burson, guitar, 2:13.
13. "Big Country," The Mayfields (Herb, mandolin; Smokey, fiddle; Clint, guitar), 1:36.
14. "El Rancho Grande XIT Schottische," Karen Walters, fiddle; Rusty Hudelson, piano (Jess Morris), 3:02.
15. "Pan-Tex Polka," Alvin Crow, fiddle; Ivan Cates, guitar ([c] Alvin Crow), 1:56.
16. "Amazing Grace," Karen Walters, fiddle; Glen Spiller, guitar, 2:00.
17. "Ridin' Old Paint and Leadin' Old Ball," Rooster Morris, fiddle and vocal; Dale Burson, guitar, 5:06.