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Spring 1999



I Forgot to Remember to Forget: Duke Porter's Bristol - 1955
Counterculture Cowboys
The Invisible Goshu: Steve Jordan
The New Brunswick Museum of Art & Music
The Handbook of Tagma Music

Letter from the Director



As this Spring 2003 issue of the *Journal of Texas Music History* goes to press, the Center for Texas Music History (formerly the Institute for the History of Texas Music) continues to develop important new programs and activities focusing on the preservation and study of the Southwest's complex and diverse musical heritage.

Our graduate and undergraduate courses on the history of Southwestern music continue to be very popular. The *Handbook of Texas Music*, which we are co-publishing with the Texas State Historical Association, the Texas Music Office, and the University of Texas at Austin, will be available later this year. Our students have researched and written more than 100 articles to be included in the *Handbook*.

The online bibliography of books, articles, and other publications on Southwestern music, which our students helped develop in cooperation with the Texas Music Office, remains a very useful tool for researchers. We also are very happy to have worked closely with the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum, the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, and others to help organize the recent "Country Music from the Lone Star State" exhibit.

Our "Texas Music History Unplugged" concerts, which bring prominent musicians to campus to perform and discuss how their music reflects the unique history and culture of the Southwest, continue to draw overflow crowds. Through these free concerts, such artists as Flaco Jimenez, Ray Benson, Tish Hinojosa, Joe Ely, Marcia Ball, Ray Wylie Hubbard, Terri Hendrix, Lloyd Maines, Ruthie Foster, Cyd Cassone, Marvin Dykhuis, Joel Guzmán, Ponty Bone, Willis Alan Ramsey, Jeff Plankenhorn, and others have helped educate students and the general public about the important role music has played in our history and culture.

In November, we completed the third volume in our *Travelin' Texas* compilation CD series. Such great Texas artists as Delbert McClinton, Asleep at the Wheel, Eliza Gilkyson, George Strait, Billy Joe Shaver, the Flatlanders, Toni Price, Pat Green, Lavelle White, Ray Wylie Hubbard, Jerry Jeff Walker, Rosie Flores, and others donated the use of their songs to help make these CDs a

very successful fundraiser for our ongoing educational projects. Our sincerest thanks to these musicians and everyone else for helping support our efforts.

Finally, I am profoundly grateful to the following people who have worked very hard to make our program so successful: Kathryn Ledbetter, Gregg Andrews, Dawn Shepler, Dee Lannon, Beverly Braud, Ann Marie Ellis, Gene Bourgeois, Vikki Bynum, the entire SWT History Department, the CTMH Board of Advisors, Becky Huff, Gerald Hill, T.Cay Rowe, Diana Harrell, César Limón, Francine Hartman, Rick and Laurie Baish, Lucky and Becky Tomblin, Kim and Robert Richey, Jo and Paul Snider, Margie First, Darrell and Barbara Piersol, Tracie Ferguson, Phil and Cecilia Collins, Ralph and Patti Dowling, Jerry and Cathy Supple, Dennis and Margaret Dunn, John Kunz, Kent Finlay, Billy Seidel, and all of our other friends who have contributed to the success of the Center for Texas Music History.

Please contact us for more information or to become involved in this unique and exciting program.

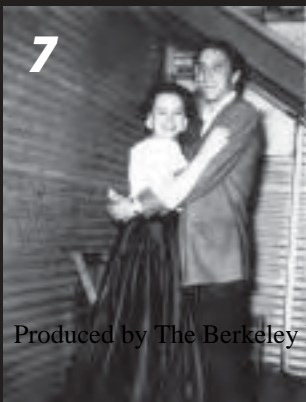
Sincerely,

Gary Hartman, Ph.D.
Director, Center for Texas Music History
History Department
Southwest Texas State University
San Marcos, TX 78666
512-245-3749
gh08@swt.edu
www.history.swt.edu/music/texasmusic.htm

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Contributors

Joe Specht**Cory Lock****Michael Corcoran****Anthony Lyle**

Reviews

Cathy Brigham**Gary Hartman**

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c o n t e n t s

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The Center for Texas Music History is a nonprofit educational program designed to help students, scholars, and the general public better understand how music reflects the richly diverse ethnic and cultural heritage of the American Southwest. Within its first three years, the Center has developed a number of very successful projects focusing on the preservation and study of Southwestern music history.

In order to continue this success, we need your help. Your contribution will help fund continued publication of *The Journal of Texas Music History*, along with all the other important educational and preservational projects we have underway.

We are very grateful to the donors listed on this page. They have made a personal commitment to preserving the musical heritage of the Southwest. Their efforts will help us continue to increase awareness of how Texas music represents the unique historical development of the region.

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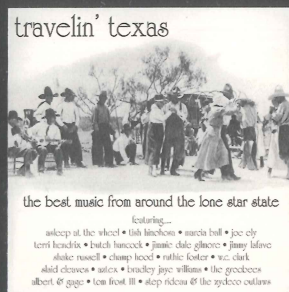
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I Forgot to Remember to Forget:

Specht: Elvis Presley in Texas - 1955

Elvis Presley in Texas-1955

Joe W. Specht



A techno remix of Elvis Presley's 1968 "A Little Less Conversation" reached #1 on the UK pop singles chart during the summer of 2002. A few months later in October, Elvis: 30 #1 Hits debuted at the top of the Billboard 200. The flood of official product from RCA, Elvis's record company, continues unchecked. Books and articles, in both the tabloids and scholarly journals, roll off the presses with regularity. More than twenty-five years after his death, Elvis Presley's popularity and influence live on. And while all aspects of his career remain open for discussion and speculation, it is the early years, the mid-to-late 1950s, that retain a special fascination. The recent publication of Stanley Oberst and Lori Torrance's Elvis in Texas: The Undiscovered King, 1954-1958 serves as a reminder, too, of what an important role the Lone Star State played in the initial stages of Presley's phenomenal rise to the top.¹

The story of Elvis in Texas during these early years is one of personal appearances and shows performed on flatbed trailers set up on baseball fields and parking lots, as well as those in high school gyms, small clubs, auditoriums, and eventually coliseums. In addition to the Texas landscape and blacktop highways, the cast of characters includes girls, girls, girls and would-be followers such as future Rock and Roll Hall of Famers Buddy Holly and Roy Orbison and even more girls, girls, girls. These were innocent times for Elvis, times when he honed his craft and still had opportunities to relax and hang out with fans and friends without causing a riot, at least for awhile. But the unchecked excitement and growing whirlwind of success that surrounded him would soon make such moments impossible.

The primary reason for Presley's initial splash in the state was

Longview, Paris, Seymour, Stamford, and Sweetwater. It is easy to understand the numerous gigs in Houston and East Texas because of the proximity to Shreveport and the *Louisiana Hayride*, where he was committed to perform most Saturday nights. What is worth noting, though, are the regular sweeps he made out west: five stops apiece in Lubbock and Odessa, three in Midland, two each in Abilene and San Angelo, and even two in tiny Stamford. Altogether, Elvis made at least twenty-six appearances in West Texas in 1955.

Texans, particularly young teen girls, responded with more than squeals; they also dug into their pocket books. Presley's music publisher, Hill and Range, later reported that sales of Elvis's first song folio were "doing very well in Memphis and Texas."⁴ His Sun Records also sold well partly due to the active

Texans, particularly young teen girls, responded with more than squeals; they also dug into their pocket books.

his involvement with Shreveport's *Louisiana Hayride*. With two Sun Records singles under his belt, "That's All Right"/"Blue Moon of Kentucky" and "Good Rockin' Tonight"/"I Don't Care If the Sun Don't Shine," Elvis, along with guitarist Scotty Moore and bassist Bill Black (soon to be known as the off-and-on-again Blue Moon Boys), signed a contract to make regular appearances on the *Hayride*. As a member of the *Louisiana Hayride* from November 1954 to April 1956, Presley could be heard many Saturday nights, along with the rest of the cast, on stage or on the air over KWKH, a 50,000-watt clear-channel Shreveport radio station. Not only did KWKH blanket the Ark-La-Tex area, but the station's AM frequency also bounced and skipped its way west across much of North Central and West Texas. Once Elvis joined the *Hayride*, bookings for personal appearances quickly followed, and the Lone Star State became a prime testing ground for what some reporters would later call Presley's atomic-powered performances.²

Elvis, Scotty, and Bill got their first taste of Texas hospitality soon after joining the *Louisiana Hayride*. They made several stops in East Texas and Houston during November and December 1954, but 1955 was the year that the Presley-Texas connection was really forged. In 1955, Elvis performed in fifteen states, primarily in the South, making approximately two hundred appearances, excluding *Louisiana Hayride* shows. At least eighty of these, or almost 40%, were in Texas. And while a few of the dates are open to question, when compared with twenty or so stops each in Arkansas and Mississippi, the two next most visited states during the year, it is evident where the Hillbilly Cat spent a great deal of his time.³

During 1955, Presley made at least thirteen appearances in Houston; Dallas was second with six. He also played shows in such places as Alpine, Beaumont, Breckenridge, Conroe, DeKalb, Gilmer, Gladewater, Gonzales, Hawkins, Joinerville,

involvement of Alta Hayes of Big State Record Distributors. Based in Dallas, Big State handled jukebox and record store distribution for independent companies such as Sun Records. Primarily because of the support from Alta Hayes, Elvis's first Sun release, "That's All Right," broke out quickly in areas serviced by Big State, especially in Dallas.⁵ In Houston, KNUZ's disc jockey/promoter Biff Collie also became an important and influential early booster.⁶

In the June 4th edition of *Billboard*, Cecil Holifield, owner of record shops in Midland and Odessa, reported that "Elvis Presley continues to gather speed over the South. West Texas is his hottest territory to date, and he is the teenagers' favorite wherever he appears."⁷ Elvis was very much aware of this, too, as he told Mae Boren Axton during an interview on May 7, 1955, in Daytona Beach, Florida: "Yes, ma'am, I've covered a lot [of territory], mostly in West Texas is where, that's where my records are hottest. Down in San Angelo, and Lubbock, and Midland, Amarillo."⁸ Obviously the King of Western Bop had been accepted with open arms by many in the Lone Star State.

The Texas connection also pops up in Mark Childress's novel *Tender*, a thinly disguised Presley chronicle. A chapter in *Tender* offers a glimpse of what it might have been like in those days. It is August 1955, and Leroy Kirby (Elvis) and his Blue Rhythm Boys, Tommy Hannah (Scotty) and Jack Brown (Bill), are in East Texas. The grind of the road, the constant bookings, and the growing excitement of the crowds are all here, and for Leroy, when the show's over, it's time to, "Sign a few autographs. Sweet-talk a girl or two. Pack the instruments in the car. Roar into the night."⁹ After playing for the grand opening of a Rexall drugstore in Big Sandy, Texas, the next stop is sixty miles south in Palestine at Eddy's Sho-Boat Lounge. The booking turns out to be a mistake, but Leroy and the Blue Rhythm Boys go ahead and play for the crowd – four customers, a waitress, and the owner.

Lean times to be sure, but Childress does give the reader a sense of the electricity that Leroy generates. And as the momentum grows, so too does Leroy's confidence: "The last traces of his stage fright had dried up somewhere in West Texas, weeks ago."¹⁰

Elvis's Texas sightings abound, then, in both fact and in fiction, but two recent discoveries in Sweetwater demonstrate how fragile the evidence is when it comes to accounting for some of his comings and goings in the early years. Because of the existence of a ticket stub for a concert on June 8, 1955, it has been assumed that Presley performed in Sweetwater on that date (*Did Elvis Sing in Your Hometown?*, *The King on the Road*, *The Elvis Atlas*, *Elvis Day By Day*, and *Elvis in Texas* all indicate such). The June 8th show had to be cancelled, however, due to "rain and bad weather," and it was rescheduled for the next day on June 9th. Information on the postponement turned up in a cache of newspapers donated to the Pioneer City-County Museum in Sweetwater (microfilmed copies of the *Sweetwater Reporter* for 1955 have been missing for years).¹¹

Even more intriguing is an advertisement found in the December 15, 1955, edition of the *Sweetwater Reporter*, announcing a Presley appearance in Sweetwater on the next evening. At least four residents recall Elvis performing twice in Sweetwater, and now the newspaper apparently confirms it. None of the Presley chronology books have any mention of the December 16, 1955, concert. In fact, there are no other documented Elvis bookings in Texas for the entire month of December. The question now becomes why trek all the way back to the state for only one night in Sweetwater? It will be interesting to see what Presley scholars make of all of this.¹²

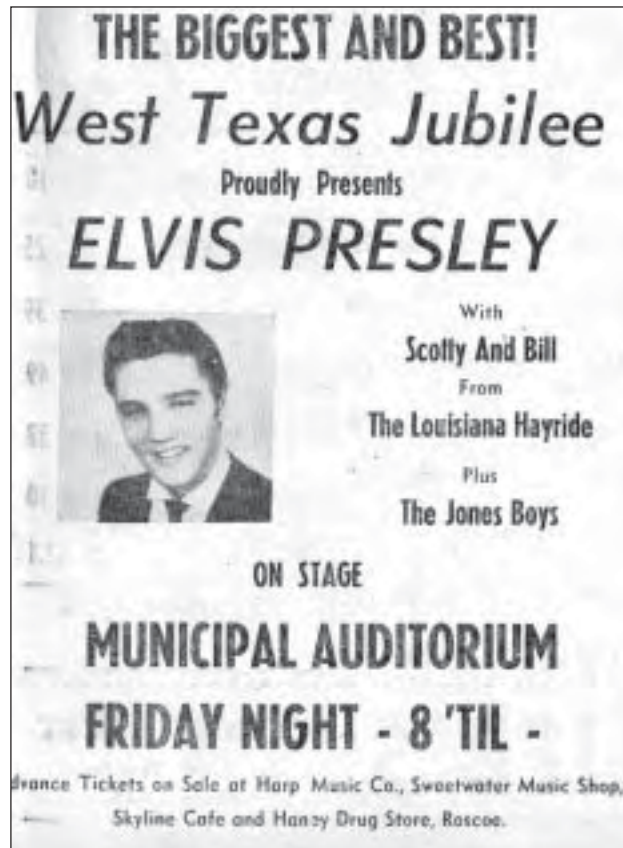
In another Texas tidbit, during his tenure with Sun Records and before signing with RCA Victor, Presley made perhaps his only recordings in a studio setting, outside of Memphis, in Lubbock. Elvis, Scotty, and Bill visited radio station KDAV on either January 6 or February 13, 1955, to promote their evening show, and the trio laid down a couple of tracks on acetate for the station to play later over the air. The two selections were "Fool, Fool, Fool," a 1951 R & B chart-topper for the Clovers, and "Shake, Rattle and Roll," first a hit for Big Joe Turner and then for Bill Haley.¹³ "Shake, Rattle and Roll" became a regular

feature on Elvis's concert playlist, and he recorded another version for RCA the next year.¹⁴

Live recordings from the period have also surfaced, and these provide aural evidence of what audiences were experiencing. Not unexpectedly, one of the earliest known tapings of an Elvis concert comes from Texas, a gig at Eagles Hall in Houston on March 19, 1955. Introduced by Biff Collie as "the boppin' hillbilly," Presley and the Blue Moon Boys opened with a frantic version of their second Sun Records release "Good Rockin' Tonight." Then on to the most recent Sun offering, "Baby Let's Play House," followed by "Blue Moon of Kentucky," Ray Charles's "I Got a Woman," and finally "That's All Right." Elvis's voice is up front. His breathing is reckless, almost slobbering into the microphone, with the audible squeals of girls in the background. Scotty and Bill are off mic, but they are still a formidable presence with Moore's cranked-up guitar breaks and Black's steady, thumping bass. Elvis

introduces "I Got a Woman" with tongue planted firmly in cheek: "This one's called ... little darlin', you broke my heart when you went away, but I'll break your jaw when you come back." On the final number, "That's All Right," Black bangs wildly on his bass and chimes in on the "that's all rights" in falsetto. Moore plugs the cracks with pungent guitar fills. Presley's voice soars. Total running time is less than fifteen minutes, and that's it. Elvis has left the building.¹⁵

The impact of performances like this inspired numerous audiences, to say the least. In Dallas, Kay Wheeler formed the first documented national Elvis Presley fan club in the world, and with his frequent flurries into the state, it did not take local musicians long to catch on to what Presley was up to as well.¹⁶ Many white teens were already in tune with the rhythm and blues sounds that were in the air, but Elvis effortlessly mixed white hillbilly or country music with black R & B like no one before. With Presley as "the avator, the unforgettable boy-daddy of rockabilly," as Nick Tosches so anointed him, disciples from the Lone Star State quickly became part of the vanguard's leading edge.¹⁷ Buddy Holly and Roy Orbison are the most famous, but there were others in this initial wave who were just as affected,



December 15, 1955 Mystery Concert ad for Presley concert in Sweetwater



Courtesy of Texas Music Museum, Austin.

including Dean Beard, Johnny Carroll, Mac Curtis, Sonny Fisher, Sid King, Buddy Knox, Bob Luman, Joe Poovey, and Alvis Wayne. And these Texas “cats” put their own twist on the Elvis Sun sound, helping to meld it into the music that would soon be called rockabilly.¹⁸

Buddy Holly was a spectator the first time Elvis played in Lubbock on January 6, 1955, and Buddy’s friend, singer/songwriter Sonny Curtis, remembers the very next day they started doing Presley songs: “Buddy wanted to be like Elvis.”¹⁹ Presley returned to the Hub City four more times during the year, and Holly and his then singing partner Bob Montgomery performed on some of the same shows. Presley and Holly got to spend time together, too, with Buddy even giving Elvis a tour of the town.²⁰ On one occasion, Holly’s brother Larry recalls that Buddy “found him [Elvis] a girl. She was not anyone you’d find on this side of town.”²¹ Although Holly moved on to produce his own unique brand of music, Buddy was always the first to point out, “Without Elvis, none of us could have made it.”²²

Elvis testimonials are plentiful, and those from fellow musicians such as Holly are especially telling; many having a Damascus Road-like quality. Roy Orbison’s initial exposure to Presley in person was most likely in Dallas at the Big D Jamboree on April 16, 1955, while Orbison was a student at North Texas State College.²³ And what he caught sight of “was a punk kid. A weird-looking dude. I can’t over-emphasize how shocking he

looked and sounded to me that night ... his energy was incredible and his instinct was just amazing.”²⁴ Orbison later said, “After that, I wanted to put on a show like Elvis.”²⁵

Often forgotten, except to rockabilly aficionados, Sonny Fisher, a native of Henderson County, was already playing in clubs around Houston when he saw Presley perform during one of his first stopovers in the Bayou City in November 1954. As Fisher told an interviewer, “Everything we did came from R&B ... Then we heard Elvis and I recognized it as something a little different just like everybody else.”²⁶ By January 1955, Sonny was in the studio recording some Elvis-styled tracks but with a different beat, literally. Fisher used drums when Presley was still *sans* “skins.” The two were later booked on the same bill, and Elvis asked to borrow Sonny’s drummer for his portion of the show.²⁷

Coleman’s Dean Beard, an unsung “Rock-me boy,” often referred to as the “West Texas Wildman,” also shared the stage with Presley.²⁸ Beard was the opening act in Breckenridge on April 13, 1955, and later that night Dean witnessed Elvis as “he tore the roof off that place.”²⁹ The next day a write-up appeared in the *Breckenridge American* by Ann Cowan that just might be “the first post-show review of an Elvis concert.”³⁰ Beard was in attendance for other Presley shows, including a July 4th appearance in Brownwood. Afterward Dean recalled inviting Elvis over to Coleman for a visit: “He [Presley] had a pink Cadillac. Boy, I felt like something riding down the main street of Coleman in that pink Cadillac.”³¹



Courtesy of Texas Music Museum, Austin.

As an aside, the July 4th concert in Brownwood was Elvis's third outing of the day, after earlier performances in Stephenville and De Leon. This would be the only occasion ever when Presley played a "triple header," three towns in the same day.³² Before going on stage in De Leon, Elvis told James Blackwood of the Blackwood Brothers: "I ain't gonna sing nothing but gospel music today." Much to the chagrin of the promoter and to the equal disappointment of the De Leon crowd, gospel music was all he sang. One more Texas first and something Presley never did again.³³

In an often quoted Elvis remembrance, Bob Luman, another wild-eyed East Texas rockabilly, told journalist Paul Hemphill what it was like to watch Presley at a show in Kilgore on May 20, 1955: "He made chills run up my back. Man, like when your hair starts grabbing at your collar ... That's the last time I tried to sing like Webb Pierce or Lefty Frizzell."³⁴ After hearing Elvis's version of "That's All Right" on the radio in Littlefield, Texas, future country music superstar Waylon Jennings had similar thoughts: "The sound went straight up your spine ... It just climbed right through you ... Up at the station, I looked at the yellow Sun label from Memphis as if it were from Mars."³⁵

Not everyone was as taken, however. Bill Malone, the dean of country music historians, was a second year student at the University of Texas in 1955 when he observed Presley perform in Austin, and he was not prepared for the encounter. It wasn't the music that bothered him so much, but rather Elvis's "physical gyrations" and the "screaming response" of the females in the audience.³⁶ With an opportunity to reflect over the years, Malone now understands he witnessed "a revolution in American music," but at that moment, it was more like "the barbarians had entered the gates of country music."³⁷

Up to this point, Presley toured primarily with members of the *Louisiana Hayride* or country music revues. And while his first number one hit record, "I Forgot to Remember to Forget," registered only on the country charts, it soon became clear to most observers that he could not be pigeonholed into a country music slot, or any other category for that matter.³⁸ During these early years, both the media and fans scrambled for words to describe Elvis and his music. Monikers included the Hillbilly Cat, the Folk Music Fireball, and the Nation's Only Atomic Powered Singer. As Presley biographer Peter Guralnick has so astutely pointed out, "[Elvis's] titles alone betray the cultural schizophrenia with which he was greeted."³⁹ But surprisingly, none of them yet carried a rock 'n' roll, or even a rockabilly, appellation.

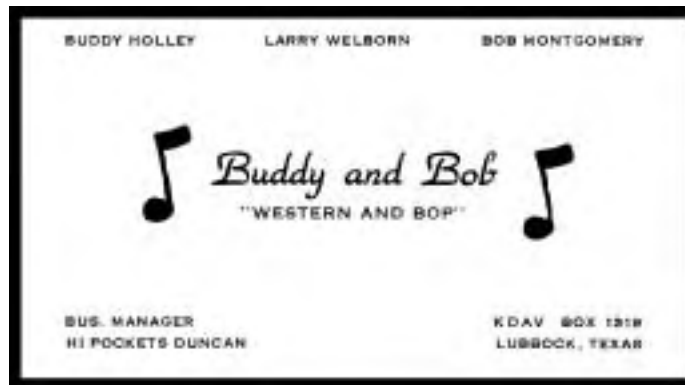
One of the more unique tags could well have its origins in the Lone Star State, and it tied Presley and his music to bebop or

just plain "bop."⁴⁰ The term "western and bop" was already in circulation on the South Plains. Buddy Holly and Bob Montgomery had business cards that read: "Buddy and Bob – Western and Bop."⁴¹ But Elvis gave a whole other worldly dimension to the phrase. The bop references began to show up as early as his first swing through West Texas in January 1955 with billing in Midland as the "King of Western Bop."⁴² For his second appearance in Lubbock on February 13, an advertisement announced: "Elvis Presley, The Be-Bop Western Star of the Louisiana Hayride, returns to Lubbock."⁴³ The next night in Abilene, citizens of the Key City were invited to come out and see "Elvis Presley and His Bop Band."⁴⁴

It didn't take long before this description had spread eastward across the Sabine River. In her interview with Presley on May 7 in Florida, Mae Axton asked, "Elvis, you are sort of a bebop artist more than anything else, aren't ya? Is that what they call you?" And Presley answered, "Well I never have given myself a name but a lot of disc jockeys call me Boppin' Hillbilly and Be-

bop...I don't know what all."⁴⁵ A month later a promoter based in Washington D.C. declared, "Presley has crossed bebop with country music."⁴⁶ And in a radio interview/promotion for the *Louisiana Hayride* in August, Bob Neal, Presley's manager at the time, described his protegee as "the King of Western Bop."⁴⁷

The same month back in Texas in a pre-concert plug, a staff writer for the *Austin American* commented on



Western and Bop card. Courtesy of Bill Griggs

Elvis's "boppish approach to hillbilly music" and "his half-bop, half-western style."⁴⁸ And prior to an October 6th appearance in the Capital City, the *Austin Statesman* reminded its readers that Presley's fans had "labeled [him] 'the king of western bop.'"⁴⁹ The following week an Amarillo ad reiterated that Elvis was the "King of Western Bop," but pointed out "his wardrobe runs to the 'cool cat' type of dress rather than western apparel."⁵⁰ Three days later in Abilene, the promoters welcomed "Elvis Presley and his Western Bop Jamboree."⁵¹ The characterization continued to follow Elvis outside the state, too, with billings as the "King of Western Bop" in Newport, Arkansas, and Booneville, Mississippi.⁵² When he made his debut in Las Vegas in April 1956, the *Las Vegas SUN* reported: "Presley's singing is a 'peculiar brand of western bop.'"⁵³

Western bop? It is interesting to note how the expression has persisted. As recently as 1999, Ace Records issued a CD anthology of late 1950s rockers recorded by Buddy Holly's producer Norman Petty, entitled *West Texas Bop*, and a rockabilly combo currently working out of the Washington, D.C. area calls itself J. P. McDermott & Western Bop.⁵⁴ Of course, when one



Joe Bovey: Photo courtesy of David Dennard and Dragon Street Records.

thinks of bop, the names of jazz bebop pioneers such as Charlie Parker, who incidentally died the same year (1955) that the term western bop was linked to Presley, come immediately to mind. And in a sense, Elvis, like Parker and his bebop contemporaries in

the mid-1940s, provided what jazz critic Martin Williams called “a renewed musical language (or at least a new dialect).”⁵⁵

But “bop” in this case was, obviously, being used as a code word. It meant more than just a “Negro” beat. Bop was also something *new* and *cool*, and it involved an element of the dance, too. The sexuality oozing from Presley could not be ignored either. In a 1960 interview, Elvis coyly confided, “I can’t dance to rock and roll. I can slow dance, but I never learned to bop.”⁵⁶ But his fans knew better and so did the media and the public at large. Presley’s stage moves were described in Tulsa, Oklahoma, as the “dirty bop.”⁵⁷ The Alabama White Citizens Council was even more explicit when it railed against “this animalistic nigger bop.”⁵⁸ In addition to the music mixing, then, another ingredient was the way Elvis stirred in front of an audience, up on the balls of his feet, twitching, seemingly ready to spring off the stage. As novelist and journalist Michael Ventura has observed, “Elvis’s singing was so extraordinary because you could *hear* the moves, infer the moves, in his singing.”⁵⁹ Clearly Texans were among the first to pick up on the new lingo and understand what Elvis and his music were all about.

With his star rapidly on the ascent after signing with RCA Victor Records and appearing on national television, and with Hollywood and Las Vegas beckoning, Presley made only 19 appearances in Texas in 1956. The last was in San Antonio on October 14 for two shows at the Bexar County Coliseum. Elvis came back in 1958. However, this time he was a draftee in the United States Army stationed at Fort Hood from April through August.

After the October 14, 1956, concerts in the Alamo City, it would be almost fourteen years before Presley returned to perform again in the Lone Star State, but he never forgot those early days. Elvis later told a reporter for the *Dallas Morning News*, “I sorta got my start in Texas.”⁶⁰ Lots of Texans remembered Presley, too, and for a variety of reasons. Sid Foster, a disc jockey in Breckenridge at the time, recalls a telephone conversation with Slim Willet, Abilene media mogul and composer of “Don’t Let the Stars Get in Your Eyes.” Willet, who had just caught Elvis’s performance in Lubbock on February 13, 1955, admonished, “Sid my man, you’ve got to see this guy, no kidding. And my advice to you is don’t bring a date if you want to keep her.”⁶¹ ■

NOTES

1. Stanley Oberst and Lori Torrance, *Elvis in Texas: The Undiscovered King, 1954-1958* (Plano, TX: Republic of Texas Press, 2002). Though obviously a labor of love, careless errors of spelling and fact require that *Elvis in Texas* be read with caution.
2. An informal history of the Louisiana Hayride is available in Horace Logan with Bill Sloan, *Elvis, Hank, and Me: Making Musical History on the Louisiana Hayride* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998). As the Hayride’s program director, Logan was responsible for hiring Presley, and his memoir offers an insider’s look at Elvis when fame was lurking just over the horizon. Albert Goldman also makes the point that “radio was the real foundation of Elvis’s [early] success.” See Albert Goldman, *Elvis* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981), 124.
3. To arrive at my “approximate” totals, in addition to *Elvis in Texas*, I used Lee Cotten, *Did Elvis Sing in Your Hometown?* (Sacramento: High Sierra Books, 1995), Robert Gordon, *The King on the Road: Elvis on Tour, 1954-1977* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), Michael Gray and Roger Osborne, *The Elvis Atlas: A Journey Through Elvis Presley’s America* (New York: Henry Holt, 1996), and Peter Guralnick and Ernst Jorgensen, *Elvis Day By Day* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999), all of which provide chronological lists of Presley appearances. Because Texas and Arkansas can both claim Texarkana, I excluded the shows that Elvis played there in 1955 from either the Texas or Arkansas count, even though the auditorium is located on the Arkansas side of the line.
4. Jerry Hopkins, *Elvis: A Biography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971), 124.
5. Collin Escott with Martin Hawkins, *Good Rockin’ Tonight: Sun Records and the Birth of Rock ‘n’ Roll* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1991) 67; Peter Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis: The Rise of Elvis Presley* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1994), 113; Oberst and Torrance, *Elvis in Texas*, 78.
6. Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis*, 152.
7. *Ibid.*, 183.
8. Jerry Osborne, *Elvis: Word for Word* (New York: Harmony Books, 2000), 2.
9. Mark Childress, *Tender: A Novel* (New York: Harmony Books, 1990), 320.
10. *Ibid.*, 329.
11. Travis Monday, “Elvis Presley in Sweetwater,” *Sweetwater Reporter*, May 12, 2002, A1. Oberst and Torrance have Presley appearing in Andrews on June 9, 1955.
12. *Ibid.*, A10. Travis Monday hopes to follow up in more detail on this very surprising discovery.
13. Ernst Jorgensen, *Elvis Presley: A Life in Music* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 21; Guralnick and Jorgensen, *Elvis Day by Day*, 28. The acetate of “Fool, Fool, Fool” was mistakenly labeled “What A Fool I Was.” Both recordings – “Fool, Fool, Fool” and “Shake, Rattle and Roll” – are included on the Presley box set *The King of Rock ‘N’ Roll: The Complete 50s Masters* (RCA 66050, 1992).
14. Jorgensen, *Elvis Presley*, 38-40.
15. At first thought to originate from an earlier Eagles Hall date on January 1, 1955, the consensus now seems to be that this show took place on March 19. See Jorgensen, *Elvis Presley*, 24-25. A tape of the concert has circulated in many guises on both vinyl and compact disc. My copy is *Elvis Presley The Rockin’ Rebel, Vol. II* (Golden Archives GA-300, ca. 1979).
16. Goldman, *Elvis*, 124; Oberst and Torrance, *Elvis in Texas*, 184.
17. Nick Tosches, *Country: The Twisted Roots of Rock ‘n’ Roll* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), 62. The chapter from which this quote is taken, “Loud Converts,” is a must read to better understand what the rockabillys and their music were all about.
18. For more on rockabilly music, see Randy McNutt, *We Wanna Boogie: An Illustrated History of the American Rockabilly Movement* [rev., 2d ed.] (Hamilton, OH: HHP Books, 1998), Craig Morrison, *Go Cat Go! Rockabilly Music and Its Makers* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), and Billy Poore, *RockABilly: A Forty-Year Journey* (Milwaukee, WI: Hall Leonard Corp., 1998).
19. Joe Carr and Alan Munde, *Prairie Nights to Neon Lights: The Story of Country Music in West Texas* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1995), 128.
20. John Goldrosen and John Beecher, *Remembering Buddy: The Definitive Biography* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), 29-30.
21. Ellis Amburn, *Buddy Holly: A Biography* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), 35; Bill Griggs, *Buddy Holly – Day By Day (September 1936 – June 1959)* (Lubbock: Rockin’ 50s, 1997), 58.
22. Timothy White, *Rock Lives: Profiles & Interviews* (New York: Henry Holt, 1990), 42.
23. The Presley-Orbison chronology is a bit of a mess. The most important point to remember, though, is Orbison was enrolled at

North Texas State College (now the University of North Texas) in Denton for the fall 1954 semester and the spring 1955 semester (the UNT registrar confirms he was a student both semesters). While a student at NT, Roy saw Presley live in Dallas on the Big D Jamboree, and this is where some of the confusion arises. Orbison told an interviewer he first saw Elvis at the Big D Jamboree in 1954. Since Presley's debut on the Jamboree was not until April 16, 1955, Roy was obviously mistaken about the year. Nevertheless, both of Orbison's major biographers place him in the audience at the Big D Jamboree a year earlier on April 16, 1954, when he was still attending Wink High School. This would have been three months before Presley recorded his first Sun Records single and seven months before Elvis, Scotty, and Bill had even played their initial Texas gig in Houston. See Alan Clayton, *Only the Lonely: Roy Orbison's Life and Legacy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 26; Ellis Amburn, *Dark Star: The Roy Orbison Story* (New York: Lyle Stuart, 1990), 28-29. Presley's biographer Peter Guralnick also falls into the trap. See Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis*, 171. To muddy the waters even more, Guralnick and Jorgensen place Orbison in the audience for Presley's performance in Odessa on February 16, 1955. See Guralnick and Jorgensen, *Elvis Day by Day*, 33. Colin Escott gets it right, however: "Elvis was in Odessa in February 1955, but Roy would have been in Denton at the time..." See Colin Escott, *Roadkill on the Three-Chord Highway: Art and Trash in American Popular Music* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 7. There is confusion on another matter: When did Orbison and the Teen Kings begin hosting a weekly television show in Odessa and when did Presley appear on the show? Several accounts have Elvis appearing on the Teen Kings show on KOSA-TV in January 1955. See Carr and Munde, *Prairie Nights to Neon Lights*, 135; Cotten, *Did Elvis Sing in Your Hometown?*, 35; Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis*, 171. This information is based primarily on interviews with Billy Walker (then a member of the Louisiana Hayride and later the Grand Ole Opry) who was touring with Presley at the time. With Orbison in residence in Denton, except for the 1954 Christmas break, Walker's recall has to be questioned. But it becomes even more suspect because the Teen Kings' association with KOSA-TV did not begin until the fall of 1955. See Mike Perry, notes to The Teen Kings, *Are You Ready?* (Roller Coaster Records RCCD 3012, 1995), 5-8 (Perry, in my opinion, has the best grasp of the chronology). So when did Presley appear with Orbison on Odessa television? Perhaps it was in October 1955 when Elvis played his last show in Odessa. See Cotten, *Did Elvis Sing in Your Hometown?*, 111. Opportunities exist, then, for more research in this area.


24. Escott with Hawkins, *Good Rockin' Tonight*, 146.
25. Amburn, *Dark Star*, 29.
26. Bill Millar, "That Rockin Daddy Sonny Fisher," *New Komotion*, no. 25 (1980), 15.
27. Ray Topping, notes to Sonny Fisher, *Texas Rockabilly* (Ace 10CH14, ca. 1979). The songs Fisher recorded in 1955 and 1956 were released on Beaumont's Starday Records, and tunes like "Rockin' Daddy" and "Hey Mama" offer up some of the earliest examples of the fledgling rockabilly sound on vinyl. Greil Marcus has described Fisher's Starday recordings as laced with "smoky sexual menace, authentically tough stuff..." See Greil Marcus, *Mystery Train: Images of America in Rock 'N' Roll*, 4th rev. ed. (New York: Plume, 1997), 289.
28. Bill Whitaker, "Dean Beard Changed Tune, Not Drive," *Abilene Reporter-News*, April 11, 1989, 1A. In 1956, Beard cut two demo sessions in Memphis for Sun Records, but Sam Phillips decided not to sign him. One of the demos was "Rakin' and Scrapin'," which Dean recorded again the next year in Abilene for Slim Willet's Edmoral label. A tenor sax, piano-driven pounder (members of the band included Jimmy Seals on tenor sax and Dash Crofts on drums), "Rakin' and Scrapin'" was leased to Atlantic Records for national distribution but for naught. Beard continued to perform locally in Texas, and he recorded regularly through the mid-60s. At one point, he was even out on the West Coast as a member of the Champs of "Tequila" fame, but ultimately Dean's story is another one of those what if ...
29. Wayne Russell, "Dean Beard," *New Komotion*, no. 23 (1980), 14; Oberst and Torrance, *Elvis in Texas*, 65.
30. Cotten, *Did Elvis Sing in Your Hometown?*, 61.
31. Russell, "Dean Beard," 14. Elvis's first pink Cadillac burned up on the road sometime in June 1955 (depending on the source, it happened on either June 5, June 16, or June 17), and he didn't get a new one until the next month. See Guralnick and Jorgensen, *Elvis Day by Day*, 40-43; Cotten, *Did Elvis Play in Your Hometown?*, 82; Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis*, 196. In all probability, Beard and Presley took their spin around Coleman in the Caddie on another date.
32. Cotten, *Did Elvis Sing in Your Hometown?*, 86; Oberst and Torrance, *Elvis in Texas*, 109-111.
33. Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis*, 196-197.
34. Paul Hemphill, *The Nashville Sound: Bright Lights and Country Music* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 273. Bob Luman recorded seminal versions of "Red Cadillac and a Black Mustache" and "Red Hot" for Imperial Records in 1957, and he went on to have both rock 'n' roll and country hits. Yet, even after joining the Grand Ole Opry in 1965, Luman maintained his rockabilly roots.
35. Waylon Jennings with Lenny Kaye, *Waylon: An Autobiography* (New York: Warner Books, 1996), 43-44.
36. Bill Malone, "Country Elvis," in *In Search of Elvis: Music, Race, Art, Religion*, edited by Vernon Chadwick (New York: Westview Press, 1997), 3. Malone places the concert as "sometime in late 1955," but if Hank Snow was on the show as Malone remembers, then, it would be on January 18, 1956.
37. Ibid., 3; Bill C. Malone, *Don't Get About Your Raisin': Country Music and the Southern Working Class* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 10.
38. "I Forgot to Remember to Forget" first entered the *Billboard* country music charts in September 1955, and it stayed there for thirty-nine weeks, eventually reaching the number one position in late February 1956. See Joel Whitburn, *Top Country Singles, 1944-1997* (Menomonee Falls, WI: Record Research, 1998), 272. Presley's first number one record on *Billboard's* Top 100 (the pop charts) was "Heartbreak Hotel" in March 1956. See Joel Whitburn, *Top Pop Singles, 1955-1996* (Menomonee Falls, WI: Record Research, 1997), 483.
39. Peter Guralnick, *Lost Highway: Journeys & Arrivals of American Musicians* (Boston: Godine, 1979), 129. See also Michael T. Bertrand, *Race, Rock, and Elvis* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 103.
40. Colin Escott and Martin Hawkins mention in passing that Presley was "billed as the 'King of Western Bop'" for a show at Overton Park in Memphis in September 1954 (the date was actually July 30, 1954). See Colin Escott and Martin Hawkins, *Sun Records: The Brief History of the Legendary Label* (New York: Quick Fox, 1980), 4. But this seems highly unlikely since it was Elvis's first advertised appearance and one of the ads even spelled his first name "Ellis." See Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis*, 108-111. In fact, Escott and Hawkins drop the bop reference altogether in their subsequent *Good Rockin' Tonight*, 65.
41. Goldrosen and Beecher, *Remembering Buddy*, 30. Texas music historian Kevin Coffey offers this: "When I hear the term western bop, Buddy Holly comes to mind. Not because I think that describes his music, but because I think he did, circa '55..." (e-mail from Coffey to Specht, July 9, 2002).
42. Billy Walker has said he "saved the ad for the Midland, Texas, show. It says: 'The show will feature five stars of the Louisiana Hayride, including Elvis Presley, King of Western Bop.'" See *Elvis Up Close: In the Words of Those Who Knew Him Best*, edited by Rose Clayton and Dick Heard (Atlanta: Turner Publishing, 1994), 64.
43. *Lubbock Avalanche-Journal*, February 13, 1955, VI-4.
44. *Abilene Reporter-News*, February 14, 1955, 3-B.
45. Osborne, *Elvis: Word for Word*, 2.
46. Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis*, 217.
47. Osborne, *Elvis: Word for Word*, 5.
48. *Austin American*, August 25, 1955, 17.
49. *Austin Statesman*, October 6, 1955, A17.
50. Guralnick and Jorgensen, *Elvis Day by Day*, 50.
51. *Abilene Reporter-News*, October 9, 1955, 11-B.
52. Cotten, *Did Elvis Play in Your Hometown?*, 115, 126.
53. Bob Lilly, "Just About Everything Under the Sun," *Las Vegas SUN*, April 26, 1956. Available: <http://www.vegas.com/lounge/elvis>.
54. *West Texas Bop: The Original Norman Petty Masters* (Ace CDCHD 699, 1999). More information on J. P. McDermott & Western Bop is available at their official website: www.westernbop.com.
55. Martin Williams, *The Jazz Tradition*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 136. See also Patrick B. Mullen, "Hillbilly Hipsters of the 1950s: the Romance of Rockabilly," *Southern Quarterly* 22 (Spring 1984), 83.
56. Osborne, *Elvis: Word for Word*, 163.
57. Gray and Osborne, *The Elvis Atlas*, 95.
58. Dave Marsh, *Elvis* (New York: Rolling Stone Press Book/Times Books, 1982), 54.
59. Michael Ventura, "Hear That Long Snake Moan," in his *Shadow Dancing in the U.S.A.* (Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher, 1985), 152.
60. Julian Levine, "'Dad Will Be With Me,' Says Elvis," *Dallas Morning News*, August 25, 1958, 4-1.
61. Oberst and Torrance, *Elvis in Texas*, 52.

Lock: Counterculture Cowboys

Counterculture Cowboys:

Progressive Texas Country of the 1970s & 1980s

Cory Lock



Country music undeniably forms a vital and prominent part of Texas culture. Texas country musicians have long been innovators, not only fashioning a distinctive brand of regional music, but also consistently enriching the music and general culture of the American nation as a whole. Artists such as Bob Wills, Gene Autry, Ernest Tubb, Ray Price, Willie Nelson, George Strait, and the Dixie Chicks have become national icons and have helped shape mainstream American perceptions of what it is to be "country."

Yet while the import of country music within regional and national culture is certain, people are much less decided on what country music means. What is it that makes country country? What does the music as a whole stand for? Is it a nostalgic genre that harkens us back to the good old days of yesteryear? Many people believe so, emphasizing country music's role in preserving what is most traditional in American culture. However, for others country music's magic does not come from references to past times or old-fashioned values. Some are enchanted with the music's structure and instrumentation in itself, the sweet, melancholy melody of a steel guitar, the irresistible dance beat of western swing, the straightforward and familiar rhythms and lyrics of a country ballad. Though nostalgia at times dominates country music's concern with rural life and open spaces, these

The trend to which I refer began in the early 1970s and continued through the mid-1980s. In his *Country Music USA* chapter, "Country Music, 1972-1984," Bill Malone approaches this time period as a coherent unit in which country music and culture drew the attention of the nation as a whole. Country entertainers graced the covers of national news magazines, such as Loretta Lynn in *Newsweek* in 1973, Merle Haggard in *Time* in 1974, and Willie Nelson in *Newsweek* in 1978.¹ In 1975, Robert Altman released the film *Nashville*, bringing the country music world to a nationwide, educated, middle-class audience and suggesting its connection with consumerized and surface-oriented American culture as a whole. Other films followed, featuring established actors in "country" roles. *W. W. and the Dixie Dancekings* (1975), starring Burt Reynolds, and *Outlaw*

Though nostalgia at times dominates country music's concern with rural life and open spaces, these themes have additionally attracted songwriters concerned with environmentalism or progressive, blue collar politics.

themes have also attracted songwriters concerned with environmentalism or progressive, blue collar politics. The cowboy, often represented in the figure of the Texan, also has an ambivalent mythic past. While many see him as the symbol of traditional justice, others are drawn to his connotations as loner, and at times even outlaw. For some, he is the sheriff that protects and upholds community values; for others, he is a creature of the open range, always outside of and apart from the life and values of mainstream society.

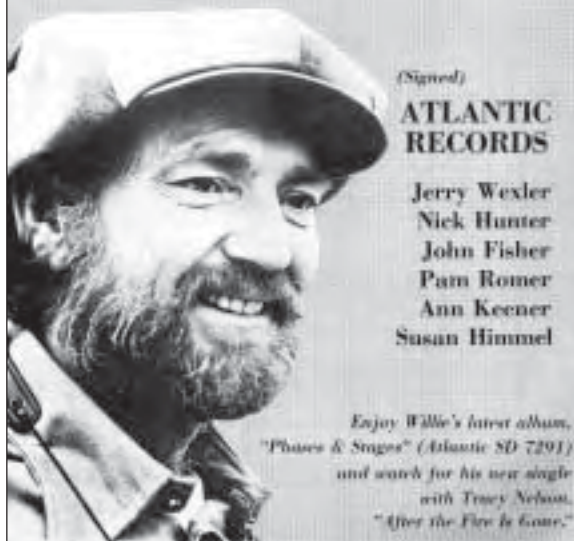
Though country music is a fixture of Texas culture, with roots extending back to the folk music of Anglo settlers during the early days of the Republic, its presence within twentieth-century, mainstream, national culture is subject to more noticeable ebbs and flows. Thus, it is on the national scene, where country music's presence is not always a given, that some of the most dramatic debates have taken place regarding the meaning of country music and the Texas cowboy culture and mythology it often references. The 1970s and 1980s saw just such a dialogue take place, as country moved to the forefront of American popular culture. Journalists, academics, and other cultural critics across the United States discussed country music's ties with what many characterized as an insidious conservative movement. Yet, these critics often ignored these same elements in other forms of American music, such as rock, blues, classic rock, and heavy metal, that often included explicitly racist or misogynistic content. Additionally, at this same moment a country music scene was developing in Texas that defied many stereotypes and demonstrated the often overlooked flexibility of the myths and symbols of country music. This moment in Texan and American history is still important today, as it speaks to the potential of what many characterize as a traditional and conservative genre to articulate the changing values and lifestyles of the twenty-first century.

Blues (1977) with Peter Fonda both portrayed country entertainers caught up in criminal activity, while other films glamorized "good old boy" lifestyles, such as *Smokey and the Bandit* (1977) with Burt Reynolds, Sally Fields, and country musician Jerry Reed, and *The Electric Horseman* (1979) with Robert Redford, Jane Fonda, and Willie Nelson. On television, programs depicting a range of country culture became national favorites. Several popular country music variety shows began in the 1960s but continued into the 1970s, including *The Porter Wagoner Show* (1960-1979), *The Johnny Cash Show* (1969-1970), and Roy Clark and Buck Owens's *Hee-Haw* (1969-1993). *The Waltons* (1972) and *Little House on the Prairie* (1974) both presented nostalgic versions of rural family life; *Dallas* (1978) brought Texas chic to an international audience, and *The Dukes of Hazzard* (1979), narrated by Waylon Jennings, capitalized on *Smokey and the Bandit's* prototype of young men, sexy women, fast cars, and country music.² Meanwhile on public television, *Austin City Limits* (1976) began to showcase the live performances of a wide range of country music performers to a national audience, a mission that it continues to the present day.

The national fascination with the country music culture continued well into the 1980s. In 1980, Texan Aaron Latham and James Bridges co-wrote the screenplay for *Urban Cowboy* and acquired John Travolta and Debra Winger for starring roles. The film inspired an "urban cowboy" trend in which country dance clubs sprang up across the nation, western clothing found a new popularity from New York to Los Angeles, and country dancing became the latest rage. That same year, Sissy Spacek won an Academy Award for her starring role as Loretta Lynn in *Coal Miner's Daughter*, an adaptation of Lynn's autobiography.³ Country legend, Dolly Parton was featured in *Nine to Five* (1980), as well as in its television spin-off (1986). She also co-

Lock: Counterculture Cowboys

Willie, you're the greatest!



Courtesy of Wayne Beckham Collection at
Southwest Texas State University

starred with Burt Reynolds in *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas* (1982), a screen adaptation of Larry L. King's 1977 play. Willie Nelson continued his acting career with acclaimed performances in *Honeysuckle Rose* (1980) and *Barbarosa* (1982), while Kenny Rogers was featured in the television movie, *The Gambler* (1980).⁴ *Tender Mercies* (1984), starring Robert Duvall, with its screenplay by Texas writer Horton Foote, received several Academy Award nominations.⁵ The widespread popularity of country music also was marked in 1983 with the creation of *The Nashville Network*, a cable channel devoted completely to country music and culture.

As country music culture gained the largest national following in its history, many people linked this cultural trend to changes in American values. Country music superstar, Merle Haggard, for example, in a *New York Times* interview enthusiastically interpreted the upsurge in country music listening as evidence of the American public's renewed sense of national loyalty and traditional values: "I think we're experiencing a feeling of patriotism that hasn't surfaced for a long time . . . and I'm glad to see it . . . Every time patriotism comes to the surface, you'll find country music, cowboys and so on becoming popular."⁶ On the opposite end of the spectrum, *Nation* reporter Paul Dickson condemned the country trend and called its songs "a comforting musical antidote to student protest, black militancy and serious debate on the war."⁷ Similarly, *Harper's* writer Florence King stressed the problem with increasing political invocations of country music: "The mind of the country music fan tends to pounce on anything that resembles a good old-fashioned *reductio ad absurdum*"; King suggested that many country songs of the 1970s were "hymns to the fear of change that is dividing America along strict political, social, and sexual lines, and encouraging all working people to emulate and identify with the very worst sort of Southern reactionaries."⁸

A number of intellectuals provided in-depth analyses of this connection between country music and politics, which almost always expressed deep concern over country music's growing popularity. In his 1985 essay, "Goin' to the Dawgs?: The Rustication of American Culture," folklorist John M. Coggeshall situates the resurgence of country music as part of a nostalgic "rustication" movement he describes as taking place throughout the American nation. He claims that as part of this rustication trend "America, and Americans, seem to be reverting to often blatantly artificial 'country' roots, the place where these [traditional, conservative attitudes toward family, community, and nation] . . . are supposedly enshrined."⁹ Coggeshall reads a highly

disparate range of cultural phenomena, including the growing nationwide popularity of country music, television programs and commercials depicting "rural folk," Kentucky Fried Chicken and other "Southern-style" foods, and western-style clothing as part of a national trend in which the white middle class has "banded together to attempt a revitalization of a lost American utopia of personal and social order."¹⁰ The white middle class, Coggeshall claims, perceives the American social order as disrupted by African Americans and other racial minorities, the federal government, and the liberal intelligentsia. Thus, he concludes, "An intensifying appeal of nostalgic

and idealized rural values and lifestyles reflects a deep, pervasive, and ultimately dangerous national mood."¹¹ The danger of this national mood, Coggeshall suggests, lies specifically in its xenophobic and racist overtones.

Years earlier, Richard Goldstein made one of the most articulate and convincing critiques of the connection between country music culture and political conservatism in his 1973 *Mademoiselle* article, "My Country Music Problem—and Yours." Responding to the nationwide resurgence of country music, particularly in New York City and other urban areas, Goldstein minces no words in summing up his "country music problem":

...I suspect there is something far more sinister to the current embrace of country music by the least likely people, and even a touch of desperation to their imitation of Southern style, as though they were admitting something far more threatening than mere nostalgia, which is the simple fact that the politics of this nation has changed drastically in the past four years, and that as a deliberate consequence of administrative power, the values of Southern, Caucasian, Protestant, suburban, adult Americans have assumed supremacy. That is to say—without flinching, now—Wasps are back at the helm, and the ship is heading full kilter into their particular sunset.¹²

Goldstein's concern is less with Southern Anglo culture in itself, though he admits that "To a New York City Jew there is something intrinsically threatening about the very syntax of country music, not to mention its content,"¹³ than with urban progressive audiences adopting the country trend. The heart of his argument is that "no cultural image is truly neutral or divorced from its consequences" (115) and that "one can never

separate the product from the desires it is meant to gratify.”¹⁴ In other words, country music is not simply a style or a trend, but a cultural production directly tied to a particular set of values and created in order to satisfy very specific desires even while producing them. When progressive, urban audiences adopt portions of this culture, they reinforce its entire value system. Like Coggeshall, Goldstein stresses the political implications of country music’s popularity:

Country music comes equipped with a very specific set of values . . . : political conservatism, strongly differentiated male and female roles, a heavily punitive morality, racism, and the entire constellation of values around which is centered the phrase ‘rugged individualism.’ To me, it is, truly, the perfect musical extension of the Nixon administration There is something utterly sinister about the image of Richard Nixon inviting Merle Haggard to sing at the White House. All this has little to do with the real man and his actual taste; this is a political gesture with a very specific ideological intent. The President wishes to identify with the system of values which country music suggests, which is to say a strongly suburban, strongly conservative, strongly Protestant audience which damned well ought to frighten every long-haired progressive urbanite, and every black man who is not part of it.¹⁵

Here Goldstein articulates the heart of his and most other liberals’ problem with country music, its direct and indirect connection with racism. After the 1960s Civil Rights movement, with its struggles for racial equality located specifically in the American South, many progressives saw Southern culture as a whole as tainted. In academia, this attitude was compounded by the increasing hegemony of the political “left” in the humanities. Many people labeled the South as, to use Goldstein’s words, “sinister” and “threatening,” consumed by a bitter race war marked by segregation, lynchings, and the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King. Coggeshall’s argument also revolves around this central issue; he sees the rustication trend as a marker of a national xenophobia directed against blacks, hispanics, Asians, and anyone else marked as a “foreigner.”

Yet in examining American, and Texan, country music, it is important to qualify any broad connections between country music culture and political conservatism. Goldstein correctly notes Nixon’s unlikely affiliation with country music. Both Merle Haggard and Johnny Cash performed for Nixon at the White House, and president Nixon also attended the ceremonial opening of the new Grand Ole Opry House. During a speech in Nashville he explicitly spelled out what he saw as the ideological affiliations of country music, claiming “The peace of the world . . . is going to depend on our character, our belief in ourselves, our love of our country, our willingness to not

only wear the flag but to stand up for the flag, and country music does that!”¹⁶ Nixon was not the only conservative president to consciously identify with country music. Ronald Reagan, who had his own associations with country culture through his earlier acting career, frequently invited Merle Haggard and other country entertainers to perform at the White House and attended the Country Music Association’s twenty-fifth anniversary celebration.¹⁷

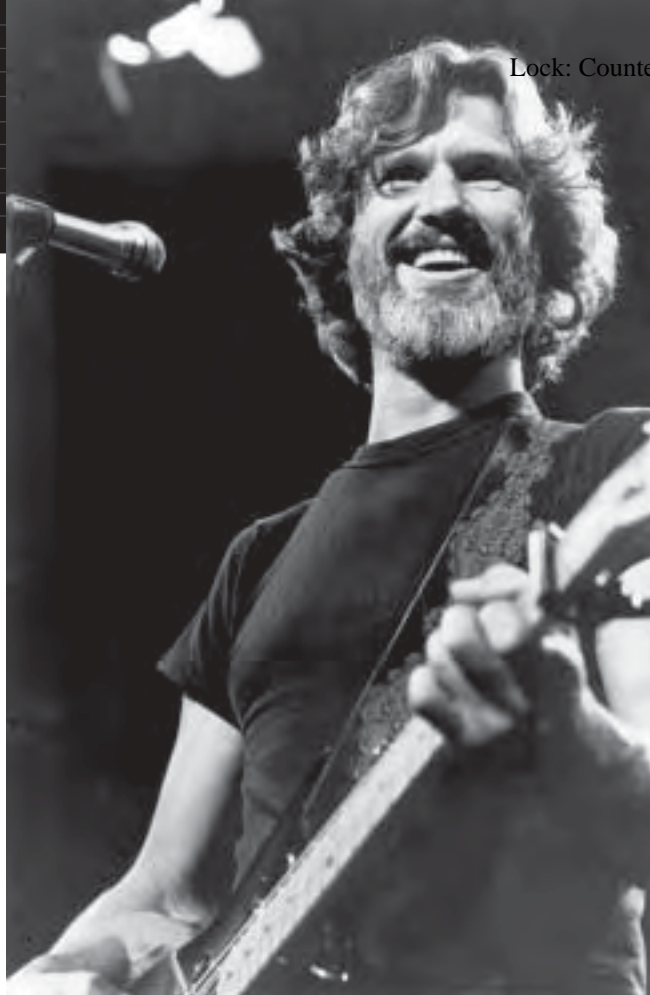
However, country musicians’ political affiliations were by no means limited to conservative administrations. Lyndon Johnson began the tradition of bringing country music to the White House, and his social events often featured country performers, such as the Geezinslaw Brothers.¹⁸ Later, Jimmy Carter expressed a deep appreciation of country music, at times appearing on stage with performers at social functions and even occasionally singing a portion of a song. The Allman Brothers, Johnny Cash, Loretta Lynn, Tom T. Hall, Hank Snow, and Willie Nelson were all not only regulars at presidential events but also active participants in Carter’s presidential campaigns.¹⁹ The diversity of country musicians’ political affiliations suggests the flexibility of this culture to invoke an array of values, rather than a strict union with the political right.

Goldstein’s connection of country music culture to conservatism, then, is not a natural equivalence, though it may point to a rhetorical trend. Several other analysts of country music have made this same argument. According to *New York Times* columnist Robert Palmer’s 1981 evaluation of the country music upsurge of the previous decade:

The popularity of country music may be tied to burgeoning conservatism. But this does not mean that country music itself is inherently conservative. The music’s core audience has always been white and working class, but in recent years black singers have become country stars, and the country audience has expanded to include listeners whose social and economic backgrounds range across the spectrum.

During the last five years or so, a number of country hits have dealt explicitly with changing social and sexual mores—more explicitly than older country music, and often more explicitly than most contemporary rock and soul. If country generally espouses traditional American values, they are values of the most basic sort—self-reliance, the willingness to work hard, the importance of trusting and acting on one’s deepest feelings.²⁰

Bill Malone likewise finds country music’s association with conservatism “an ironic development in that the similar ‘discovery’ of white folk music in the thirties had been fueled by an awakening of liberal sentiment.”²¹ He points out that during the period of 1972-1984,



Kris Kristofferson. Photo by Scott Newton, courtesy of Leon Carter Collection, Texas Music Museum.

country music's political stance remained difficult to categorize. Musicians voted both Democratic and Republican and stayed as free of ideological postures as did most Americans. Some performers leaned toward Reagan, but others supported the Democratic cause. Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, Jessi Colter, Dottie West, and Kris Kristofferson, among others, participated in the giant Democratic fund-raising telethon in May 1983.²²

The 1970s showed evidence of gradual, but nonetheless marked, changes taking place in the value system of country music as songs began to address drug culture, criticize the Vietnam war, advocate the women's movement, and expose racism. Several performers openly referenced drug culture in their songs, and Gram Parsons and the other members of the Flying Burrito Brothers went so far as to rework the Nudie suit, a fashion institution in country music, choosing sequined marijuana leaves for their brightly colored attire, in place of the traditional cactus plants and wagon wheels.²³ Tom T. Hall criticized the Vietnam War from the perspective of a disabled veteran in "Mama Bake a Pie (Daddy, Kill a Chicken)."²⁴ Loretta Lynn wrote and sang a number of songs criticizing women's fates in "traditional" society and advocating various forms of liberation. Some of her most memorable are "Don't Come Home a Drinkin' (With Lovin' On Your Mind)," "One's On the Way," and, of course, "The Pill," which celebrates the control and sexual freedom the birth control pill brought to women's lives. The

often right-wing Merle Haggard also popularized "Irma Jackson," a sympathetic portrayal of interracial love, while Tanya Tucker called for harmony between Southern blacks and whites in "I Believe the South is Gonna Rise Again."²⁵ Perhaps the biggest example of changing attitudes in country music was the success of black country singer, Charley Pride, who won multiple Grammy Awards and was named Entertainer of the Year by the CMA in 1971.²⁶ Inarguably country music contains major conservative and traditionalist strains; however, these elements come nowhere close to constituting its essence.

Yet even among all these changes in national country music, the Texas music scene of the 1970s and 1980s stood out as producing a remarkable number of artists who sought to innovate and cross boundaries, rather than cling to past values and traditions. Austin, the focal point of Texas music and a national music hot spot in its own right, nourished a particularly progressive country music environment during this time period, a culture in which most criticism of the conservative nature of country music culture simply did not apply. The foundation for Austin's brand of "progressive country" was laid during the late 1950s and 1960s when singer and yodeler Kenneth Threadgill encouraged an eclectic atmosphere in his bar and thereby nourished Austin's developing music scene. At Threadgill's, working-class locals mixed with college students to listen to and perform an eclectic mix of country-inspired music, "everything from hoary hillbilly material (like that of the Carter family) to bluegrass, blues, traditional ballads, and Woody Guthrie and Bob Dylan songs."²⁷ Janis Joplin, perhaps the most famous musician from the Threadgill's scene, moved to the West Coast, but a number of other musicians raised in this crossover atmosphere remained in the Austin area.

Throughout the 1970s, the Armadillo World Headquarters functioned as the central venue for an emerging counterculture that supported a rock-influenced version of country music.²⁸ Though a few veteran country music performers, such as Kenneth Threadgill, Floyd Tillman, and former Texas Playboy Jesse Ashlock remained in Austin in the 1970s and 1980s, its country music was dominated by up-and-coming musicians, such as Guy Clark, Steve Fromholz, Michael Martin Murphey, Rusty Wier, Ray Wylie Hubbard, Bob Livingston, Gary P. Nunn, Townes Van Zandt, Marcia Ball, Doug Sahm, Jerry Jeff Walker, and Willie Nelson.²⁹ On the periphery of the Austin scene (as he spent much time in New York performing at *its* progressive country venue, the Lone Star Cafe), was the irreverent Kinky Friedman and his band, the Texas Jewboys (who seem like an embodied rebuttal of Goldstein's claim about the categorical incompatibility of country music and Jews). And while the Armadillo music could definitely be described as counterculture, it was not simply a local anomaly, isolated from the world of mainstream country. In addition to Nelson, many other national, mainstream country artists frequented its stage, including Gram Parsons, Bill Monroe, and Earl Scruggs.³⁰

"Cosmic cowboy," "redneck rock," and "progressive country," the most common labels of this style that had come to the

forefront of Austin country music, all suggest the influence of the counterculture rock scene on both its music and ideology. Though it is often difficult to categorize the mindset and political leanings of all the practitioners of a style of music, the affiliation of these “cosmic cowboys” with liberal counterculture was clear in both their outward appearance and their world views. Archie Green describes the country culture of Austin in the mid-1970s as a scene in which “fans tied ‘cowboy’ directly to long hair, dope, revival folk-song, cliché-laden poetry, and pop astrology.”³¹ Yet, the progressive nature of the scene went beyond surface-level stylings. The Austin scene’s openness to music and culture outside the domain of traditional country can be seen in the variety of performers at the Armadillo, its central venue. In addition to

hosting local and national country acts, the Armadillo also showcased such musically and racially diverse acts as reggae singer Jimmy Cliff; zydeco accordionist and singer Clifton Chenier; and blues artists Ry Cooder, Mance Lipscomb, and Lightnin’ Hopkins.³²

These long-haired, bell-bottomed cowboys also explicitly articulated liberal political leanings. Jan Reid calls their work “a songwriter’s poetry of homecoming, celebration of nature, and intelligent soul searching.”³³ Many of their songs, such as Kris Kristofferson’s “Sunday Morning Coming Down” (popularized by Johnny Cash) and John Clay’s “Plastic Plowboy” addressed the drug culture that penetrated the progressive country scene. Kris Kristofferson also sang “Good Christian Soldier,” a song written by another Texan, Billy Joe Shaver, that has been called “the most moving, as well as the most

powerful antiwar song of the 1970s.”³⁴ Michael Martin Murphey’s “Cosmic Cowboy,” the song “Plastic Plowboy” parodies, vaguely articulated his and his fans’ hippie lifestyle with lines celebrating “Lone Star sippin’,” “skinny dippin’,” and “acting strange.”³⁵ However, *Geronimo’s Cadillac*, the album released by Murphey a year earlier addressed the more serious issues of Native-American rights and environmentalism. Kinky Friedman definitely strove to shock his audiences in songs such as “They Ain’t Makin’ Jews Like Jesus Anymore,” yet his inflammatory lyrics also at times

contained radical political messages, such as his condemnation of fascism in “Ride ‘Em Jewboy.”³⁶ Jerry Jeff Walker’s “Mr. Bojangles” gives a sympathetic treatment of a very nontraditional country music subject, the life of a black New Orleans street dancer.³⁷ And Ray Wylie Hubbard’s “Up Against the Wall Redneck Mother” directly attacks the ignorance and closed-mindedness of redneck country culture.

While Austin functioned as the center of Texas’s music scene, Lubbock’s innovative contributions to Texas country music during the 1970s and 1980s cannot be ignored. A number of venues were important to the Lubbock scene, including Stubbs’ Barbecue Restaurant, Fat Dawg’s, Main Street Saloon, and Coldwater.³⁸ The Cotton Club, a Lubbock institution for several decades, featured an unusual crowd reminiscent of Austin’s Threadgill’s and Armadillo:

some . . . had been dancing in honky-tonks and clubs for years, while others were a younger group of musicians and others that could have been characterized as “hippies.” This unusual mix of “redneck” and “hippie” must have seemed even more improbable in West Texas, whose image was and is conservative. This scene provided musicians a unique test audience on which to try their music.³⁹

Joe Carr and Alan Munde describe the same sort of genre-blending taking place in Lubbock music during this period: “An open dialogue among jazz, pop, blues, bluegrass, and country musicians facilitated the development in West Texas of hybrid musical styles such as western swing, rock and roll, and country-rock.”⁴⁰ John Denver began his musical career in Lubbock and Fort Worth during this period, where he became a star playing another form of crossover music, country-folk.⁴¹

Perhaps the most famous musicians from the Lubbock scene, known both as a group and individually for their unique songwriting and boundary-breaking country music, are Joe Ely, Jimmie Dale Gilmore, and Butch Hancock. In 1971 they formed the Flatlanders and produced a critically praised, but commercially unsuccessful album under the same name. Yet by 1972 the group disbanded, and



Kinky Friedman and the Texas Jewboys at the Armadillo World Headquarters. March 27, 1973. Photo by Burton Wilson.



Joe Ely. Courtesy of BSG Monument, Leon 6 Carter Collection, Texas Music Museum.

Gilmore soon moved to Denver to study eastern philosophy and dropped out of the music scene until 1980, when he relocated to Austin to again focus on his music career.⁴² Butch Hancock likewise left Lubbock shortly after the Flatlanders broke up, living in Clarendon and Austin, where he continued to write songs and record on his Rainlight label.⁴³ Joe Ely continued to perform his brand of rock-influenced country in Lubbock

Promising Male Vocalist award in 1975. Fender displayed an even more dramatic crossover style than Rodriguez, recording a number of bilingual versions of standard country songs, such as his 1975 hit single, "Before the Last Teardrop Falls."⁴⁸ The popularity of all these artists suggests the flexibility of Texas country music throughout the 1970s and early 1980s and the ability of audiences inside and outside of Austin to embrace

Two Chicano performers, Johnny Rodriguez and Freddy Fender, also became stars on the national country scene during the 1970s.

throughout the 1970s and 1980s, where he produced a number of albums featuring compositions by himself, Gilmore, and Hancock. His music was described by his steel guitarist, Lloyd Maines, as "mind-boggling" and owed much to its extended instrumental solos by an eclectic mix of musicians, including blues guitarist Jesse Taylor and blues-rock-influenced accordionist Ponty Bone.⁴⁴ The Maines Brothers Band, composed of Lloyd, Steve, Kenny, and Donnie Maines, was also an important presence in Lubbock throughout the 1970s, as was singer/songwriter Terry Allen and his Panhandle Mystery Band (which included three of the Maines brothers).⁴⁵ Combining the ideals of Lubbock's "alternative lifestyle" with country music were Tommy and Charlene Hancock, who with their children Traci, Conni, and Joaquin performed as The Supernatural Family Band.⁴⁶ Though never as nationally recognized as the Austin country music scene, Lubbock was nonetheless a distinct cultural center of its own that, like Austin, encouraged genre-blending and the combination of traditional elements of Texas country with modern viewpoints and lifestyles.

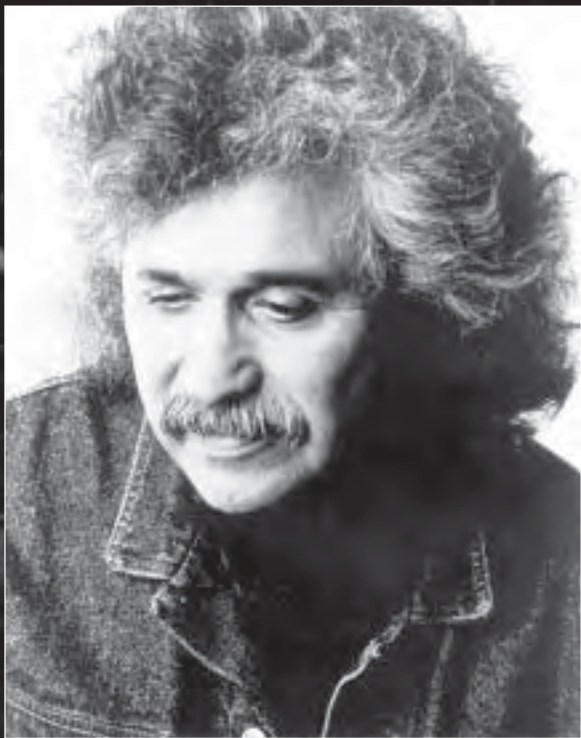
Outside of or reaching beyond the Austin and Lubbock scenes, a number of other Texas country singers displayed their own sort of liminal, progressive, or crossover status. While some Texans, such as George Jones, Barbara Mandrell, the Gatlin Brothers, and Tanya Tucker, became an integral part of the Nashville scene, others remained on its edge to various degrees. The term "outlaw music" was applied to a loose association of singers dominated by Texans such as Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, Billy Joe Shaver, and Kris Kristofferson. The Nelson and Jennings duet, "Mamas Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up to Be Cowboys," expresses the theme common to all the outlaw artists, their marginality from mainstream society. Two Chicano performers, Johnny Rodriguez and Freddy Fender, also became stars on the national country scene during the 1970s. Rodriguez's strongest musical influence was Merle Haggard, and most of his music expressed this traditional honky-tonk country sound, although he occasionally mixed in Spanish verses. His songs, such as "North of the Border" and "Ridin' My Thumb to Mexico," consistently topped the Nashville charts throughout the 1970s and early 1980s.⁴⁷ Fender was equally popular on the national scene, winning the Association of Country Music's Most

musicians breaking, as opposed to reinforcing, social norms.

The progressive country scene of the 1970s and 1980s is important in its own right as a key piece of Texas music history. Many of the artists who dominated Texas country over two decades ago are still making headlines today. Joe Ely, Jimmie Dale Gilmore, and Butch Hancock, all of whom built names for themselves after the Flatlanders' short period of cohesion in the early 1970s, have reunited as the Flatlanders and recently released a new disc, *Now Again*. Charlene Hancock, Conni Hancock, and Traci Lamar of the Supernatural Family Band play regularly in Austin as the Texana Dames. Guy Clark, Steve Fromholz, Rusty Wier, Gary P. Nunn, Marcia Ball, Jerry Jeff Walker, Ray Wylie Hubbard, Freddy Fender, Ponty Bone, Billy Joe Shaver, Willie Nelson, and many other musicians from the 1970s and 1980s country music scene remain active and quite influential in the Texas music scene today.

In addition to the progressive country legacy of this period surviving through the music of veteran performers, new Texas artists continue to voice progressive politics and to test the boundaries of the country genre with their innovations. One major group of these alternative country artists are what some call the "new" or "renegade" traditionalists.⁴⁹ Many of these artists have actively rejected contemporary, Nashville-style, mainstream country music as overproduced, too commercialized, and, in a nutshell, inferior to the country of the 1940s-1970s (for a to-the-point summary of this position, try listening to Dale Watson's "Country My Ass"). Harkening back to legends such as Bob Wills, Buck Owens, Lefty Frizzell, George Jones, and Merle Haggard, new traditionalists could be said to be conservative in that they perpetuate the lyrical themes and musical styles of past performers, rather than adapting the conventions of today's mainstream country. Yet many of these bands and artists, such as The Derailers, The Hollisters, Junior Brown, the Cornell Hurd Band, Lyle Lovett, and Ted Roddy do not simply replay the past, but rework traditional music to appeal to modern audiences. In addition to musical innovations, such as Junior Brown's guitar work (he has not only come up with new sounds, but has designed and mastered a whole new hybrid instrument, the double-necked electric and steel "guit-steel" guitar), new traditionalists have reworked songs from outside the country

Doug Sahm, May 6, 1973. Photo by Burton Wilson.



Freddy Fender. Courtesy of Refuge Management, Inc.
Texas Music Museum.





Freda and the Firedogs at the Split Rail. September 16, 1972. Photo by Burton Wilson.

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genre (such as the Derailers' version of Prince's "Raspberry Beret," Chaparral's cover of the Cure's "Just Like Heaven," or Two Tons of Steel's version of the Ramones' "I Wanna be Sedated"). While many of their lyrics hearken back to the symbols and themes of decades past, renegade traditionalists have nonetheless shown considerable lyrical innovation, such as Billy Joe Shaver's "Mothertrucker," which reverses the traditional gender dynamic of truck driving songs to chronicle the story of a man left behind by a "lean, mean mother trucker"; in "Truckin' Queen," Dale Watson sings of a transvestite CB radio enthusiast.

The rock/country mix popularized by the redneck rock of the 1970s and 1980s also continues in progressive country bands of today. Perhaps the most radical subgenre of alternative country, "cowpunk" or "country punk" became prominent in Texas music in the 1980s and 1990s with bands such as Killbilly, The Cartwrights, and The Bad Livers, but it continues strong today in groups such as the Old 97's, T. Tex Edwards and the Swingin Kornflake Killers,⁵⁰ the Damnations, Slobberbone, and the Meat Purveyors. Even more prominent in Texas country today is the subgenre most closely tied to the redneck rock of the 1970s and 1980s, roots rock. Groups such as The Shakin' Apostles, Reckless Kelly, Owen Temple, The Groobies, the Lucky Pierres, Beaver Nelson, the Gourds, and Lucinda Williams combine roots influences from folk, bluegrass, blues, and country music with contemporary rock sounds. Many of these cowpunk and roots rock artists are the most powerful songwriters in country music today, with lyrics expressing a progressive edge, such as Owen Temple's "Move Around Money," a scathing critique of corporate America, the Groobies' "My Best Feature" a feminist celebration

of a woman's personality, brains, and skill over physical traits, and The Meat Purveyors' stark condemnation of spousal abuse.

Yet, perhaps the most drastic change in the progressive country scene in the last decade has been the long-awaited arrival of women to the landscape of Texas country music. While country music outside of the Lone Star State included female voices since its inception as a commercial entity (think of the Carter Family, Patsy Montana, Patsy Cline, Loretta Lynn, Dolly Parton, and Tammy Wynette, to name just a few), Texas country music history has been noticeably void of female performers. Ruby Owens, Charlene Arthur, Goldie Hill, and Jeannie C. Riley achieved moderate fame from the 1920s through the 1960s,⁵¹ and Marcia Ball was a formidable presence in the 1970s alternative country scene as the lead singer of Freda and the Firedogs, but the stars of Texas country music have been, as a whole, overwhelmingly male. A few other women with Texas roots, such as Barbara Mandrell and Tanya Tucker, did make the "big time," but this was generally by removing themselves from the Texas music scene and entrenching themselves in Nashville. Today, however, things are noticeably different as women artists increasingly bring a female, and feminist, perspective to the Texas country scene. There are, of course, America's sweethearts, the Dixie Chicks, whose "Earl's Gotta Die" recently gained national attention; their expert musicianship, good looks, and bold attitude have had a wide range of female and male listeners repeating their marketing slogan, "Chicks Rule." The list of Texas women bringing their perspectives to the forefront of country music is, thankfully, too long to encompass here, but it includes names such as Amy

Boone and Deborah Kelly of the Damnations, Charlene and Conni Hancock and Traci Lamar of the Texana Dames, Toni Price, Nanci Griffith, Alison Krauss, the Damnations, Kimmie Rhodes, Kelly Willis, Marti Brom, Rosie Flores, The Sisters Morales (Roberta and Lisa), Susanna Van Tassel, Penny Jo Pullus, Karen Poston, Teri Joyce, Libbi Bosworth, Caroline Herring,

and Lucinda Williams. They, like all the renegade traditional, cowpunk, roots rock, psychobilly, and other alternative country artists of today, remind us just how far Texas country has come from its days as a boys-only club and the time, just a few decades ago, when the genre's fixity as an essentially politically conservative genre was being seriously debated. ■



Audience at the Armadillo World Headquarters, May 5, 1979.
Photo by Burton Wilson.

NOTES

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2. Malone, 371.
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4. Tony Leisner, *The Official Guide to Country Dance Steps* (Secaucus, NJ: Chartwell Books, 1980), 38.
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14. *Ibid.*, 115, 114.
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31. *Ibid.*, 173.
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33. Jan Reid, "Who Killed Redneck Rock?" *Texas Monthly* 4 (December 1976): 211.
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35. Green, 170-171.
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44. *Ibid.*, 164.
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48. Malone, 312.
49. For more on "new" or "renegade" traditionalists and cowpunk, see "Chapter Seven: Renegade Traditionalists and Country Punk" of Rick Koster's *Texas Music*, 69-82.
50. Koster, 79-82.
51. Koster, 31-33.



The Invisible Genius: Steve Jordan

Michael Corcoran

When he walked onstage at the 20th anniversary of the Tejano Conjunto Festival in at San Antonio's Rosedale Park in May 2001, Steve Jordan was resplendent in a purple jumpsuit with gold buccaneer sleeves. But what stood out most was how frail the 62-year-old accordion legend looked. Like a skeleton clinging to its last layer of skin, Jordan appeared so gaunt that his right eye patch seemed to cover half his face. A stray strand of his jet black mane stuck to his lips, giving this cholo pirate an even more eery look as he strapped on a red diatonic button accordion bearing his name.¹

Then came the smile, that ear-to-ear endorsement of the moment. To other entertainers, a grin is a given. But on the mouth of a pioneer prone to bitterness, who has rarely played in public the past ten years, the upturned corners meant something.

It's not often that an enigma comes to life before your eyes, so when "Estay-bon Hor-don," as he was introduced, took off on a jazzy tangent to start his set, the audience of about 2,000 erupted. Conjunto purists have not always been fans of Jordan's attempts to modernize a style of music that peaked in popularity in the '50s and '60s, and he's not exactly big with the Tejano crowd, which prefers its frontmen to wear cowboy hats and dance around. But on this night the factions of fans blended together to welcome home the notorious troubled genius. When he punctuated the perfect night with his trademark girly yelp, the

You don't need to ask a question to get him to take off on any given subject in his hipster growl. "I hate digital, man," he says pointing to his ancient reel-to-reel decks. "Music is not this," he says chopping the air like the vertical coding on CDs. "It's like this," he says, rolling his hand in circles.

Steve Jordan doesn't do interviews, he holds court. He tells stories, recounts old gigs and goes off on riffs, jumping from an explanation of why he used to own a hearse ("I didn't want my first ride in one to be in the back") to his assessment of other accordion players ("That dumb cowboy's pretty good, but he can't play with me," he says of one.) At the mention of a recent article in the *San Antonio Express-News* which, while acknowledging Jordan's genius, also includes allegations of current drug use, brings out a trace of the notorious temper.

I never went to school, never been trained how to act. I'm an animal, bro.

cowboys in their white straw hats raised their cans of light beer and the women brushed against the up beat.

"Voy a cantarles un corrido muy al alba" ("I'm going to sing you a great corrido") he vocalized on a traditional Mexican folk song that he would "Jordanize" with cat-quick button runs and a skronking solo closer to be-bop than Tex-Mex. "Esta es la historia de un pachuco muy rocote," he sang in an unharnessed voice.

This is the story of one badass pachuco.

The way you interview Steve Jordan is to drive to San Antonio and just show up at his door in the small house in the back yard of another house on the far West side. Appointments don't mean much to the man who's never owned a watch. He's been known to take off on impromptu deep sea fishing and casino gambling vacations at the drop of a Hohner. But on this day you're lucky. It's four in the afternoon and Jordan's home, but he's still sleeping. "He was up all night recording," his 19-year-old son Steve says. "Give him another hour or two." A polite and soft-spoken kid, Steve III (he has an older half-brother also named Steve Jordan) gives a tour of the studio that dominates the living room.²

The only TV is tuned to a surveillance camera outside. The only stereo is a big wooden console number on top of which several Ampex reel-to-reel tapes are stacked. The famous red "Steve Jordan Tex-Mex Rockordeon" is on the floor next to a chair. There are musical instruments everywhere: guitars, drums, saxophones, timbales and two or three other button accordions. Jordan can play them all with the virtuoso skill another man named Jordan once displayed on the basketball court.

"How do you like my little set-up here?" asks the man himself, emerging from a bedroom less than half an hour since the knock on his front door. "You meet my 280 musicians? Right here, man, in my synthesizer. Best musicians I ever jammed with, bro, cause they all play like me." There's that exaggerated snicker and the slap on the back. Mr. Jordan's wearing sunglasses instead of the patch that earned him the nickname "El Parche."

"I'll take a dude outside and whip his ass if he disrespects me," he says. "Society can't touch me, man. Never has. I never went to school, never been trained how to act. I'm an animal, bro."

"I'm not afraid to die," he says, lifting his shirt to show a scar that runs from his navel to just below his breast plate. "I've already been dead, bro."

Moments later, Jordan is back to telling funny stories about the early years on the road. If you're going to keep up with Steve Jordan, you can't dwell on anything he says or does. "I remember the first time I ever heard of acid, LSD. It was 1964, bro, and the stuff was legal," he says. "We had just finished playing, it was somewhere in California, and some dude asks the band if we want to do some acid. I said, 'Sure, I'll try anything,' and started rolling up my sleeve. But the dude said, You don't shoot it, you eat it." Jordan goes on to describe LSD hallucinations so horrifying that he says he swore off acid forever. "At one point, I asked my bass player, 'What's that funny-looking thing? What does it do?' and he said 'That's your accordion, man.' That was it for me. When I couldn't recognize my accordion, that was way too fucked up."

He's been called "the Jimi Hendrix of the accordion" since the late '60s, when he introduced psychedelic phase shifters to an instrument aligned with *The Lawrence Welk Show*. He's also been compared to Charlie Parker, in both talent and temperament, but Jordan doesn't agree. "Charlie Parker just played jazz. I play jazz, but I also play rock, country, salsa, mariachi, cumbias, you name it."

These days, however, Jordan is more like Brian Wilson during his obsessive "Smile" days. During the past eight years, when he snipped his barfly wings and evolved into a studio parrot, Jordan has recorded more than 100 new tracks, stuff he says is 20 years ahead of its time. It's a heavily layered sound, with Jordan running his guitar notes through a pair of Roland synthesizers to create everything from cellos and violins to otherworldly horn



Photo courtesy of Al Rendon

sections. The music of Steve Jordan's mind is full and offbeat. But despite its inherent trippiness, there's an unmistakable melodic thrust to the new material, which sounds like '60s soul one minute and a loco polka the next. "I've always been way ahead of everybody else, but this stuff is in a whole other galaxy, man." He doesn't trust a record company to put it out, just as he doesn't let managers, booking agents or anybody else in the music industry touch his art. He hasn't released a new album in 12 years.

"The big man upstairs is teaching me patience," Jordan says. "That's something I've never had before. Maybe the plan now is for me to lay low and let everybody else catch up a little. But I tell ya, I'm not slowing down, bro. I still kick ass every day."

Jordan gave up the bottle after he fell during his 53rd birthday party and broke his arm. When he turned 54, his friends chipped in and surprised him with a \$2,000 synthesizer he'd been pining for. "They were gonna sign for it and I was going to make the payments," Jordan says, "but then at the store they had a little meeting and decided against it. I was hurt, man. I had no idea that they had planned to surprise me with it a few days later." He gives five to Efraim Palacios, the head chipper-in who has stopped by to tell Jordan about a possible gig in Saginaw, Michigan, a city with a huge population of homesick Mexican and Texan migrant workers. Palacios, who sells business communication systems during the day and drops in on Jordan at night, is more a responsible friend than manager. "We created a monster," the preppily dressed Palacios says of the synthesizer that led to the single-minded compulsion to record. "I don't listen to anybody else," Jordan says. "I don't listen to the radio. It's all

crap, man." In the background is a Christmas song that Jordan recorded so he'd have something to listen to during the holidays.

Release schedules and concert dates, not to mention wives, only confuse the muse. Jordan says he'll know when the time is right to start putting out this new stuff on his own El Parche label. "I just want to get this (expletive) on the streets, man. I wanna see everybody flip. Then I can die and head on to the next place."

But his first wife Virginia Martinez, who says she supported Jordan for a year and a half in Phoenix before she kicked him out and sent him back to Texas in August 2000, doesn't think "El Parche" is in any hurry to release the fruits of his obsession. "That record's his lure," says Martinez, who spent \$16,000 on equipment with the promise that she'd be repaid when the album comes out. "It's how he gets people to give him money. I kept telling him, 'Just put out one album. Let's sell it or lease it to a record label.' He had no money coming in. But he wouldn't do it."

By his own estimation, Steve Jordan is 125 years old. "When I was a little kid, I couldn't work in the fields. I couldn't pick cotton, so I stayed behind in the camp with all the people who were too old to work," he says. "When I was 7 years old, I was 70 in my mind."

He began life in the Rio Grande Valley town of Elsa in 1938 with a fire in his eyes. Moments after he was born, a midwife gave him contaminated eye drops which caused scarring and Jordan lost all his sight in his right eye and most of it in the left. He was the runt of 15 children born to migrant worker parents, but Steve could play every instrument he got his little hands around. His earliest memory is of playing the harmonica as a toddler. He moved on to guitar, bass and drums. One night in a

labor camp outside of Lubbock, seven-year-old Jordan was playing guitar and heard a sweet accordion sound coming from the shack next door. "I stuck my head out and he stuck his head out and we decided to play together," he says. And that's how Jordan met a teen-aged Valerio Longoria, who would go on to join Santiago Jimenez Sr. (Flaco's dad) and Narciso Martinez in the holy trinity of conjunto acordeonistas. "I had seen people playing the accordion before, but never so close or so good." The accordion was invented in Berlin in 1822 as the orchestra for the common people and when Jordan squeezed one for the first time and heard the richness of sounds, he knew he had found his instrument. In just three weeks he was accomplished enough to play for tips in the cantinas. Asked when he started thinking about making a living as a musician, he says it was as soon as he made his first dollar that night in El Campo 55 years ago. "School didn't make sense to me," says the first-grade dropout. "The whole idea is to learn some way to make money, but I already knew how to make money, man." As a teen-ager in the early '50s, Jordan saw a demand for dance bands, so he pulled four brothers out of the fields and taught each one their musical role. "That's how I learned all those instruments," he says. "When I'd show someone in my band what to play, I was also teaching myself."

In 1958, Steve met teenaged mariachi singer Martinez at a Mexican Independence Day concert at the Phoenix Municipal Park baseball stadium in South Phoenix. "I was the headliner and Steve and his brothers just showed up and asked if they could play a few songs," says Martinez, who recently retired from her AA Mariachis and Catering company, but still sings in the Phoenix area. "Well, they just blew everybody away, playing in that wild California conjunto style. I told the announcer Carlos Montano, 'I'm not following them' and made him put on another act before me."

around and just get down all the sounds in my head. Don't hold back, because life is short." You can hear the innovations evolve on the essential "Many Sounds of Estéban 'Steve' Jordan" (Arhoolie), which opens with nine tracks recorded in 1963 with Martinez and ends with an assortment from the '70s.

During his '73 hospitalization and year-long recuperation, Jordan often passed the time taking his equipment apart and putting it back together. For years he'd been retuning his accordions by filing the reeds inside, but when he studied the inner workings of an echoplex and perfected his double echo effect, he took conjunto music to a new level. The "invisible genius of Texas accordion music" he was called in a 1992 *Option* magazine profile by Ben Ratliff, now a jazz critic for the *New York Times*.

"He really blew the doors open to what the accordion could do," says Brave Combo's Carl Finch, who helped compile *The Return of El Parche*, a 1988 reissue of '70s Jordan recordings for Rounder. "He's just an all-round genius and on top of that he's got this bulletproof mystique."

But as with many innovators, Jordan hasn't achieved the success of many of his imitators. His groundbreaking singles for Corpus Christi-based Hacienda Records in the '70s rarely sold more than 1000 copies and nobody can remember the last time he had a radio hit. He's an international dude stuck in a Chicano world, as he told one critic, an expressionist expected to conform to the limitations of a diatonic instrument designed to play in only three keys.

Accordion players and manufacturers all over the world know about him, however, and Jordan says one of his proudest moments was the hero's welcome he received when he visited the Hohner plant in West Germany 11 years ago. The company flew Steve over to present him with an accordion they customized to his specifications, including almost flat buttons for faster finger action. "The factory tour was a trip, man, because I always like

I could be playing for five people or 5,000, it doesn't make a difference. I'm still gonna kick ass.

Though the couple would not marry until 1976, they started living together in 1959, raising three children and splitting time between his family, which had settled in San Jose and hers in Phoenix. "We lived like gypsies, but it was a wonderful time," Martinez says. "The first ten years we were together, Steve never had a drink, never smoked, never did drugs. That's not the same man you'll find now. He turned out to be one hell of a bad husband and a hell of a bad father. But his talent lets him get away with it."

He was faster, flashier, more versatile than the other accordion players right from the start, but Jordan says he really opened up, both literally and musically after being knifed in 1973 by a stranger whose motive remains a mystery. "Getting stabbed really turned me around," he says of the parking lot assault outside a bar in Roswell, N.M. "I realized that it was time to stop fucking

to see how things are produced. Then I played for all the assembly line workers, and you could see their jaws drop," he says. "I showed 'em what they were making."

There are no wrong notes, only players who don't know what to do with them, Jordan says. Sometimes he'll hit a "wonk" when you're expecting a "wink," but in his jazz player's consciousness, it all makes sense. He doesn't know where it comes from, this inspiration that makes him happy and drives him crazy. "I don't wanna wake up until I die," he says. Making music is putting yourself in a trance that tunes out the world, often to the dismay of wives, lovers and bill collectors.

"I don't give a damn about the audience," he continues. "I could be playing for five people or 5,000, it doesn't make a difference. I'm still gonna kick ass. And if you ain't gonna play



Photo courtesy of Al Rendon

because there's nobody there, then get the fuck out of my band."

"Steve is always saying he's not giving any part of Steve Jordan away," says Martinez. "He turned down a tour that would have earned him a million dollars because he didn't want to give an agent his percentage. He said he'd rather have 100 percent of nothing than to give some other man a piece of him." Martinez' son Steve Jordan Jr., who leads Mariachi Chihuahua, knows too well how idiosyncratic his father can be. "He did some recording with Steve Sr. last year and he was so proud of that work," Martinez says. But when Steve Jr. came back the next week to hear how the tracks were mixed, his father said he had erased them because he didn't like them. "Stevie was crushed. He idolizes his father." Jordan's wicked perfectionist streak is such that he once hauled his own PA system to a taping of *Austin City Limits*. Although he initially refused to go on without his own speakers, he finally relented when it was pointed out that the "ACL" system was set up for television taping and not some Tejano bar. Jordan has also been known to be brutal with club sound engineers. "I'm sorry, but white guys just can't mix Mexican music. They always want to put the emphasis on the beat," he says, imitating a bass drum. "But we like the up beat."

Jordan says reports that he can be a fiery bandleader are justified, but there's no problem with his current group. "They're like little pieces of me," he says of 17-year-old bassist Richard Jordan and the 19-year-old guitarist he calls Steve 3. "They've been playing only 11 months, and they get what I'm saying the first time."

The father didn't really know his sons when they were growing up. There were occasional Christmas visits and a fishing trip here and there, but for the most part he wasn't an active participant in their upbringing. He didn't get along with their mother, his second and, he vows, final wife. Then, one day about two years ago, she dropped the kids off with the near-stranger with the eye patch, saying she couldn't control them anymore.

At the time Jordan was without a band, and therefore without an income (he says he's never received a penny in royalties from the nearly 50 albums he's released in his career). When a lucrative gig was offered in Houston, Steve said he'd take it. He had three weeks to teach his sons, who were more into sports and Nintendo than music, how to play 30 songs, but they did the show and have barely stopped playing since. "These boys, they keep me young," the proud father says.

Steve suddenly stops talking and raises a hand for silence as his version of "Harlem Nocturne" plays in the background. The jazz standard, which Jordan spent more than a week producing, starts with a lushly layered orchestra conjuring every shade of the night. "Can you dig it, man?" he asks when his accordion starts into the melancholy melody. "All that sound from this little brown box," he says, tapping an old Hohner on the floor with a pointy-toed shoe. He touches his chest where the buttons would be, swaying his head as if he's lost in a dream. "Man, what am I doing here, living in the back of some other dude's house, with my kids sleeping on the floor?" he asks, cutting into the ethereal moment. "Ask yourself that, bro. But this is why," he says, gesturing back to the speakers, where his accordion is flitting all around the melody like a bouquet of fireflies. "This," he says tapping the air. "This."

What a gift it is, the ability to blow your own mind. For Estéban "Steve" Jordan that'll have to do for now.

NOTES

1. Parts of this article previously appeared in the *Austin American Statesman*.
2. From interviews with Steve Jordan at his home in San Antonio in May 2001, Virginia Martinez via telephone in July 2001, and Carl Finch of Brave Combo in July 2001.

The New Braunfels Museum of Art & Music:

A New Showplace for the Arts in Texas

Anthony Lyle



Ted Daffan. Photo courtesy of Dorothy Daffan Yamuzzi and Geronimo Treviño III

The New Braunfels Museum of Art and Music, located at 1259 Gruene Road in Gruene, Texas, will soon open a new 10,000 square foot exhibit and performance facility as part of its ongoing efforts to encourage the preservation and study of the rich and diverse cultural heritage of the Lone Star State. Although the museum is only three years old, it already has compiled a very impressive list of accomplishments, including a number of highly acclaimed and well-attended exhibits, a variety of educational outreach programs in local schools and community venues, and a very successful fundraising drive made possible through grants, donations, and other sources.

The New Braunfels Museum of Art and Music (NBMA&M) originally opened in 2000 in the old Hummel Museum next to the Comal County Courthouse on the main plaza in New Braunfels. The Hummel Museum, which opened its doors in October 1992, was established to exhibit a collection of the original paintings and sketches created by Sister Maria I. Hummel, a Franciscan nun who died in 1946 of tuberculosis. The museum also showcased a large collection of ceramic figurines the nun's work had inspired, along with an interpretive exhibit of Sister Hummel's art classroom from the Siessen Convent in Germany. Although the Hummel Museum attracted tourists from throughout the United States and abroad, the institution had little historical connection with the community. In 1999, the Nauer Family, which owned the licensing rights to

entitled "Uniquely Texas Icons," celebrated the creative works of twenty Texas artists in music, visual arts, decorative arts, and crafts in the newly revamped galleries that had been the Hummel Museum. It was during this initial exhibit that museum organizers decided to amend the museum's name to reflect the important role music was to play in the institution's focus on Texas culture and history. With this in mind, the current name, New Braunfels Museum of Art and Music, was chosen.

Immediately following the "Icons" exhibition, the museum presented "Gruene Hall: A Texas Legend." This exhibit emphasized the unique cultural heritage of Gruene, a picturesque village settled by German immigrants in the mid-1800s directly across the Guadalupe River from New Braunfels. This historic community of artisans, shops, and the world famous music

The Hummel Museum's Board of Directors decided to reorganize the museum and try to secure its place within the community.

Hummel's work, requested the return of the original Hummel artworks. Without these works as an artistic centerpiece, the museum seemed destined for closure.

Despite this setback, however, the Hummel Museum's Board of Directors decided to reorganize the museum and try to secure its place within the community. In May 2000, the Board recruited Charles Gallagher, who had created and directed "DiverseWorks," a highly successful, multidisciplinary arts center in Houston, featuring exhibition, performance, and studio space, and Charlene Rathburn, who currently works with the Abilene Fine Arts Museum, to help define a new mission for the Hummel. Rathburn spent two months researching museums around the state and gathering ideas for a strategic reorganization plan.

Gallagher contacted John Paul Baptiste, who, at the time, was Executive Director of the Texas Commission on the Arts, to help draw up a list of achievable goals for the museum. For the first year, these goals were to address three main issues: the diverse historical traditions of Central Texas; the creation of exhibitions focused equally on visual arts, music, folk history, and community; and a survey procedure to gauge public opinion regarding exhibits and programs. Other suggestions included hosting community forums on the new mission and goals and integrating public comments into short and long-range plans. In addition to these suggestions, Baptiste stated that a museum had to do two things: be accepted as a part of the local community and develop financial profit centers to help sustain the institution. Following these initial meetings, Gallagher was appointed Development Director and eventually became Executive Director of the newly transformed museum.

By August 2000, the museum's new name, the New Braunfels Museum of Art, was made official, and its new mission to help preserve and exhibit Texas art, music, and other forms of folk culture and history was well underway. The first exhibition,

venue, Gruene Hall, was celebrated through an eclectic display of artifacts and documents on loan to the museum from the Gruene family and the Sophienburg archives, a stage-set of country music instruments, sketches of Gruene Hall performers, and memorabilia from past Gruene Hall performances. In conjunction with this exhibition were museum programs that included educational art and music workshops.

Throughout 2001, the museum continued its successful run with other exhibitions, such as "Picturing Here," "American Fiddler's Collection," "Made in Texas," and "The Texas Accordion Legacy: 100 Years of Music and Community." In May 2001, the museum produced its first annual "Texas Music and Arts Festival," a very popular three-day series of events showcasing Texas musicians from Americana to Zydeco.



London Hall #5, "Sunday Lovers." Oil on canvas. Painted by Gail Wendorf.2

Education and Outreach Programs

In addition to serving as an important exhibit facility for Texas history and culture, the museum has made a strong commitment to arts education in New Braunfels and Comal County. In 2001, the museum raised over \$50,000 in grants for the implementation of an "Arts in Education Program." Since its inception, this program has served over 5,000 local youths with professional artist workshops, residencies, field trips, and musical performances. In addition, a \$15,000 "MetLife-Museum Connections" grant allowed the museum to expand this project to work in conjunction with an "Art After School" program for children residing in public housing. This combined outreach program continued in 2002 and is expected to expand during 2003-04 through collaborations with a local charter school and other non-profit organizations. The museum continues to develop arts programs in order to reach out to specific populations in the community that are traditionally underserved. For example, more than 50% of the New Braunfels population is over 65 years of age, and the museum is currently organizing a program to provide free art appreciation and history classes at the local Senior Center.

Smithsonian Affiliations Program

On November 30, 2001 the NBMA&M became the 75th museum to be accepted as an affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution. The Smithsonian's Affiliations Program Director, Michael Carrigan, acknowledged the NBMA&M's accomplishments by stating, "We hold in high regard the professionalism and expertise of the New Braunfels Museum of Art and Music staff and are confident that our affiliate relationship with the museum will help us better serve the entire country as 'America's Museum.'" The NBMA&M marked this important occasion with the unveiling of the first Smithsonian traveling exhibition to be shown at the New Braunfels facility. "Women of Taste: A Collaboration Celebrating Quilt Artists and Chefs" combined works by nationally recognized female quilt makers and chefs.

The Museum Moves to Gruene

By the end of 2001, the museum, its exhibits, and its many educational programs had outgrown the old Hummel Museum building. In addition to needing more space, the museum had to provide adequate facilities, including a new climate control system, in order to be fully compliant with all Smithsonian Affiliations requirements. The museum's directors eventually found a very suitable location in historic Gruene. The new site included an existing restaurant overlooking the Guadalupe River and sufficient space for a new building and parking areas. Construction on the state-of-the-art museum facility began in earnest on August 15, 2002.

In the meantime, the staff moved into a room in the adjoining River's Edge Restaurant and continued developing exhibits and educational programs and conducting research and grant writing activities. The staff took advantage of the restaurant's spacious interior, with its grand forty-foot ceilings spanned by rustic beams and a massive stone



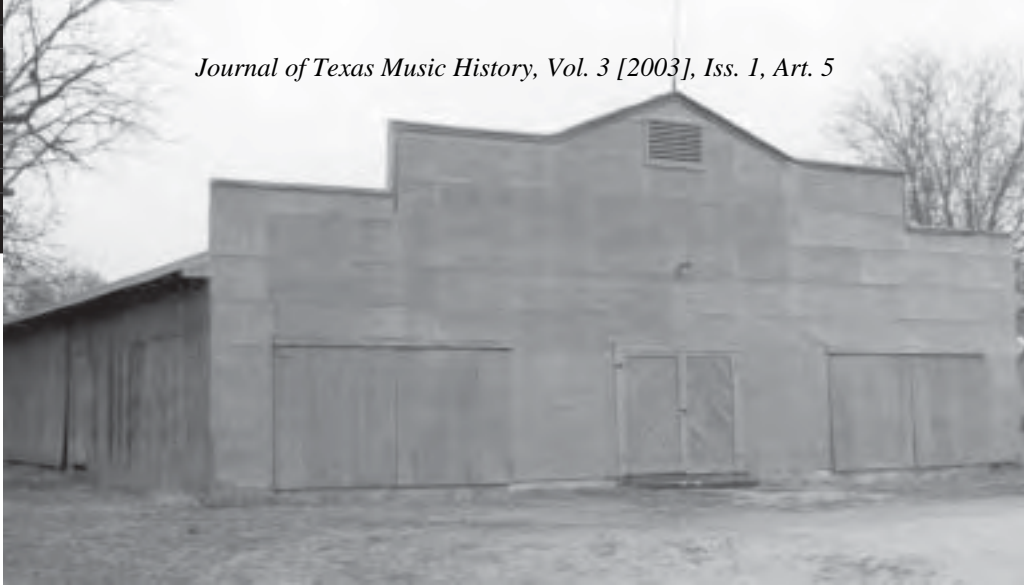
Quilt depicting Julia Child in "Women of Taste" exhibit.
Photo courtesy of Craig D. Hillis.

fireplace, to present additional exhibits and musical events while the new museum was being built next door. As part of these ongoing exhibits, the museum hosts regular live musical performances by a variety of Texas artists on the first Thursday evening of every month.

A Museum for the Twenty-first Century

The new museum will be a low maintenance, energy efficient 10,000 square foot facility housing exhibition space, a multi-use resource center (suitable for classroom and workshop activities), staff offices, and a gift store. The building has a large downstairs gallery with mobile walls that can easily convert the space into multiple exhibit areas, and a second gallery situated around the upstairs balcony. State-of-the-art security, climate control, and technology support systems are being installed to maintain the exact controls mandated by conservators for archival and historical materials.

During the reorganization process, museum directors decided that housing permanent collections would be too costly and



Weinheimer Dance Hall, Stonewall, Texas. Photo courtesy of Judy Treviño.

require too much space. The concept of a non-collecting facility was consistent with the NBMA&M's vision of focusing on the creation of temporary exhibits. With the technology available today, archives of all art exhibits displayed at the museum could be stored in digital formats for a permanent record and for future research. Museum staff have addressed this issue through the Interactive Digital Archives Project (IDAP). The IDAP involves all aspects of research from data collection, temporary object acquisitions, collection management, public outreach, and exhibitions. With this strategy, the NBMA&M can use its affiliation with the Smithsonian as an intermediate institution. Through this partnership, the museum can network with other Smithsonian affiliates to access materials and archival space in order to make educational exhibits available to the public. The NBMA&M also is active in the collection and preservation of historic photographs, sound recordings, personal interviews, and family histories.

In December 2001, the museum's Music History Curator Craig Hillis and I, staff Research Curator, spent two weeks in Washington, D.C., where we began the long process of

researching the Smithsonian Institution's extensive collections and established a good working relationship with members of the Smithsonian staff. We conducted research in the Museum of American History and several of its ancillary departments, including the Archives Center, the Cultural History Collection, the Jazz Masterworks Orchestra, and the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

Meetings also included key staff at the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, which is currently undertaking the "Save Our Sounds" program. The "Save Our Sounds" project, which is expected to serve as a template for the NBMA&M's development of its IDAP and digital archives, involves collecting and preserving early music and other sound recordings that are currently on deteriorating vinyl, acetate, or aluminum records, tapes, and other media, and transferring them to a more permanent digital format. The NBMA&M research team also spent time at the Library of Congress exploring national resources that deal with Texas arts, at the offices of the National Endowment on the Arts, and with a lobbyist, who offered advice on accessing federal funds.





Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Photo courtesy of Craig D. Hillis.

Dance Halls and Last Calls

The newest exhibit to open at the NBMA&M, entitled "Dance Halls and Last Calls," is a tribute to the great dance hall traditions of the Lone Star State. In collaboration with writer and musician Geronimo Treviño III, this exhibit celebrates the important role dance halls have played as centers for social activity in communities throughout Texas since the 1800s. Treviño has spent years compiling research on Texas dance venues. As a working musician, he has intimate knowledge of many of the halls and other venues in Texas, as well as the musicians and their families.

In his new book, *Dance Halls and Last Calls*, Treviño documents such dance hall performers as Ted Daffan. Daffan, who died in 1996, was one of the most influential, yet lesser-known, talents responsible for the rise in popularity of Texas country music. He was an innovative musician and songwriter who wrote hit songs for Cliff Bruner, Gene Autry, and Bing Crosby. *Dance Halls and Last Calls* also includes interviews with other great Texas musicians, such as Adolph Hofner, who was the first to record the dance hall standard "Cotton-Eyed Joe" in 1941. Hofner and his band, the Pearl Wranglers, enjoyed one of the longest careers in country music. Just prior to his death in June 2000, Hofner was inducted into the Texas Country Music Hall of Fame. The stories of Ted Daffan, Adolph Hofner, and many others will be told in the "Dance Halls and Last Calls" exhibition at the New Braunfels Museum of Art and Music, along with the colorful histories of the dance halls themselves and the communities they served.

The "Dance Halls and Last Calls" exhibit also will include works by Gail Wendorf, an artist who visited and photographed dancers in many dance halls across Texas. Wendorf painted over

one hundred oil-on-Masonite works and more than thirty larger-than-life images on canvas depicting colorful figures dancing in the dark interiors of these historic halls. The exhibit also will feature recent photographs taken by Austin-area photographer Bruce Jordan. Jordan's high-resolution black and white photographs are from a selection of halls, including Weinheimer Dance Hall. Located in Stonewall, the hall was hit by a tornado in October 2001, which destroyed most of the structure.

In addition to the exhibit, museum staff have worked with Geronimo Treviño on related projects, which include a multimedia exhibit, a documentary film on Texas dance halls, a traveling exhibit, and a compilation CD of classic dance hall tunes, including Texas-Czech polkas, western swing, honky tonk, and Americana. The "Dance Halls and Last Calls" exhibit promises to be another in a series of very successful projects undertaken by this new and dynamic museum.

Recently Charles Gallagher and Debbie Voorhees, Financial Director and all-around-hand-y-woman for the NBMA&M, were watching contractors put the finishing touches on the roof of the new facility. A tourist strolling by stopped to ask if this new building was going to be a dance hall. Gallagher replied, "No, it's a museum," but then added, "and a dance hall!" This is truly a fine compliment for a twenty-first century institution dedicated to educating and entertaining its community in the Texas dance hall tradition. ■

For more information on the New Braunfels Museum of Art & Music call 830-625-5636 or visit: <http://www.nbmuseum.org/>

The Handbook of Texas Music:

An Important New Reference Book on Texas Music History



"The Diaz Sisters," Clara, Lucy and Mary Diaz pose with their musical instruments.
Source: Advocate Magazine, The Victoria Advocate, Victoria, Texas, June 1907, pg. 94.

In summer 2003, the Texas State Historical Association, in collaboration with the Texas Music Office/Office of the Governor, the Center for Texas Music History at Southwest Texas State University, and the University of Texas at Austin, will publish the Handbook of Texas Music. The Handbook is an ancillary to the multi-volume New Handbook of Texas, published by the TSHA. As the first reference publication to include such a comprehensive survey of the people, places, and things involved in the development of the state's rich and diverse musical heritage, the Handbook of Texas Music will be the definitive encyclopedia of Texas music history.

The idea for a new reference book about Texas music was first presented to the Texas State Historical Association by Casey Monahan, director of the Texas Music Office. In 1998, Monahan contacted the TSHA about the possibility of collaborating on a reference work that would provide a handy guide to the unique musical history of the Lone Star State. Monahan chose the Texas

head of the publication division of the TSHA, and David Timmons, TSHA design and layout specialist

The subject matter of the *Handbook of Texas Music* is quite broad. It will include articles on a variety of ethnic groups and their music, including Native Americans, Mexican Americans, African Americans, Anglo Americans, Czechs, Germans, French,

The book will cover such diverse musical genres as blues, jazz, gospel, conjunto, Tejano, classical, zydeco, country, swing, polka, and rock and roll.

State Historical Association because of its record of publishing attractive books distinguished for their usefulness and scholarship.

In collaboration with Doug Barnett and Roy Barkley at the TSHA, Monahan recruited Gary Hartman of the Center for Texas Music History at Southwest Texas State University and Dave Oliphant of the University of Texas at Austin and author of standard works on Texas music, to help move the project forward. Eventually, the team was expanded to include Cathy Brigham, an ethnomusicologist at Concordia University of Austin, Donna Coates, TSHA illustrations editor, George Ward,

and others. The book will cover such diverse musical genres as blues, jazz, gospel, conjunto, Tejano, classical, zydeco, country, swing, polka, and rock and roll. It also will include encyclopedic entries on numerous individuals, musical groups, and institutions, ranging from Chelo Silva to Joe Patek, the Houston Symphony Orchestra to the Texas Top Hands, and Panther Hall to the Texas Star Inn. The stories behind leading radio and television stations, as well as longstanding musical programs, such as *Austin City Limits*, also will be presented.

The *Handbook* will relate the history of Gilley's in Pasadena

Robert Shaw, King of the Barrelhouse Piano. Courtesy Burton Wilsons.





Texas Playboys and Alvin Crow at the Broken Spoke (Autographed Poster), September 17, 1975.
Courtesy of George B. Ward.

and Billy Bob's Texas in Fort Worth, both of which claimed to be the "world's largest honky-tonk." The book also will describe the early efforts at starting the Beethoven Maennerchor, a German men's chorus in San Antonio. The great Houston patron of the arts Miss Ima Hogg is included, along with singer and songwriter Townes Van Zandt, who helped to inspire "grunge rock" and so laid claim to being "the mold that grunge grew out of." Readers can learn about John and Alan Lomax and the musicians that they recorded, including the legendary Texas singer and songwriter Leadbelly. Readers will find biographies of such bluesmen as Robert Shaw and such blueswomen as Big Mama Thornton. They can survey the careers of opera singers, steel guitar pickers, and even a professional whistler.

The *Handbook of Texas Music* will include lesser known Texas performers, along with many famous ones, such as Buddy Holly, Janis Joplin, Scott Joplin, Gene Autry, Selena Quintanilla, and Bob Wills. Although the guidelines for the TSHA's handbook series stipulate that only biographies of deceased individuals may be included, some living artists, such as Van Cliburn, Lydia

Mendoza, and George Strait, are covered in larger articles about developing musical genres or ongoing musical events.

The *Handbook of Texas Music* will be a one-volume, fully illustrated, general encyclopedia of Texas music and musicians. It is intended for anyone with an interest in this vital aspect of Texas history and culture, whether that interest is academic, avocational, or amateur. Furthermore, since the book will embrace all types of music, it will appeal to a broad audience comprising aficionados of classical, ethnic, folk, rock, country, and other genres.

The *Handbook of Texas Music* fills an important void in the historiography of Texas music. Most Texans are passionate about their unique musical heritage, and the *Handbook* will be a welcome resource for those who want to know more about this vital aspect of the state's history. ■

For updates and announcements about the *Handbook of Texas Music*, please see the TSHA web site at: www.tsha.utexas.edu.

Dance Halls and Last Calls:

A History of Texas Country Music

By Geronimo Treviño III, (Plano: Republic of Texas Press, 2002).

The dance hall has been a prominent structure in many small towns across Texas for well over a century. Requiring nothing more than an open area for dancing and music, dance halls vary from small, simple structures to large, elaborate architectural statements. The dance hall serves as a communal gathering place, where people from the host town and from neighboring communities gather to socialize and to listen and dance to live music, usually country music. It has been a family-friendly gathering place, often the only other venue in town outside of church where people gather. Since the advent of the radio and of movies, and later the combination of the two into television, the dance hall has steadily decreased in popularity among an ever-modernizing Texas. Because of their historic popularity, Texas dance halls have shaped the development of country music in the state; formative Texas musicians from Bob Wills to George Strait began their careers in Texas dance halls, and the structures themselves symbolize the roots of country music in the state.

Dance halls are readily acknowledged in many music histories as an important site for exposing listeners and musicians to new styles of music. And yet, despite their important role in the development of country music, until now no one had developed an index of the dance halls in the state. *Dance Halls and Last Calls* is a strong addition to the healthy list of books chronicling the development of Texas music, but adds its own twist by focusing on the structure of the dance hall and its role in the community.

Geronimo Treviño is a working country music performer who has started a new career for himself with this book. *Dance Halls and Last Calls* is the culmination of ten years of research, interviews and photography. The publication of this book has led to new media opportunities through which the musician will promote his research. The book has inspired a forthcoming documentary to be released in the summer of 2003. A compact disc, organized by the New Braunfels Museum of Art & Music, has been released featuring selections of country

music which may have been commonly played in Texas dance halls. And a museum display of photographs, poster art, and other memorabilia of Texas dance halls will tour the state through 2003-2004. All three spin-offs share the same name as the book.

Dance Halls and Last Calls begins with a forty-eight page introduction to Texas music. The introduction serves as a quick chronology of musicians who have had influential periods in Texas and who have also affected the development of country music. Most of the musicians mentioned are singers or songwriters who work primarily in country music, but Treviño also includes musicians from other genres who have influenced country. The history of country music performers in Texas has been described better and in fuller detail in other sources, but this introduction does serve to briefly remind the reader of who's who in Texas country music.

After the introduction, Treviño moves into his index of dance halls across the state. While he admits that he may have overlooked some dance halls, the book does cover more than one hundred historic music venues in Texas, many of which are still standing and operating as dance halls.

The dance halls are listed in alphabetical order by name of the venue; most entries include photographs of the site, a few paragraphs on the structure and the community in which it stands, as well as mentions of important performances that may have happened there. The sketches of the dance halls are brief, engaging and extremely readable. They are loosely historical and, while Treviño is proud of his fact-checking, the book reads like a collection of memories rather than a compilation of data. The sketches occasionally include quotes from owners or performers, which is a nice touch. Treviño takes the time to highlight the unique things about each structure (architecturally and historically) when appropriate. And, when they are consistent enough to print, he includes the performance schedule of the clubs. Treviño has included both original and previously unprinted photographs. The book

has been criticized for overlooking some important dance halls, but the inclusion of so many smaller, and even destroyed dance halls makes the text admirable.

The photos make the book immediately engaging to a reader. Treviño includes great images not only of the structures themselves, but also of performers on the stage or in front of the buildings. He also includes signage and poster art, as well as photographs of the grounds of some of these dance halls. Most of the structures included in the book have photographs, even of those dance halls which have been destroyed or converted. Yet, several still-standing clubs curiously do not have photos. Also, some entries have great photographs of performers in the dance hall, but not pictures of the structures themselves. These omissions may be due to the inability to receive permission to use photos in the book, but for the sake of consistency, it would be nice to have photos of every structure, and then augment some articles with additional images. Another issue with the layout of the text that should be addressed in a future printing is that not every photo in the book is labeled. Because of the page breaks and variable lengths of text for each dance hall, without labels it is occasionally unclear which dance hall is pictured.

The index is cross-referenced, which is nice; the reader can research a dance hall by name of the venue, or by name of the town. This detail, combined with the directions to each dance hall conveniently included in each entry, makes the book particularly useful to keep in the car when road-tripping across the state. The index does not consistently include references to the introduction of the book, which is a shame; it would be useful to refer back to the introduction after reading about a dance hall, or while visiting a site, in order to see who had once played at that venue.

The two brief chapters toward the end of *Dance Halls and Last Calls* seem extraneous to the overall book. Treviño has included a two-page homage to smaller country music venues (bars, clubs, and other settings) and



Reviews

Border Radio: Quacks, Yodelers, Pitchmen, Psychics, and Other Amazing Broadcasters of the American Airwaves.

By Gene Fowler and Bill Crawford. Foreword by Wolfman Jack. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002.)

a three-page section on “roadies” which reads more like a tribute to a personal friend of his than to the support and labor these individuals give to musicians. He is right to acknowledge that these venues and individuals also shape the development of country music and the lives of musicians; however, Treviño clearly notes that he is focusing on larger, family-friendly dance halls, and not on smaller venues or on individuals within country music. In a future edition, I would hope he would remain confident in the scope of his work and continue working in that direction rather than diluting his index with new subjects tacked on to the end of his book.

Treviño’s life on the road and his familiarity with so many prominent musicians gives the book a great personal touch filled with intimate stories of country artists. Treviño is able to include anecdotes that a reader would probably not have heard otherwise – recollections of first time performances, the image of Ernest Tubbs riding a bike to a San Antonio radio station, and many stories of musicians being pulled over by the police. This book is a great read for fans of Texana, of country music history, and of architecture. I also recommend the book to anyone interested in traveling through the small towns across Texas.

Cathy Brigham

The so-called “border radio” stations, which blasted their signals from just across the Rio Grande in Mexico northward into the United States, Canada, and beyond from the 1930s through the 1980s, created a colorful, complex, and sometimes bizarre concoction of music, news, commercial advertisements, and evangelical outreach.

In this revised and updated edition of *Border Radio*, Gene Fowler and Bill Crawford explore this fascinating phenomenon in which technological innovation, religious fundamentalism, product promotion, and popular music blended together in a rather freewheeling and often improvised campaign to mass market goods, ideas, and culture to an increasingly consumer-oriented American public. By combining solid scholarship with a generous helping of humor and social insight, Fowler and Crawford offer a very enlightening and thoroughly entertaining look at this important aspect of American music history.

As radio stations began to proliferate in the 1920s, the airwaves quickly became filled with broadcasts ranging from high-browed music and educational programs to medicine-show quackery promoting miracle cures for a variety of ailments, both real and imagined. By the 1930s, the federal government, in collaboration with large, privately owned broadcasting companies, began regulating the airwaves, pressuring smaller stations to adhere to more uniform programming standards or forcing them out of business altogether.

In order to avoid what they perceived as heavy-handed government regulation, some maverick broadcasters set up stations just across the border in Mexico. This allowed them to continue their innovative programming with relatively little interference from U.S. authorities. Mexican law also authorized these stations to broadcast with a signal strength many times greater than that permitted in the United States, thus allowing these “border blasters” to reach an unprecedented number of listeners across the continent and around the globe.

Dr. John Brinkley was one of the pioneers of border radio. This Kansas doctor earned national notoriety in the 1920s by

transplanting goat glands into humans, ostensibly to restore male sexual potency. In 1931, he relocated to Del Rio, Texas, and opened his own radio station (XER) across the border in Ciudad Acuña. Now able to advertise his “miracle procedure” in millions of living rooms across the country, Brinkley was soon inundated with new patients. He expanded his radio programming to include music, a variety of commercial advertising, and spiritual guidance from such characters as astrologer and fortune-teller Rose Dawn, the “Star Girl.” Millions of Depression-weary Americans tuned in daily to Brinkley’s broadcasts, desperate for entertainment, health or financial advice, and the reassurance of hope for some kind of improvement in their lives.

Other colorful figures, including radio announcer and future Texas governor W. Lee “Pappy” O’Daniel, also took advantage of these powerful broadcasting facilities and their innovative formatting to promote themselves and their products. Such companies as Crazy Water Crystals and Hillbilly Flour sponsored very popular variety shows as an effective way to expand their customer bases. Some of America’s most beloved and influential musical figures of the time performed on border radio, including Woody Guthrie, Lydia Mendoza, Cowboy Slim Rinehart, Patsy Montana, and the Carter Family. Radio evangelists also used border radio to reach larger audiences than previously possible. By the 1960s, border radio allowed such “rebel” DJs as Wolfman Jack to break new musical ground and redefine mainstream popular music by broadcasting controversial or less well known rock and roll acts to a national audience.

The border radio phenomenon is as fascinating as it is important in helping shape American cultural history. *Border Radio* tells the story of this unique aspect of broadcasting history in a wonderfully entertaining way. Although scholars will probably lament the absence of footnotes, this is a well-researched and written book that will appeal to almost anyone interested in the development of American popular culture.

Gary Hartman

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTORS

Joe Specht

is director of the Jay-Rollins Library at McMurry University in Abilene. In addition to presenting numerous papers on topics ranging from the Chuck Wagon Gang to the 13th Floor Elevators to Willie Nelson, he has contributed entries to *The Encyclopedia of Country Music* (Oxford University Press, 1998) and the forthcoming *Handbook of Texas Music*. His interview with and discography of Hoyle Nix was published in *Old Time Music* in 1980. A former host of his own radio show, *Burning Memories: The Texas Tradition*, Specht has an extensive record collection devoted to all aspects of Texas music.

Cory Lock

is a Ph.D candidate in the English Department at the University of Texas, where she specializes in Southwest literature and culture. Her dissertation, titled "Waltz Across Texas: Literary and Cinematic Articulations of Texas Culture," focuses on representations of country music and dance in Texas.

Michael Corcoran

has been a music critic for the *Austin American Statesman* since 1995. Before that, he was a critic with the *Dallas Morning News* for three years. He lives in Austin with his eight-year-old son Jack, who doesn't like the Dallas Cowboys or Billie Holiday, but is otherwise perfect.

Anthony Lyle

is an Adjunct Professor of Anthropology at San Antonio College. He is also research curator at the New Braunfels Museum of Art and Music.

Gary Hartman

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

Cathy Brigham

earned her Ph.D in Folklore and Ethnomusicology from Indiana University. She researches Top 40 country music across the country, with a focus on fan groups in central Texas. She is a faculty member at Concordia University in Austin. She is also a musician, playing classical music and torch songs with her theremin/keyboard band, Theralux.