

THE LOST GONZO BAND AND THE CREATION OF THE LIVE MUSIC CAPITAL
OF THE WORLD, 1960s-1980s

by

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DEDICATION

For my parents, Todd and Sarah, who have shared their love of music with me and have always believed in and encouraged me in everything I do. I wouldn't be who I am today without your support and love. I love you both so dearly.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The art of musical performance is a cultural practice that unites individuals in a community and is rooted in the passion and energy of the artists who produce it. Ethnomusicologist Manuel Peña denotes a distinction in this music-as-culture phenomenon. He describes “organic” music as music that is defined by culturally meaningful performance and is based on use-value. In contrast, Peña defines “superorganic” music as commodity production that is based on exchange-value. In other words, organic music is used as an effective medium for bringing people together to express a sense of commonality, creating bonds of social reciprocity. On the other hand, “superorganic” music is bought and sold in a massively commodified market, diminishing its use-value and replacing it with exchange-value. In this context, music tends to lose its ability to strengthen social relations among a given community.¹ In Austin, Texas – with its moniker the “Live Music Capital of the World” – music’s organic qualities have historically been prioritized through the practices of live musical performance and audience engagement. One band in particular, the Lost Gonzo Band, emulated the values behind Peña’s definition of “organic music” at a significant moment in the scene’s history.

Though hardly a household name, the Lost Gonzo Band helped to establish the foundation of the modern Austin music scene that has done so much to build the city’s cultural reputation on the national and world stage. Coming from a variety of backgrounds, this group of musicians effectively combined their musical expertise to

¹ Manuel Peña, *Música Tejana* (College Station, Texas A&M University Press: 1999), 3-11.

create a unique, hybrid genre of Austin music that became reflective of their own experiences of race, class, gender, and geography during the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War.² This genre, which would come to be known as “progressive country,” left a lasting impact on the Austin music scene in terms of musical production, recording approaches, and live performance. As the backbone of this movement, the Lost Gonzo Band have remained pillars in the Austin music scene and have been influential in building the “Live Music Capital of the World.”

Historical Context

In the tumultuous 1960s and 1970s, the United States experienced a widening generational divide, an increase in conservatism, and the rise of a new “New South,” or what Bruce Schulman described as the “strongest reassertion of southern cultural identity and regional pride since the Civil War.”³ A key indicator of the South – country music – surged in popularity across the nation in the 1970s. These country songs, such as “Okie from Muskogee” and “Big City” by Merle Haggard, “Coalminer’s Daughter” by Loretta Lynn, and “Thank God I’m a Country Boy” by John Denver boasted a populist

² Travis Stimeling, *Cosmic Cowboys and New Hicks: The Countercultural Sounds of Austin’s Progressive Country Music Scene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 4.

³ Bruce Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society and Politics* (New York: The Free Press, 2001), 114. [Note: What Schulman is describing actually came after the first “New South” proposed by Henry Grady in the 1870s, which advocated for industrial development as a solution for economic troubles of the post-war South. Grady’s “New South” also argued that ideas of slavery and secession were dead, indicating a rather benign racial climate. Therefore, this emerging new “New South” in the 1970s that Schulman describes actively fought against the industrialized ideals of Grady’s romanticized post-war Southern development. For more on Grady, see Joel Chandler Harris, “The New South” in *Life of Henry W. Grady: Including his Writings and Speeches* (New York: Cassell Publishing Company, 1890), 83-93.]

conservative ideology with sometimes subtle anti-Black, anti-city, and anti-welfare sentiments.⁴ In 1971, singer-songwriter Neil Young critiqued the southern way of life in his song “Southern Man,” targeting the perceived ignorance and brutality of white southern culture. The chorus, “Southern change gonna come at last / Now your crosses are burning fast,” alluded to the centuries-long racial violence perpetrated by white Southerners against African Americans.⁵

While political debate rarely emerged on FM radio, Young received a response from Lynyrd Skynyrd, a Southern rock band from Jacksonville, Florida. “We heard Neil Young sing about her / We heard ol’ Neil put her down / We hope Neil Young will remember / Southern Man don’t need him around anyhow,” the band declared in their 1974 hit single, “Sweet Home Alabama.”⁶ Many Americans perceived “Sweet Home Alabama” as a defense of neo-Confederate racial and political ideals. However, despite the song’s glorification of segregationist governor George Wallace and their use of Confederate imagery at live performances, Southern historian Mike Butler argues that Lynyrd Skynyrd and other Southern rock bands actively rebelled against the long-held racial ideologies of the South. Butler points to the band’s tendency to pay homage to the blues musicians who influenced them and include the stories of Black Southerners in their songs, arguing that these prove that Lynyrd Skynyrd deviated from the majority of

⁴ Schulman, *The Seventies*, 115.

⁵ Neil Young, “Southern Man,” recorded 1970, track 4 on *After the Gold Rush*, Reprise Records.

⁶ Lynyrd Skynyrd, “Sweet Home Alabama,” recorded 1973, track 1 on *Second Helping*, MCA Records.

the contemporary Southern attitudes towards Black people.⁷ Butler acknowledges that while Lynyrd Skynyrd was using Confederate imagery, such as the Confederate battle flag, and making “Dixie,” a widely-known Confederate song, part of their setlist at concerts, the band was also simultaneously taking steps to forge a new Southern white male identity. He argues that the band still demonstrated their unabashed love for the South, but it no longer included the public denigration of Black people. This signified a massive change in the concept of white masculinity.⁸ It was clear that the South was indeed experiencing a significant cultural and social shift in the early 1970s, which paralleled the economic rise of the region.

With the decline of overtly racist policy after the mid-1960s civil rights legislation, with federal investment in the Sunbelt, and with capital’s search for low-wage, non-union labor, the South began to see a rise in industry, innovation, and national political influence. This, in turn, sparked a cultural revival. After an industry boom, the Sunbelt – stretching across the southern United States from Florida to southern California – became a region of interest and investment for the nation. The promise of oil, the expansion of the space program, and the mechanization of industry drew business to the Sunbelt region, which began shedding its rural, agricultural image. This ultimately resulted in Southern cities becoming some of the fastest-growing areas in the country.

With the cultural rise of the “New South,” and the Sunbelt’s economic success, country music rose in popularity. The popularization of country music also promoted the

⁷ Mike Butler, “‘Luther King was a Good Ole Boy’: The Southern Rock Movement and White Male Identity in the Post-Civil Rights South,” *Popular Music and Society* 23, no. 2 (1999).

⁸ Butler, “Luther King was a Good Ole Boy,” 55.

image of the “cowboy” or the “redneck.” Schulman explains that the concept of “redneck,” in a sense, became a fashion statement. People across the nation bought into this symbolic identity as an emblem of resistance against liberals, high taxes, and hippies. In a 1974 article in *Texas Monthly*, Richard West provided a helpful guide to differentiating a “real” redneck from a “pseudo” redneck – to tell “the shamans from the sod busters.” He explains that the real rednecks usually work as plumbers or electricians, drive pickup trucks, and drink Budweiser, while the pseudo rednecks are college students who drive VW vans and drink Shiner beer.⁹ While other Southern cities were home to conservative country music that was popular among what West would consider “real” rednecks, a different kind of “country” music was brewing down south in Austin, Texas. Some, like West, might call it “pseudo” – others might call it “Gonzo.”

Like cities across the Sunbelt region, Austin’s image was being transformed by unbridled economic and population growth; it was a perfect environment for the live music industry to grow, change, and flourish. In his book *Cosmic Cowboys and New Hicks*, musicologist Travis Stimeling illustrates how the baby boomer generation changed Austin music by blending traditional country sounds from their youth with the popular rock ‘n’ roll music of the 1970s. Moreover, thanks to the city’s large student population enrolled at the University of Texas, these young people were able to implement their unique ideas about music. They played an “unusually important role” in the shaping of Austin’s culture, “bringing with them an energy and an openness to all kinds of cultural expression that was unparalleled in Texas and in most other cities nationwide.”¹⁰ The

⁹ Richard West, “So You Want to be a Redneck,” *Texas Monthly*, August 1974.

¹⁰ Stimeling, *Cosmic Cowboys and New Hicks*, 11.

resulting music scene – one that emphasized anti-commercialism, live music, audience engagement, and spontaneity – challenged listeners to “turn away from overly mediated musical experiences,” such as radio broadcasts and major record label productions, and engage with other Austinites in a communal experience that centered around live musical performance.¹¹

Music venues in Austin such as Threadgill’s, the Vulcan Gas Company, and the Armadillo World Headquarters served as spaces where cultures and musical genres could blend together. As these venues rose to prominence in the 1960s and 1970s, a slew of countercultural characters started to flood the city. “Cosmic cowboys” – who dressed in Wranglers, Stetsons, and boots, but also smoked marijuana, had long hair, and participated in the counterculture – were beginning to run the growing local music scene. Among these cosmic cowboys were Bob Livingston, Gary P. Nunn, Craig Hillis, and John Inmon. These musicians, who would go on to form the Lost Gonzo Band, played a significant role in shifting the music scene and defining progressive country music in Austin. By remaining adaptable, taking a collaborative approach to music, and exhibiting the image of the “cosmic cowboy,” the Lost Gonzo Band became instrumental in developing Austin’s reputation as a key nexus of American musical performance.

This thesis aims to highlight the lives and musical careers of the members of the Lost Gonzo Band and demonstrate their foundational role in building Austin into the Live Music Capital of the World. Through oral histories, archival collections, and secondary scholarship, my research documents the individual stories of each member of the Lost Gonzo Band as well as their combined influence on Austin’s music scene. These

¹¹ Stimeling, *Cosmic Cowboys and New Hicks*, 7.

musicians, in addition to the frontmen they played with, ushered in a new era of cultural confluence in Texas's capital city; their enduring stamp on the Austin scene lay in the fact that they privileged spontaneity and authenticity in the live experience over virtuosity or ambition in getting ahead in the music business. This, coupled with their continued commitment to their local scene, molded the Lost Gonzo Band into fixtures in the city's cultural history and the larger legacy of Texas music.

Historiography

Although scholars have researched Austin's progressive country music scene and its founding members, there has been minimal historical scholarship written specifically about the impact of the Lost Gonzo Band. Musicologists and journalists have mentioned the band in articles, whether scholarly or otherwise, about Jerry Jeff Walker, Michael Murphey, or other artists they played with; however, the Lost Gonzo Band is rarely given a real limelight in musical scholarship. The same truth exists in most books that analyze the progressive country movement in Austin. Authors such as Jan Reid, whose *Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock* serves as the first documentation of the scene, have paid some attention to the Lost Gonzo Band; Reid describes the Austin "sidemen" as a musical group who could easily "[jump] from band to band and would staff the studios if Austin realized its musical potential."¹² In his 2016 book *Cosmic Cowboys and New Hicks*, musicologist Travis Stimeling also mentions the band, but focuses on their

¹² Jan Reid, *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 172.

“imprecise vocal performance, which includes pitch, control, and timing problems,” on Jerry Jeff Walker’s *Viva Terlingua!* album.¹³

While Reid and Stimeling tend to focus primarily on the frontmen that the Gonzos played with, other authors have dedicated more than just a couple of sentences to the Lost Gonzo Band themselves. Barry Shank, a popular music scholar and former punk musician, heavily criticizes particular aspects of Austin’s progressive country scene and chastises numerous artists’ abilities to remain locally relevant as their fame increased on a national scale. Amidst his condemnation of the scene, however, he spends a few paragraphs specifically praising the Lost Gonzo Band for their adaptability and focus on immediate personal pleasure as opposed to national financial success.¹⁴ Shank has a begrudging respect for the Lost Gonzo Band, crediting them with the noncommercial attitudes that were later adopted by Austin’s DIY punk scene. Along with a handful of other scholars and journalists, Shank also notes the band’s ability to perform with a multitude of artists in a plethora of different genres with little to no previous notice. However, while Shank and other scholars have aimed to shed light on the Gonzos’ contributions to the progressive country movement in Austin, adequate credit has not been given to their full impact on the scene. Because the scholarly discourse surrounding the Lost Gonzo Band is scarce, my research is critical to telling the stories of the band and drawing fuller conclusions about the progressive country music scene in Austin.

¹³ Travis Stimeling, *Cosmic Cowboys and New Hicks*, 87.

¹⁴ Barry Shank, *Dissonant Identities: The Rock ‘n’ Roll Scene in Austin, Texas* (Middleton: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 61.

Methodology

Because my research involves musicians who are still alive and are still actively participating in the city's music scene today, I chose to prioritize the usage of oral history interviews while telling the story of the Lost Gonzo Band. This method allows the characters to preserve their stories in their own words and empowers the historian to compare and scrutinize historical memory with the archival record. I have collected oral histories from Gary P. Nunn, Bob Livingston, John Inmon, Craig Hillis, and Freddie Krc, who were members of the Lost Gonzo Band at various points.

Because the 1970s progressive country music scene was dominated by white males, it is important to highlight the experiences of women as well. In addition to interviews with the Lost Gonzo Band, I also conducted an oral history with Leea Mechling, who worked at the Armadillo World Headquarters during its peak and was incredibly involved in Austin's music scene in the 1970s and 1980s. Today, Mechling is the director of the Austin Museum of Popular Culture (AusPop) and works to preserve the city's music history for future generations. Austin's progressive country scene was unquestionably gendered, and at the height of the scene's prestige, as Reid notes, "the women playing in any of the top bands could be counted on one hand."¹⁵ Mechling's personal recollections will not only allow for an audience/bystander perspective, but also a woman's perspective of the scene. By bringing her words into the story of the Lost

¹⁵ Reid, *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*, 362.

Gonzo Band, my research will work to highlight and validate women's experience in Austin's music scene.¹⁶

When comparing interviews side by side, it is common for the narrators' recollections of events to differ. In an interview with Gonzo guitarist Craig Hillis, he admits that the band members could be asked the same question and they would "all have different memories...it's so funny how public memory works."¹⁷ This reality made it difficult to piece stories together with complete confidence. Oral historian Alessandro Portelli notes that memory oftentimes manipulates facts, and therefore oral testimony should allow us to recognize the subjective quality of historical truth. Therefore, while oral history interviews are not objective, historians should supplement them with sources which provide an analysis of the meaning of events and what people have made of them over time.¹⁸

Adopting Portelli's practice, I tried to avoid taking oral histories as pure fact. Rather, I employed the method of asking *why* certain events or people are remembered in a particular way. Instead of claiming absolute historical truth, interviews tell us much more about an individual's motives, attitudes, or beliefs surrounding a subject. To glean the full benefits of this practice, I sought to take a "life-history approach" during interviews with the Lost Gonzo Band. In other words, I asked questions about the lives of the individual narrators, outside of the 1960s-1980s, in order to more fully understand their upbringing and the potential roots of their beliefs and values. This allowed me to

¹⁶ *Women's Words* by Sherna Gluck and Daphe Patai was largely influential in shaping my understanding of a feminist approach to oral history. [Sherna Gluck and Daphe Patai, *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* (New York: Routledge, 1991).]

¹⁷ Craig Hillis, in conversation with author, April 2021.

¹⁸ Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories* (Urbana, 1990).

place these individual stories into a larger perspective. My hope is that taking a “life-history approach” and supplementing interviews alongside primary and secondary sources will aid in painting a fuller picture of the Lost Gonzo Band.

Conducting these oral histories with members of the Lost Gonzo Band is significant to my project for a number of reasons. First, because their stories have not been documented before, the band members are able to take a participatory role in writing their own history. Interviews allow the narrator to describe their life and experience in their own words and take part in the storytelling process. Second, interviews produce a level of realness and humanity that cannot be extracted from secondary scholarship. In her work about using oral histories to understand broader social trends, Lindsey Dodd explains that studying individual memory acts as a gateway to understanding the relationship between the individual and their social environment.¹⁹ Therefore, using the individual memories of members of the Lost Gonzo Band will highlight broader social and cultural change in Austin during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.

In addition to using oral histories, I also referenced a number of other primary sources to build my project. I drew heavily on the published memoirs of both Gary P. Nunn and Jerry Jeff Walker, which proved to be very helpful in establishing a chronological timeline of events. These memoirs also elaborated on the emotions and experiences of these two characters, which further allowed me to communicate their personal recollections and feelings in my writing. Furthermore, the Jerry Jeff Walker

¹⁹ Lindsey Dodd, “‘Small Fish, Big Pond’: Using a Single Oral History to Reveal Broader Social Change,” in *Memory and History: Understanding Memory as a Source and Subject*, ed. Joan Tumblety (New York: Routledge, 2013).

archives, which are held at the Wittliff Collections at Texas State University, also provided crucial resources that aided in my research process. In addition to photographs, written material, and a plethora of magazine and newspaper articles, these archives also contained audio recordings from jam sessions, rehearsals, and concerts. My central argument was largely drawn from listening to these recordings, which illustrate the band members' relationships with one another, their recording environment, and the intricacies of their musical performances.

Thesis Chapters

This thesis is divided into three chapters. Chapter One explores the dynamics of the Austin music scene before the Lost Gonzo Band was officially formed. This chapter explains the roots of Austin's music scene, namely folksinging at Threadgill's Tavern and the anti-commercial attitudes of the Vulcan Gas Company. It then considers the varying personal backgrounds and early musical careers of members of the Lost Gonzo Band in the 1960s before they worked with Michael Murphey and Jerry Jeff Walker. This first chapter will offer a character snapshot of the individual band members and the frontmen they played with.

Chapter Two opens with a look at Austin in the 1970s, explaining the genesis of the "cosmic cowboy" fad and taking a look at the foundational role of the Armadillo World Headquarters in the success of progressive country. Analysis will then turn to the Lost Gonzo Band's experience as they played with Michael Murphey and their influential role in the making of Jerry Jeff Walker's *Viva Terlingua!*, which was groundbreaking in the development of progressive country music in Austin. The chapter then explores the

consequences of *Viva Terlingua!*'s success and the effects it had on Walker and the Lost Gonzo Band. Thematically, this chapter will draw conclusions about the band's evolving musical ideology and their ability to remain the binding glue of the Austin music scene.

Chapter Three takes a closer look at the Lost Gonzo Band's solo career after they split from Walker in the mid-1970s and analyzes the ways their musical impact manifested in Austin. The chapter describes the Gonzos' involvement in *Austin City Limits*, analyzes their three solo albums, and explores their impact on the city's blues and punk scenes. A character snapshot of Freddie Krc is also provided in Chapter Three. Although he worked with the Gonzos after the 1970s, Krc nonetheless serves as a key player in the legacy of the Lost Gonzo Band. His simultaneous involvement in the progressive country, punk, and psych scenes in Austin during the 1980s exhibits his musical versatility and adaptability, showing his interchangeability that aligns so seamlessly with the Gonzos' musical approach. Furthermore, Krc has remained a centerpiece in the Lost Gonzo Band and in the greater Austin music scene, playing with prominent progressive country artists such as B.W. Stevenson and Jerry Jeff Walker, and Austin psych legend Roky Erickson. The chapter concludes by exploring the Lost Gonzo Band's local, national, and global impacts, focusing on Hillis's career shift to the management side of Austin music, Livingston's "Cowboys and Indians" cultural music program abroad, Inmon's work in various other musical genres in Austin, and Nunn's successful solo career.

II. COSMIC CHARACTERS OF AUSTIN, 1960-1972

Musicologist Travis Stimeling describes Austin's progressive country music scene in the 1970s as a "Texan renaissance."¹ Participants in the scene actively reconstructed their Texan roots to express their desire for a local, self-sustaining cultural scene that encouraged the production of experimental, creative, and anti-commercial music. An organic, grassroots music industry developed in turn, built on the talent of Austin's local community. Beginning in the 1960s, the members of the future Lost Gonzo Band would prove to be key players in this growing local music industry.

This chapter explains the genesis of Austin's progressive country scene through highlighting the individual backgrounds of the scene's musical ambassadors. After introducing the Austin music scene, it will explore the early lives and musical careers of the Lost Gonzo Band – Bob Livingston, Gary P. Nunn, John Inmon, and Craig Hillis – as well as provide a glimpse into the frontmen they primarily worked with – Jerry Jeff Walker and Michael Murphey. Coming from a variety of upbringings and musical backgrounds, and migrating from hometowns nationally – and internationally – widespread, this group of kindred musical spirits would change the scope and tenor of Texas music.

The Beginnings of Austin's Live Music Scene

Folksinging – a music style which initially attempted to recreate a vernacular, pre-commercialized cultural practice – saw a resurgence in national popularity in the 1960s;

¹ Travis Stimeling, *Cosmic Cowboys and New Hicks: The Countercultural Sounds of Austin's Progressive Country Music Scene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 7.

in Austin, the folk music style set into motion a series of events and collection of ideas that would shape the city's approach to popular music. Because folksinging indicated an interest in musical pleasure for its own sake, with no profit or fame involved, punk music historian Barry Shank argues that it created an "aura of authenticity."² This musical expression of noncommercialized "authenticity" quickly became a way for countercultural young people in Austin to differentiate themselves from conforming, mainstream, conservative crowds at the University of Texas. Austin's civil rights movement also gained significant traction among folksingers, as it challenged societal norms. Jeff Shero, the organizer of the University of Texas's chapter of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), found that "alienated and rebel groups were all in alliance in those days," and the folksinging movement drew Austin's social outsiders together.³ Ironically, however, many of the university's white folksinging students were also regular customers at Threadgill's Tavern, a segregated folksinging club on the north side of town.

By the 1960s, Threadgill's Tavern was arguably the most influential folksinging club in the city. The venue, previously a Gulf Service station, was owned and operated since 1933 by singer and yodeler Kenneth Threadgill who is characterized in the Handbook of Texas Music as "a unifier of Austin's past and present."⁴ Threadgill's hosted open-mic nights on Wednesdays, which packed the small establishment with a skilled, older generation of yodelers along with young U.T. students who helped

² Barry Shank, *Dissonant Identities: The Rock 'n' Roll Scene in Austin, Texas* (Middleton: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 41.

³ Jeff Shero quoted in Shank, *Dissonant Identities*, 44.

⁴ Alan Lee Hasworth, "Kenneth Threadgill," in *The Handbook of Texas Music*, ed. Roy Barkley et. al (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2003), 326.

formulate a fledgling singer-songwriter community in Austin. Shank explains that although radical student groups had adopted folksinging and a willingness to cross racial barriers in their music, “their belief in the importance of integration conflicted with their respect for this living symbol of the connections between generations – Kenneth Threadgill” – proving that “not even the authenticity of noncommercialized musical performance could guarantee a progressive political stance.”⁵ Nonetheless, the genesis of Austin’s local music scene can be traced to Threadgill’s, which was firmly established by the time progressive country music began to emerge in Austin.

While Threadgill’s was helping to reinvigorate traditional and “authentic” musical performance, folksingers from other parts of the nation were beginning to push against the “norm” and question the establishment. Bob Dylan, who had become the iconic face of folksinging by the mid-1960s, challenged authority by engaging underlying themes of counterculture in his music. When Dylan launched his controversial electric tour in Austin in the fall of 1965, local Austin musicians were inspired to also begin intermingling countercultural themes within their music. As historian Bruce Schulman notes, Dylan’s music from the 1960s (and even more so in the 1970s) revealed a larger underlying theme in the era’s popular culture – one of distrust towards corporations and authority that pitted “a self-styled outlaw band of rebels against the massive global conglomerates” who dominated cultural industries and, in the process, “blunt[ed] the edges of artistic expression.”⁶ Following Dylan’s example, Austin’s growing population of young, progressive non-conformists adopted folksinging as a means of communicating

⁵ Shank, *Dissonant Identities*, 45.

⁶ Bruce Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society and Politics* (New York: The Free Press, 2001), 148.

a distaste for commercialization and authority. In this way, musicologist Travis Stimeling explains that Austin's burgeoning folk music scene was "the first direct antecedent of Austin's progressive country music scene of the 1970s."⁷

Texas music historian Jason Mellard maintains that Dylan's performance in Austin "marked a turning point in the youth culture's position in the city, as young entrepreneurs began to construct alternative institutions to serve their own community."⁸ The Vulcan Gas Company emerged in 1967 as a psychedelic rock venue near the center of town and became a key expression of this turning point. The venue was run by members of the counterculture for members of the counterculture and actively engaged in the promotion of an anti-commercial musical ideology.⁹ Bands such as Shiva's Headband became mainstays at the Vulcan, and the 13th Floor Elevators boldly defined "psychedelic rock" on the Vulcan stage. Meanwhile, a steady stream of artists began to migrate from Austin to San Francisco and back, bringing home ideas of counterculture and hippiedom from the "Summer of Love" and Woodstock Music Festival.

Countercultural ideas and notions of anti-commodification solidified themselves at the Vulcan, which soon became a watering hole for Austin's countercultural individuals to be radically different and reject the commercialization of the music industry. In this way, Shank notes that the venue "presented rock 'n' roll solely for the

⁷ Travis Stimeling, *Cosmic Cowboys and New Hicks*, 18.

⁸ Jason Mellard, *Progressive Country: How the 1970s Transformed the Texan in Popular Culture* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013), 61.

⁹ Mellard explains that the Vulcan's location is also notable. The fact that the venue was situated in the center of town, in plain sight of the state's Capitol building, posed a direct threat to Austin's conservative authorities and sent a clear message of opposition to the status quo.

musicalized pleasure of its fans.”¹⁰ Although lack of business relations (coming out of this anti-commercial ideology) and harassment by city authorities caused the Vulcan to fold before very long, it successfully trained individuals who would go on to run prominent local venues in the coming decades. The Vulcan’s noncommercial attitudes and its radical display of difference left a lasting impact on the Austin music scene.

The patrons that once made their home at the Vulcan linked up at other new places around town, namely a former National Guard armory turned concert hall called the Armadillo World Headquarters, opened by Eddie Wilson in 1970.¹¹ As an “adventurous adolescent,” Wilson often wandered into Threadgill’s Tavern and built a close relationship with Threadgill himself; he later frequented the club as a student of Stan Alexander’s at the University of Texas.¹² Wilson claims that the Armadillo ultimately came to be because, after the demise of The Vulcan, “local musicians were desperate because there were so very few places to play” in Austin.¹³ In addition to showcasing local acts, the Armadillo also hosted nationally-recognized touring groups.

¹⁰ Shank, *Dissonant Identities*, 53.

¹¹ Wilson initially intended to name the venue the “Armadillo National Headquarters” to point to the building’s military past, but Bud Shrake (a “Mad Dog” journalist, discussed more in Chapter 2) convinced him that international symbolism would prove more unifying at the height of the Vietnam War. Therefore, Wilson decided on the word “World” instead of “National” to describe the Headquarters, strategically employing terminology that appealed to the anti-war movement.

¹² Stan Alexander was an English professor at the University of Texas before taking a permanent position at North Texas State University in Denton (now University of North Texas) and later Stephen F. Austin in Nacogdoches. Alexander played soulful country blues at Threadgill’s on Wednesday nights when he lived in Austin and later started the folk music club at North Texas State, mentoring future Texas music icons such as Michael Murphey, Steven Fromholz, and Wilson, who transferred there. In Nacogdoches, Alexander formed the East Texas String Ensemble with other country music-loving professors at SFA.

¹³ Jan Reid, *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 68.

Furthermore, the Armadillo showcased a musically and racially diverse lineup of talent that included acts such as zydeco pioneer Clifton Chenier, and blues legends Mance Lipscomb and Lightnin' Hopkins.¹⁴ While the venue grew over time to be more commercial than previous venues, the Armadillo put Austin on the national musical map.

“Progressive Country” Enters the Limelight

The Armadillo World Headquarters became the cultural and spiritual epicenter of Austin's music scene in the 1970s. It effectively distinguished itself from the city's other venues by adding country music to the scene's mix of blues, folk, and psychedelia. The Armadillo housed an overflow of hippie ex-Vulcan patrons and countercultural migrants returning from San Francisco, mixed with a new group of self-proclaiming “rednecks” who wore big hats and cowboy boots as trendy fashion statements that were indicative of their Texas roots. The hippies and rednecks formed a hedonistic coalition of sorts, giving birth to a new genre of music that would significantly alter the Austin music scene: progressive country music.

“Progressive country”¹⁵ was coined in the early 1970s by KOKE-FM, which defined the genre as a radio format. Amid an increasing popularity of country music across the nation, KOKE-FM aided in defining progressive country's sound. Rusty Bell, KOKE's disc jockey, believed in a rather loose definition of what country music was; according to Bell, “what mattered was not the identity or hair length or philosophy of the

¹⁴ Cory Lock, “Counterculture Cowboys: Progressive Texas Country of the 1970s and 1980s,” *Journal of Texas Music History* 3, no. 1 (2003): 19.

¹⁵ The term became synonymous with “Redneck Rock,” which was coined by Jan Reid in his seminal work, *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*.

singers, but the kind of instruments that accompanied them. If anything remotely country could be discerned in a recording, it qualified.”¹⁶ Progressive country music, therefore, combined genres such as rock, folk, psychedelia, and blues, but depended on the sounds of traditional country music such as fiddles and steel guitars, a shuffle or two-step rhythm, and harmonized vocals.

This new, eclectic musical initiative brought versatile musicians from a variety of backgrounds to work with various singer-songwriters (mostly individuals from the folk scene, such as Jerry Jeff Walker, Michael Murphey, and Steven Fromholz). These artists, according to Stimeling, would use specific compositions, performance practices, and musical traditions as a catalyst for expressing their individual and collective identities within the Austin music scene.¹⁷ A specific group of multi-talented musicians, later known as the Lost Gonzo Band, were central to the development of the Austin sound, the city’s progressive country scene, and the creation of the Live Music Capital of the World. The character snapshots that follow will aim to introduce the members of the Lost Gonzo Band and explore their early musical careers that would lay the foundation for their impact on Texas music.

Bob Livingston

Robert Livingston was born in San Antonio in 1948 but moved to Lubbock at a young age and grew up there. Both of his parents worked for First United Methodist Church in Lubbock; his mother was employed as the church’s secretary and his father

¹⁶ Jan Reid quoted in Shank, *Dissonant Identities*, 57.

¹⁷ Stimeling, *Cosmic Cowboys and New Hicks*, ix.

served as the Activities Director. Livingston claims that even though he grew up in the church environment, he still had thoughts of rebellion.¹⁸ One night in 1964, he ventured down to the church's basement and turned on the big television to watch The Beatles on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. He notes that he was struck by the band's hair, explaining that "in Lubbock, everyone had to have a flat top [haircut] or you would get beat up. So here are The Beatles, looking like Davy Crockett!"¹⁹ Struck by the band's musicianship (and their hair), Livingston claims that The Beatles were the reason he truly became interested in playing music.²⁰

By the time he reached his teenage years in the mid-1960s, Livingston immersed himself in the Lubbock music scene. In junior high, he joined his first band called the "New Grutchley Go-Fastees." He claims that they were essentially a "jug band"²¹ and played primarily at church functions.²² Livingston attended Lubbock High School and joined the football team, which was coached by Freddie Akers, who later went on to coach for the University of Texas. Livingston graduated high school in 1967 – the "Summer of Love" – and enrolled in college at Texas Tech University in the fall. He joined the Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity at Texas Tech, where he took up partying in Lubbock's cotton fields and drinking cheap beer.²³

¹⁸ Bob Livingston, Interview by Chris Oglesby, *Virtual Lubbock*, December 4, 2000.

¹⁹ Bob Livingston, Interview by Chris Oglesby.

²⁰ Bob Livingston, Interview by Chris Oglesby.

²¹ Essentially a band that plays with a mixture of homemade instruments, jug bands used ordinary objects that were modified to make musical sounds. Examples of instruments in a jug band include washboards and spoons. The New Grutchley Go-Fastees weren't an actual jug band, but Livingston makes the point to say they were just kids having fun and making music that was rudimentary in nature.

²² Bob Livingston, Interview by Chris Oglesby.

²³ Bob Livingston, Interview by Chris Oglesby.

Once established in his routine as a college student, Livingston became interested in entering Lubbock's music scene. When he was a sophomore at Texas Tech, Livingston convinced a local ice cream shop owner to open up a folk club in the basement. This compact venue became known as "The Attic" and was quickly designated as a Texas Tech fraternity hang out spot. Tech's fraternity members would come to The Attic to listen to local music, eat pizza, and drink beer.²⁴ At that time, Livingston notes that Lubbock music was primarily supported by the Greek life at Texas Tech because "they were the only people that would pay any sort of money" to see bands.²⁵ Livingston began booking other acts to play at The Attic, including Lubbock native Joe Ely, who he calls "Lubbock's [Bob] Dylan."²⁶ Ely, who was playing a mix of rock 'n' roll and folk music at the time, was booked to play at the club every Sunday night. Livingston and Ely developed a growing friendship during this time and have remained in the same folk music circles ever since.

Livingston began making annual trips to Red River, New Mexico during his summers in college, where he played music at bars and clubs and drove Jeep tours for extra income.²⁷ He lived down the street from a Dallas band called Three Faces West. When Livingston started playing with them, he notes that these musicians, including a "wise ass named Ray Hubbard," were playing music that he was unfamiliar with.²⁸ Living in Lubbock, Livingston played what he was hearing on his transistor radio; Three

²⁴ The venue was BYOB.

²⁵ Bob Livingston, Interview by Chris Oglesby.

²⁶ Bob Livingston, Interview by Chris Oglesby.

²⁷ Bob Livingston, Interview by Avery Armstrong, November 2021.

²⁸ Bob Livingston, Interview by Avery Armstrong, November 2021.

Faces West was playing a different kind of folk music, and they became foundational in developing a folk music scene in the Red River Valley.

Like all the great folkies on the Western circuit, Michael Murphey also played in Red River, and Livingston had seen him there. Although they didn't yet know each other personally, Livingston admired Murphey for his poetic songwriting skills, and even claimed that Murphey's songs were "as good as any [he had] heard since The Beatles."²⁹ After college, Livingston moved to California after he was offered a record deal with Capitol Records in Los Angeles. Livingston picked up a German hitchhiker one night who said he knew another Texan in California named "Mike Murphey." As fate would have it, the hitchhiker gave Livingston's name to Murphey, and he called him that same night.

While Livingston reported that "nothing much came of the record deal," he admits that he did meet some "great musicians in Los Angeles."³⁰ He teamed up with Murphey and singer-songwriter Guy Clark to form "Mountain Music Farm," a music publishing venture that was funded by Roger Miller. After recording a number of publishing demos, Murphey invited Livingston to play bass with him on a folk music circuit across the Southwest. Livingston told Murphey that he did not know how to play bass, to which Murphey simply responded, "You'll learn," and handed him a Fender Precision Bass.³¹ This tour with Murphey would be the beginning of a series of experiences that would evolve Livingston's musical sensibilities.

²⁹ Bob Livingston, in conversation with author, November 2021.

³⁰ Craig Hillis, "Cowboys and Indians: The International Stage," *Journal of Texas Music History* 2, no. 1 (2002): 3.

³¹ Bob Livingston, in conversation with author, November 2021.

What started off as a tour of small coffee shops and bars across the Southwest turned into a much bigger, more significant project in Nashville. During their travels, the duo was discovered by a producer by the name of Bob Johnston, also a Texan. Johnston had produced big acts such as Bob Dylan³², Simon and Garfunkel³³, Johnny Cash³⁴, and other iconic musicians across genres. In an interview with Livingston, he explains that Johnston showed up to the Rubaiyat, a folk club in Dallas, when Murphey's band was practicing there one afternoon. Murphey was stopped by Johnston's outcry in the audience after playing the first two lines of "Calico Silver," a song he wrote about the life and death of the mining town of Calico, California, which is now a ghost town. Johnston exclaimed that the song was the most beautiful thing he had ever heard, and offered Murphey a record deal.³⁵

Livingston and Murphey embarked on a journey that would produce one of the founding documents of progressive country music. The duo piled their belongings into a Buick – belonging to Murphey's mother – and headed off to Columbia Studio A in Nashville to record an album that became known later as *Geronimo's Cadillac*.³⁶ In the studio with Johnston, they recorded each song in one or two takes and cut over twenty songs in two days. After they finished recording each song, Johnston would insist they

³² Johnston produced *Highway 61 Revisited* (1965), *Blonde on Blonde* (1966), *John Wesley Harding* (1967), *Nashville Skyline* (1969), *Self Portrait* (1970) and *New Morning* (1970).

³³ Johnston produced *Sounds of Silence* (1966) and *Parsley, Sage, Rosemary and Thyme* (1966).

³⁴ Johnston produced *At Folsom Prison* (1968), *The Holy Land* (1969), *At San Quentin* (1969), *Hello, I'm Johnny Cash* (1970), *The Johnny Cash Show* (1970), *I Walk the Line* (1970) and *Little Fauss and Big Halsy* (1971).

³⁵ Bob Livingston, in conversation with author, November 2021.

³⁶ Bob Livingston, in conversation with author, November 2021.

move on to the next one, declaring that they couldn't get it any better.³⁷ The album included significant radio hits such as the title track, which was later covered by Cher, "What Am I Doing Hangin' 'Round?," which was recorded by the Monkees, and "Backslider's Wine," later popularized by Jerry Jeff Walker and the Lost Gonzo Band on *jViva Terlingua!*. While they cut the basic songs for the album, they didn't finish it completely. Recording tracks for *Geronimo's Cadillac* would be picked up at a later date by Murphey and a number of other notable Austin musicians.

Livingston openly admits that he was excited yet overwhelmed by Murphey's talent and drive, claiming that recording with him was like getting "thrown into the deep end of the pool."³⁸ As the duo rounded out their tour together, tensions started to arise between them. While Livingston was flexible and free-wheeling in his musical approach, Murphey was more rigid and polished. Livingston describes Murphey as "exacting and a stern taskmaster" in rehearsals and on stage.³⁹ He would occasionally halt in the middle of a live show to embarrass a band member for being out of tune. Livingston explains that by the end of his run with Murphey, he was "really affected by [him]...everybody is."⁴⁰ Ultimately, Livingston decided to discontinue working with Murphey because their musical philosophies did not align. He committed to playing bass again for Three Faces West in New Mexico. Murphey and Livingston's last gig together for the time being was at the Saxon Pub in Austin, a new singer-songwriter venue that opened following the closing of Rod Kennedy's Chequered Flag, which had historically been one of the town's

³⁷ Bob Livingston, in conversation with author, November 2021.

³⁸ Bob Livingston, in conversation with author, November 2021.

³⁹ Bob Livingston, in conversation with author, November 2021.

⁴⁰ Bob Livingston, in conversation with author, November 2021.

most popular folk music venues on the “Coffee House Circuit.”⁴¹ Livingston notes that he was “totally out of it...freaked out to the max. As the “last note faded” at the end of the show, Livingston was “in [his] car on the way to Denver” to meet up with Hubbard and the rest of his band.⁴²

While Livingston was playing with Three Faces West, Murphey recruited fellow Austin musician Gary P. Nunn to play bass as they finished recording the rest of *Geronimo’s Cadillac* in Nashville. When it was time for the album to finally release, Murphey – per Johnston’s insistence – called Livingston and asked him to rejoin the band to tour and promote the album. Even though he was enjoying his time with Three Faces West, “havin’ a great time, making money for the first time and travelling all over the Midwest,” Livingston decided to rejoin Murphey in Nashville to finish *Geronimo’s Cadillac*.⁴³ On this second go-around with Murphey, Livingston shared the stage with other versatile band mates including Gary P. Nunn (who switched over to keyboards after Livingston’s return), Michael McGeary, and Herb Steiner.

Gary P. Nunn

Gary P. Nunn grew up in Eram, Oklahoma, a small rural town where both of his parents worked in the school system. In addition to being the superintendent of the school district, his father also taught math and science and coached basketball and softball, and his mother taught second grade. His family moved to the Texas panhandle town of

⁴¹ This is referring to the original incarnation of the Saxon Pub off of I-35 on the north side of town, as opposed to the later version that was opened on South Lamar in the 1990s.

⁴² Bob Livingston, in conversation with author, November 2021.

⁴³ Bob Livingston, in conversation with author, November 2021.

Brownfield when Nunn was 12 years old, where he began playing drums in a band he formed with his classmates called The Premiers. When their bass player quit, Nunn took over; he bought a Fender Precision Bass and began his bass playing career that would persist until 1979. Nunn also played basketball and football, and was involved in choir and theater productions throughout high school.⁴⁴

Nunn discovered a new band in town called The Sparkles. The Sparkles were a garage rock band from Levelland (which neighbored Brownfield) who wore “cool matching suits, did dance steps, and for the finale [of their show], they threw their guitars up behind their heads and rocked out while simultaneously doing coordinated dance steps!”⁴⁵ While he was still in high school, Nunn went to see The Sparkles as much as he possibly could. He became close friends with the band members, and when the band’s rhythm guitar player quit, Nunn was asked to join the band. To remain in the area, Nunn cancelled plans to go to the University of Texas and enrolled in Texas Tech University, and then South Plains College in Levelland. He was making very good money with The Sparkles because they were such a well-received band and got a significant amount of gigs. When the band set their sights on bigger things and wanted to move to California, Nunn made the decision to stay in Texas and finish school. He was concerned about being drafted to the Vietnam War if he quit school to go play music in California.⁴⁶

Picking back up on his previous plans to go to the University of Texas, Nunn moved to Austin in the fall of 1967 to attend pharmacy school.⁴⁷ He also played a couple

⁴⁴ Gary P. Nunn, *At Home with the Armadillo*, 66.

⁴⁵ Gary P. Nunn, *At Home with the Armadillo*, 82.

⁴⁶ Nunn, *At Home with the Armadillo*, 100.

⁴⁷ Gary P. Nunn, in conversation with author, October 2021.

of gigs every week with a group called the Georgetown Medical Band. As time went on, he became less interested in school and increasingly infatuated with playing music and performing in the city's flourishing music scene. Nunn officially dropped out of school in the fall of 1969 to focus on his music career. He was hired to play organ for a band called the Lavender Hill Express, which was, at the time, the "hottest band in town."⁴⁸ The Lavender Hill Express was largely led by Rusty Wier, who played drums and sang vocals, and also included guitarist Layton DePenning, who would go on to play with Nunn in the future. The band opened for a number of big acts that passed through Austin and were booked at popular clubs, such as The Jade Room and the New Orleans Club, multiple nights a week.

Concurrent to Nunn's musical explorations in Austin, anti-Vietnam War protests were heating up in cities across the nation and generations were drifting further and further apart in regards to ideas on race, war, sex, and drugs. In an interview with Nunn, he explained how the countercultural scene in Austin was "distracting," as many of his peers who were involved in the music scene were also involved in this political and social upheaval.⁴⁹ At the end of 1969, he received news that he was going to be drafted to Vietnam. While Nunn personally admits that he thought he would make a good soldier, he also "felt a moral obligation to resist being put in a situation where [he] was called upon to kill other human beings."⁵⁰ He reluctantly reported for duty in San Antonio;

⁴⁸ Nunn, *At Home with the Armadillo*, 118.

⁴⁹ Gary P. Nunn, in conversation with author, October 2021.

⁵⁰ Nunn, *At Home with the Armadillo*, 125.

however, upon taking his physical, he failed his hearing test.⁵¹ Nunn was spared from the war in Vietnam and delivered back, safe and sound, to the Austin music scene.

The Lavender Hill Express split up in 1970, but Nunn and DePenning decided to stay together and form another band called Genesee (the name of a Colorado town just west of Denver, and a combination of “genesis” and “Tennessee”). In interviews, both Nunn and Bob Livingston described Genesee as a “frat rat band” – a band that primarily played for fraternities at the University of Texas, but didn’t secure many other gigs.⁵² The band adopted a folk singer-songwriter sound that mimicked Crosby, Stills, Nash, & Young, and began to primarily write and perform songs of their own. One night at the New Orleans Club, Nunn crossed paths with John Inmon, a skilled and well-known guitarist in the Austin scene. Nunn admired Inmon’s musicianship, taking note of his “extraordinary natural talent and guitar-playing ability,” and asked him to join Genesee.⁵³ Although Genesee eventually disbanded due to disagreements in the band, the relationship between Nunn and Inmon would prove to be important in the coming years, and the band’s shift in sound and songwriting approach would prove fundamental in Nunn’s journey during the next decade and beyond.⁵⁴

Feeling discouraged after Genesee broke up, Nunn made plans to move back to his family’s farm and get away from the music scene for good. In his memoir, he explains that he was in “a very low place” and “didn’t have a single trusted friend [he] could turn to with [his] troubles.”⁵⁵ Before leaving town, however, Nunn planned to see Michael

⁵¹ Gary P. Nunn, in conversation with author, October 2021.

⁵² Bob Livingston, in conversation with author, November 2021.

⁵³ Nunn, *At Home with the Armadillo*, 130.

⁵⁴ Nunn, *At Home with the Armadillo*, 130.

⁵⁵ Nunn, *At Home with the Armadillo*, 137.

Murphey perform at the Saxon Pub in Austin.⁵⁶ Much like Bob Livingston, Nunn also admired Murphey for the “eclectic, poetic, and intellectual quality of [his] material.”⁵⁷ Though they had never met, Nunn was approached by Murphey between sets, who had heard good things about Nunn and knew of him because of his stints with The Sparkles and the Lavender Hill Express. Murphey asked Nunn to play bass in his band, as his bass player (Livingston) had just quit and moved to New Mexico. Aware of Murphey’s reputation as a prolific songwriter, his recording contract with Bob Johnston, and a new record in the works, Nunn swiftly accepted the offer.

Murphey brought Nunn and the rest of the band (Craig Hillis, Herb Steiner, Michael McGeary, and, eventually, Bob Livingston) back to Nashville to finish recording *Geronimo’s Cadillac*. The songs that Murphey previously recorded with Livingston at Columbia Studio A were overdubbed with drums added in. Murphey asked Nunn to play piano and B-3 Hammond organ on a few tracks. After they finished recording, the duo travelled around Texas together and played gigs in college coffee shop circuits and small bars across the state. As aforementioned, Bob Livingston rejoined the band shortly after and they travelled around the United States to promote *Geronimo’s Cadillac*.

John Inmon

Born in San Antonio in 1949, John Inmon grew up as an “army brat” and lived in various cities across the United States such as San Francisco, Denver, and Washington D.C. His family moved to Heidelberg, Germany, in 1960, which was the European

⁵⁶ Again, this is referring to the original incarnation of the Saxon Pub.

⁵⁷ Nunn, *At Home with the Armadillo*, 141.

headquarters for the United States Army, where his father was stationed as USAREUR's Chief of Medicine during the Cold War.⁵⁸ Living in Europe during the Cold War made for a unique childhood experience. Three months after the Inmon family moved to Germany, the Berlin Wall was erected; Inmon notes that, at any given point, it felt as if they were "just minutes from being vaporized."⁵⁹

Inmon says that there were not a significant amount of kid-friendly activities in Germany after World War II, as the country was still rebuilding itself and lacked substantial television or radio networks. People often listened to a radio station out of Luxembourg, called *Radio Luxembourg*, which played rock 'n' roll music.⁶⁰ Inmon enjoyed music and frequently listened to it on the radio, but it wasn't until his sister's boyfriend taught him how to play guitar that he knew he wanted to be a musician himself. After that, Inmon notes that he "just had to have it...it had to be rock 'n' roll...that was it."⁶¹

The guitar soon became Inmon's obsession. His family moved to San Francisco when he was a teenager where he formed a surf band with some of his friends. He became completely immersed in music, playing both drums and guitar.⁶² In 1964, much like Bob Livingston, Inmon recalls that his life changed when he watched The Beatles perform on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. He remarks that before his exposure to The Beatles, many of the bands that he played with were strictly instrumental. However, watching The

⁵⁸ John Inmon, in conversation with author, February 2022.

⁵⁹ David Stone, "John Inmon: Gober to Gruene Hall," *Our Town Temple*, July 9, 2022, <https://www.ourtowntempletx.com/p/john-inmon-gober-to-gruene-hall>.

⁶⁰ John Inmon, in conversation with author, February 2022.

⁶¹ John Inmon, in conversation with author, February 2022.

⁶² Stone, "John Inmon: Gober to Gruene Hall."

Beatles changed his perspective on music; the fact that they sang and played at the same time was, to him, “completely revolutionary.”⁶³

When Inmon’s family moved to Temple, Texas, when he was sixteen, it quickly became apparent to him that the nearby town of Austin was the center of the state’s music scene. Inmon was in a small band in high school called The Reasons Why who played at clubs all across Austin, along with frat parties at the University of Texas.⁶⁴ He later joined a band from Temple called The Chevelles, which included Donny Dolan – a drummer who Inmon would later bring on board to play with Jerry Jeff Walker in the 1970s. The Chevelles also played at clubs and frat parties around Austin (as Livingston mentioned, frat parties were a great paying gig for small bands), singing tunes by The Beatles and other “Top-10” hits.⁶⁵

When he graduated high school, Inmon enrolled in a junior college in Temple before attending the University of Texas. The Vietnam War was raging on and affecting young people in large numbers. The draft, which was a “big threat at the time,” broke The Chevelles apart.⁶⁶ After the Chevelles were separated, Gary P. Nunn approached Inmon at the New Orleans Club and asked him to play with Genesee. The band lived in a big house that overlooked Austin on the west side of town; its big open rooms and lack of neighbors made it perfect for jamming, attracting frequent visitors such as Rusty Weir, B.W. Stevenson, and Jerry Jeff Walker.⁶⁷ As aforementioned, the band adopted a folk

⁶³ John Inmon, in conversation with author, February 2022.

⁶⁴ John Inmon, in conversation with author, February 2022.

⁶⁵ Stone, “John Inmon: Gober to Gruene Hall”

⁶⁶ John Inmon, in conversation with author, February 2022.

⁶⁷ Stone, “John Inmon: Gober to Gruene Hall”

sound and started focusing on writing original songs, so Inmon gained significant experience in folk songwriting after playing rock 'n' roll music for his entire career.

Because Inmon wanted to be fully committed to playing music, he made the decision to drop out of the University of Texas. This meant, however, that he was at the mercy of the Vietnam draft. Inmon, who “lost a number of band mates to Vietnam,” claims that he identified as a hippie and was active in protesting the war; he declares that he was “totally in the counterculture movement...and [he] still [is]!”⁶⁸ These anti-war sentiments and involvement in the counterculture reflect itself in Inmon’s attitude and music and would become key indicators of the progressive country genre.

Craig Hillis

Like Inmon, Craig Hillis was also raised in a military family and moved around frequently during his childhood. He grew up in a musical family; his father, who was a career Air Force officer, was a musician, as were his grandparents and great-grandparents on his mother’s side.⁶⁹ His musical interests developed significantly during the number of years his family spent living in England, where he became inspired by the style and music of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, as he experienced the early impacts of the British Invasion from the other side of the Atlantic Ocean.⁷⁰

Hillis joked in an interview that after he moved to Washington D.C. in 1963, his grandmother bought him a guitar and “ruined [his] life,” and he’s been “chasing the

⁶⁸ John Inmon, in conversation with author, February 2022.

⁶⁹ Craig Hillis, “The Austin Music Scene in the 1970s: Songs and Songwriters” (doctoral dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 2011), 10.

⁷⁰ According to Hillis’s dissertation, this time in England spanned the years of about 1959-1963.

guitar ever since.”⁷¹ He played in rock bands throughout his high-school years that “diligently tried to reproduce the top-ten radio playlists of the era.”⁷² Hillis got hired at a local music store in Washington D.C. where he worked as a guitar salesman and instructor. In 1967, Hillis enrolled in the University of Texas where he played in “top-forty bands” that performed at local nightclubs and on the “U.T. fraternity-sorority circuit.”⁷³ In 1970, during his fourth year of college, Hillis dropped out of school and fully dedicated himself to the Austin music scene.

Hillis soon befriended a group of nationally recognized singer-songwriters who came through Austin on their promotional tours. As a part of this group, Hillis would learn skills and have experiences that would help lay a foundation for his musical sensibilities. Two of these renowned singer-songwriters were Steven Fromholz and Dan McCrimmon, who together formed a folk-music duo called Frummox. When Hillis went to see Frummox perform in 1969 at the Chequered Flag, Austin’s premier folk venue, he explains that he experienced an “aesthetic wake-up call.”⁷⁴ He was immediately inspired by Fromholz’s songwriting style and vivid lyrics, but also his musicality and ability to produce both “delicate and dynamic melodies.”⁷⁵ After the show at the Chequered Flag, Hillis was introduced to Fromholz and McCrimmon and was invited back to a “serious song swapping and party pickin’” session at a hotel; as they passed guitars around that night, a spark grew that kindled a lifelong friendship between Hillis and Fromholz.⁷⁶

⁷¹ Craig Hillis, in conversation with author, April 2021.

⁷² Hillis, “The Austin Music Scene in the 1970s,” 11.

⁷³ Hillis, “The Austin Music Scene in the 1970s,” 11.

⁷⁴ Hillis, *Pickers and Poets*, 61.

⁷⁵ Hillis, *Pickers and Poets*, 62.

⁷⁶ Hillis, *Pickers and Poets*, 62.

To Hillis, Fromholz provided a preliminary initiation into the world of songwriting. Hillis packed up his Volkswagen hatchback and moved to Denver in 1971 to be closer to his new friend. He joined a band called Timberline Rose and played a “house gig” at a rustic mountain inn to earn steady income.⁷⁷ After a few months of living in the Denver area, Hillis was introduced to Michael Murphey and Bob Livingston, who were in town to play a four-day booking at a café in Denver. Hillis describes Murphey as a prolific, “very technical songwriter” who was well-read and took an academic approach to songwriting.⁷⁸ They quickly struck up a friendship and spent their time together exchanging songs, guitar licks, and stories. Hillis was asked to play with the duo at the Denver café the following night, and subsequently asked to tour with Murphey as he was promoting his first album, *Geronimo’s Cadillac*.

Hillis’s rock ‘n’ roll background and his songwriting experience with Fromholz and Murphey set him in a category of his own, bringing a special uniqueness to bands he played with. When he moved back to Austin in 1971 to play full-time with Murphey, he continued to sharpen his craft and learn more about music and songwriting. During rehearsals and performances with his new band – Murphey, Livingston, Gary Nunn, and Michael McGeary – Hillis had “really clever ideas about what to play and when to play,” according to Nunn.⁷⁹ He was always eager to learn new things, absorb information and experiences, and become the best he could possibly be at his craft. These traits would serve him well as he continued to play with pioneering acts in Austin’s progressive country music scene.

⁷⁷ Hillis, “The Austin Music Scene in the 1970s,” 197.

⁷⁸ Craig Hillis, in conversation with author, April 2021.

⁷⁹ Gary P. Nunn, in conversation with author, October 2021.

Jerry Jeff Walker

Jerry Jeff Walker was born Ronald Clyde Crosby on March 12, 1942 in Oneonta, New York. He was exposed to music at a young age; his mother participated in the choir at their church, and his grandparents played in a square dance band.⁸⁰ Many nights spent at his grandparents' house eating dinner, singing songs, and dancing around the piano with his family sparked Crosby's love and appreciation for music at a young age. His grandmother bought him a guitar when he was twelve years old, which he would use when he joined his first band, The Pizzarinos, a doo-wop group that played at a local pizza shop in Oneonta.⁸¹

Upon graduating from high school in 1960, Crosby joined the National Guard and quickly made friends with other Guard members who were older than him. Because he wanted to go drink with these friends but he was underage, Crosby was given a fake ID with the name "Jerry Ferris." On a whim of courage and wanderlust, Crosby hitchhiked to Florida after feeling tied down in the National Guard and longing to leave New York once and for all. He decided to throw out all forms of identification except for his Jerry Ferris fake ID, wanting to completely reinvent himself as a new person: a wanderer, a rambler. He officially determined that "Ron Crosby no longer existed. It was Jerry Ferris who climbed into the next car and headed down the highway."⁸² Jerry Ferris, with his brown leather satchel and his bass ukulele, was headed for the great unknown.

⁸⁰ Obituary of Alma Crosby, *The Daily Star* (Oneonta, NY), July 25, 2011, Box 6, Folder 4, Jerry Jeff Walker Collection, Wittliff Collections, Texas State University.

⁸¹ Larry Monroe, "Jerry Jeff Began in a Doo-Wap Group," *Austin Weekly* (1989), Box 5, Folder 2, Jerry Jeff Walker Collection, Wittliff Collections, Texas State University.

⁸² Jerry Jeff Walker, *Gypsy Songman*, (Duane Press, 1999), 17.

Jerry hitchhiked to New Orleans where he played music on street corners for pocket change and quickly became a well-known character around town. As he began to really live into his street persona, he wrote a song to explain what he was all about; this song would later be known as “Gypsy Songman,” which became the first song on his debut album. Jerry explained in his memoir that he “always felt that [his] years in New Orleans were the equivalent of a college education in life and the world.”⁸³ He continued to travel around the country, treating New Orleans as a home base. He hitchhiked to Texas, played music in Austin at the Eleventh Door folk club and in Houston with singer-songwriters Townes Van Zandt and Guy Clark, and met Hondo Crouch – a goat rancher and storyteller who would later become one of Walker’s best friends and mentors. He felt welcomed and accepted in Texas, feeling that Texans “always thought of [him] as one of them.”⁸⁴

In the spring of 1964, Jerry headed north to Chicago. Upon his arrival, however, he quickly realized the folk music scene there was “too slick for [his] taste, the music citified and business-like.”⁸⁵ Jerry’s repulsion toward “citified” music signified a newfound awareness; he realized that he appreciated more laid-back music environments that didn’t sound commercial or materialistic. He hitchhiked to Columbus, Ohio, after his disappointment in Chicago’s music scene. The people he met in Columbus were “bright, eclectic, [and] free-thinking” – just the kind of people Jerry realized he wanted to surround himself with.⁸⁶ While in Columbus, he resolved to write a new, original song

⁸³ Walker, *Gypsy Songman*, 24.

⁸⁴ Walker, *Gypsy Songman*, 96.

⁸⁵ Walker, *Gypsy Songman*, 30.

⁸⁶ Walker, *Gypsy Songman*, 30.

every day. Through his songwriting, he became a “highway ethnographer” of sorts, documenting people and places as he hitchhiked around the country.⁸⁷ With a new purpose at the forefront of his mind, Jerry said goodbye to the Midwest and travelled back down south to New Orleans.

As political and social upheaval was taking place across the United States during the 1960s, Jerry sought out places where whites and African Americans comingled and mixed freely in the segregated state of Louisiana. This forging of friendships across racial lines began to further formulate his own opinions about the political and social happenings across the country, which became somewhat intertwined with his musical philosophy. He spent a lot of time in New Orleans learning and picking with Babe Stovall, a Black street musician who was well-renowned among the musical community in New Orleans. He and Stovall walked away from a number of gig opportunities because they refused to play at segregated venues. Stovall once told Jerry that “I makes money, money don’t make me,” which Jerry would later turn into a hit song.⁸⁸ This piece of wisdom from Stovall is one that Jerry would carry with him throughout the rest of his life and would define his music philosophy for years to come.

After a number of years of being a troubadour on the road, Jerry decided that he wanted to “christen [him]self with a new name” and part ways with the identity that he assumed after leaving the National Guard.⁸⁹ Proclaiming that “Jerry Ferris no longer existed,” he spontaneously chose a new name – Jeff Walker – partly a tribute to Kirby Walker, a Black jazz pianist in New Orleans whom he played with a number of times,

⁸⁷ Craig Hillis, in conversation with author, April 2021.

⁸⁸ Walker, *Gypsy Songman*, 47.

⁸⁹ Walker, *Gypsy Songman*, 36.

and partly because he “just liked” the name Jeff.⁹⁰ When Walker moved back to New Orleans, everyone knew him as “Jerry Ferris” – so the two names became naturally intertwined. From there on out, he was Jerry Jeff Walker.

One evening, Walker was arrested for public intoxication in the French Quarter. He was locked up at the New Orleans First Precinct Jail. Everyone at the jail had a nickname – Walker’s was “The Kid.”⁹¹ He was placed in a cell with a white haired, older street dancer who he came to know as “Bojangles.” Many street dancers, both in New Orleans and elsewhere, called themselves “Bojangles,” making the name more of a collective category than an individual identity.⁹² Bojangles’s blue eyes “sparkled with kindness” as he told Walker stories about his travels across the country, his experiences in New Orleans, and his old dead dog.⁹³ He danced and performed for his fellow inmates, captivating Walker in the process. The night spent in the cell with Bojangles would prove to be a fateful night not only in Walker’s life, but for the evolution of American songwriting and popular music. When he was released from jail, Walker couldn’t stop thinking about Mr. Bojangles. One night, “when the rest of the country was listening to

⁹⁰ Walker, *Gypsy Songman*, 36.

⁹¹ Richard Kirk, “Hey! It’s Mr. Bojangles!”, *Country Music Roundup* (1993), Box 4, Folder 4, Jerry Jeff Walker Collection, Wittliff Collections, Texas State University.

⁹² The original “Bojangles” was Bill “Bojangles” Robinson, a Black tap dancer who headlined Broadway and vaudeville shows in the 1930s. He is best known today for his dancing with Shirley Temple in a series of films from the 1930s and was the highest-paid Black performer of his time. The New Orleans character illustrated in Walker’s “Mr. Bojangles” was given his nickname after Robinson for their shared adeptness at tap dancing. For more on Bill Robinson, see [James Haskins, *Mr. Bojangles: The Biography of Bill Robinson* (New York: William Morrow, 1988).]

⁹³ Walker, *Gypsy Songman*, 59.

the Beatles,” he began to compose a “six-eight waltz about an old man and hope. It was a love song.”⁹⁴

Around 1966, Walker formed a band called the “Lost Sea Dreamers” (L.S.D.) in Houston. When they moved to Greenwich Village, the heart of the folk-music scene in New York, the president of Vanguard Records attended one of their shows and immediately offered the band an audition at the record label. The band changed their name to Circus Maximus and identified as a psychedelic rock band. As Circus Maximus was making headway in New York’s psych scene, Walker was still thinking about Bojangles. One night, he and a fellow guitarist and friend, David Bromberg, went to the WBAI radio station where Bob Fass, the “midnight-till-dawn” disk jockey, ran a nighttime program that played live music, new music and poetry.⁹⁵ More than slightly drunk and rather emotional, Walker sang “Mr. Bojangles” in the middle of the night on live radio. Fass recorded the song so that the station could play it over and over for the next few days.

After the emotional live radio performance of “Mr. Bojangles,” Walker’s love for folk music had been revived. Days later, people were showing up at record stores all over town, asking for a record that didn’t exist; the song was a massive hit. Much to Walker’s surprise, “Mr. Bojangles” was on its way to becoming one of the most popular songs in the country.⁹⁶ By late 1967, “Mr. Bojangles” was absolutely flourishing and Walker had a substantial following in various parts of the nation as the song came to be covered by the

⁹⁴ Walker, *Gypsy Songman*, 66.

⁹⁵ Craig Hillis, “Steven Fromholz, Michael Martin Murphey, and Jerry Jeff Walker: Poetic in Lyric, Message, and Musical Method” in *Pickers and Poets*, ed. Craig Clifford and Craig Hillis (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2016), 76.

⁹⁶ Jerry Jeff Walker, *Gypsy Songman*, 84-85.

Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, John Denver, Neil Diamond, and others. Walker was falling out of love with psychedelic rock and was, once again, becoming increasingly fond of folk music.

When Circus Maximus broke up because of conflicting interests, “Mr. Bojangles” continued to climb the charts. However, Vanguard refused to cut “Mr. Bojangles” because of the current political climate. Martin Luther King Jr. had recently been assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee, and – wrongly assuming Mr. Bojangles to be Black – the label deemed Walker’s song as “racist.” Ironically, Mr. Bojangles was white, as Louisiana jails in the 1960s were segregated.⁹⁷ Walker instead signed a record label with Atlantic Records and released his first album, entitled *Mr. Bojangles*, in 1968. At this point, he was proving to be obviously different from other young, folk acts of the time: his first real hit was a six-eight waltz that people really enjoyed.

Once again, Walker grew tired of living and playing in New York; he reminisced on his good times in Texas back in the mid-1960s. He spent time in Florida in the early 1970s, becoming good friends with Jimmy Buffett; however, while Buffett was thriving in the Florida beach-island environment, Walker continued to long for Texas. Buffett’s island-country style fit the music scene in Florida, while Walker’s folk singer-songwriter style very clearly did not. In 1971, Walker packed up his belongings and headed to Texas in hopes of finding his musical niche.

⁹⁷ Jerry Jeff Walker, *Gypsy Songman*, 89.

Michael Murphey

Michael Murphey (later Michael Martin Murphey) grew up in a storytelling culture. Along with a number of other songwriters, Murphey was raised in the Oak Cliff neighborhood of Dallas.⁹⁸ Many of his early years were spent riding horses at his grandfather's and uncle's ranches where his relatives ran cattle. In an interview with Murphey from 2021, he notes that some of his earliest childhood memories involved sitting on his grandfather's front porch, "rattlin' iced tea around in a glass," and listening to his grandfather tell him cowboy stories and folk tales.⁹⁹ This familial oral tradition that was passed down between generations caused Murphey to develop a special love for Texas folklore.

Murphey read avidly as a teen and young adult, particularly taking interest in the works of Mark Twain and William Faulkner, which sparked his love of literature and writing at a young age. He also began writing poetry in his youth and spent a significant amount of time listening to his father's record collection, which included music by country and folk legends such as Hank Williams, Bob Wills, and Woody Guthrie. Murphey began playing music himself at the Christian summer camp where he worked called Sky Ranch. Murphey grew up in a devout Baptist family, and went on to write various traditional-style hymns throughout his career such as "Harbor for My Soul" and "Holy Roller."¹⁰⁰ In his doctoral dissertation, Craig Hillis analyzes these songs as "upbeat

⁹⁸ Steven Fromholz and B.W. Stevenson also grew up in Oak Cliff, as did T-Bone Walker and Stevie Ray Vaughan.

⁹⁹ Michael Martin Murphey, "Cultura - Michael Martin Murphey and Ryan Murphey Interview," YouTube, KENW PBS, July 23, 2021.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qIxxkmljQUw>.

¹⁰⁰ Murphey later strayed away from the Baptist denomination and became more "spiritual" than "religious."

songs that hinted at salvation but were seasoned with an adequate dash of tongue-in-cheek revivalism to avoid the appearance of proselytizing,” which “successfully kept a young, secular crowd on their feet.”¹⁰¹

In college, Murphey studied Greek at the University of North Texas, where he was also a member of the folksinging club and studied classical poets – an interest that greatly influenced his songwriting. While at UNT, he was mentored by Stan Alexander, a prominent fixture at Threadgill’s Tavern in Austin. Alexander was a student at the University of Texas in the 1950s and sang folk songs at Threadgill’s. When his career as a university professor brought him to teach English at UNT in the early 1960s, Alexander also started a folksinging club at the university. Murphey joined the folksinging club when he started school at UNT, along with Steven Fromholz and Armadillo owner Eddie Wilson. Murphey and Fromholz, along with their classmate and fellow folksinger Patti Lohman Brooks, formed the Mike Murphey Trio in 1963 while they were a part of the folksinging club at UNT. The trio played at a number of events around campus and performed at the Denton country club.¹⁰² Even after UNT’s folksinging club disbanded when Alexander left to teach at Stephen F. Austin University in 1968, its legacy lingered; the folk music scene remained ingrained on the campus and in Denton more broadly, helping launch the successful careers of other Austin musicians such as Ray Wylie Hubbard and B.W. Stevenson.

After a few years at UNT, Murphey moved to California to study creative writing and medieval history and literature at the University of California, Los Angeles. He

¹⁰¹ Hillis, “The Austin Music Scene in the 1970s,” 257.

¹⁰² Jessica DeLeon, “Folk Music Club,” *North Texan*, 2014, <https://northtexan.unt.edu/issues/2014-winter/folk-music-club>.

formed a band called the Trinity River Boys with an old friend from Texas, Michael Nesmith, who later went on to play with The Monkees. Nesmith insisted that The Monkees record Murphey's song, "What Am I Doing Hangin' 'Round?," for their album *Pisces, Aquarius, Capricorn & Jones Ltd.* This recording ultimately launched Murphey's songwriting career. After the album was released, Murphey was hired to work as a staff songwriter for Screen Gems, the publishing branch of Columbia Pictures, where he was paid to write songs for other artists.¹⁰³ Because of this, he produced a huge collection of songs before he even moved back to Texas. Murphey wrote an entire album for Kenny Rogers called *The Ballad of Calico*.¹⁰⁴ He was also offered a record deal by Sparrow Music, but they eventually dropped him. In a 1975 interview with Murphey, he explains that he didn't have what Sparrow Music was looking for:

[At] my first recording company...I was pressured to make [a] more commercial product. It eventually led the company to dropping me from the label because they didn't feel like what I was doing was marketable enough, it was too regional in its appeal. But I think that if you can't sing about your own roots and you can't sing about your own home ground, music is meaningless.¹⁰⁵

By the time Murphey inevitably became disillusioned with the Southern California music scene and decided to move back to Texas, he had about five hundred songs published.¹⁰⁶ He ventured back to Austin with his new co-conspirator, Bob Livingston, in 1971. The duo frequently performed at the folk and acoustic clubs across

¹⁰³ Craig Hillis, in conversation with author, April 15, 2021.

¹⁰⁴ This album included the aforementioned "Calico Silver" that blew Bob Johnston's mind at the Rubaiyat in Dallas.

¹⁰⁵ Michael Martin Murphey, "Michael Martin Murphey Interview - November 1975," YouTube, G. William Jones Collection at SMU, November 1975, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=09NXtOxN4gE>.

¹⁰⁶ Michael Martin Murphey, "Michael Martin Murphey Interview: On Making Music in Austin, Texas," YouTube, Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, December 2, 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cZacSOCLW1M>.

town, such as Castle Creek and the Chequered Flag. Murphey and Livingston were discovered by Bob Johnston and recorded *Geronimo's Cadillac* in Nashville, the title song of which explains Murphey's views on the contemporaneous American Indian Movement.

"Geronimo's Cadillac" criticizes the white exploitation of Native American life and the colonization of their land.¹⁰⁷ Murphey's inspiration for the song came from the famous photograph of Geronimo, a prominent Apache leader, pictured sitting in a 1905 luxury car (which was actually a Type C Locomobile) wearing a suit and a top hat. The two images together – Geronimo and a Cadillac – stood out to Murphey as a song title; he was moved by what he saw as the white man's attempt to pose Geronimo so as to fit in with white consumer culture. The lyrics to "Geronimo's Cadillac" not only speak for Murphey's political views regarding Native American rights, but it also demonstrates how one of the foundational albums in progressive country music stood against the past colonization efforts of the American government and the inherent loss of the Natives' freedom and agency.

The personal backgrounds and experiences of each member of the Lost Gonzo Band equally contributed to their reputation as an "interchangeable" group of talented musicians on the Austin scene in the 1970s. Their individual stories are emblematic of varying facets of the band's influence on the progressive country scene. Rural childhoods, military upbringings, exposure to a variety of cultures, generational oral tradition, the Vietnam War draft, and the social and political climate of the United States

¹⁰⁷ Green, "Austin's Cosmic Cowboy: Words in Collision," 172.

were all factors in these individuals' lives that aided in building the Lost Gonzo Band into one of the most versatile, resourceful musical groups in Austin.

III. THE PEAK OF PROGRESSIVE COUNTRY: MICHAEL MURPHEY, JERRY JEFF WALKER, AND THE CREATION OF THE LOST GONZO BAND

One summer night in July 1972, Jerry Jeff Walker and the Austin Interchangeable Band met up to record songs for Walker's new album, later called *Jerry Jeff Walker*. Instead of assembling at a typical recording studio, Walker scheduled this recording session to be held at an old, abandoned dry cleaning establishment, previously known as Rapp's Cleaners, on Sixth Street in Austin. Walker despised recording studios and actively avoided them, calling them "sterile" and comparing them to hospitals with all of their gadgets and wires.¹ Like most of his rehearsals, he scheduled this one to begin at 10:00 P.M., and had already mixed up a five-gallon water cooler of sangria wine by the time the band arrived.

The rehearsal that followed would prove to set a precedent for communicating an aura of realness, spontaneity, and authenticity on record, all of which would become foundational pieces of the identity of the Lost Gonzo Band and the Austin music scene. Because of the primitive recording environment, the band did not have a mixing board; instead, each microphone signal was fed directly into the tracks on the tape recorder.² According to Gary Nunn, the band sat around drinking beer and sangria and playing along as Walker ran through the tracks. They were "learning the material as [they] went, recording every pass live."³ Walker and the band members collectively decided to leave a number of song introductions and lead-ups on the album, which usually included

¹ Ed Smykus, "Viva Jerry Jeff!," *The Tab* (1994), Box 5, Folder 2, Jerry Jeff Walker Collection, Wittliff Collections, Texas State University.

² Gary P. Nunn, *At Home with the Armadillo* (Austin: Greenleaf Book Group Press, 2018), 157.

³ Nunn, *At Home with the Armadillo*, 157.

laughter and jokes among band members before playing began. These introductions added a layer of realness, exhibited the band members' individual personalities, and gave the listener an idea of their relationships with one another.

Walker's unorthodox recording setup at Rapp's Cleaners allowed him to produce a recording project that communicated, as musicologist Travis Stimeling puts it, an "organic outgrowth of the Austin music scene" that reflected the local community's creative output and represented the artistic vision of Walker and his collaborators.⁴ Plugging directly into the tape recorder and recording each song "live" effectively minimized the distance between the artists and their audiences. After they recorded *Jerry Jeff Walker*, Walker and the band agreed that they wanted to continue recording future albums in unconventional places to give them more of a rugged, earthy, informal feel. This consensus would go on to manifest itself on future progressive country recording projects that proved formative to the creation and legacy of the Austin music scene.

This chapter will exhibit the Lost Gonzo Band's rise and fall with Michael Murphey and Jerry Jeff Walker. The chapter begins with an overview of "Cosmic Austin" in the early 1970s and explores the role of Michael Murphey's "Cosmic Cowboy, Pt. 1" in the development of the identity of the progressive country music scene. It then analyzes the members of the Austin Interchangeable Band and their experience playing with Murphey. Finally, it analyzes the Austin Interchangeable Band's (who officially becomes the "Lost Gonzo Band" in this chapter) time playing with Jerry Jeff Walker, specifically exploring the creation of the formative progressive country album, *Viva*

⁴ Travis Stimeling, *Cosmic Cowboys and New Hicks: The Countercultural Sounds of Austin's Progressive Country Music Scene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 83.

Terlingua!, and taking a look at the aftermath of the album's success on both Walker and the Gonzos. Through examining the band's experience recording and performing with these two acclaimed Austin singer-songwriters, it becomes evident that the Lost Gonzo Band played a central, necessary, and distinctive role in the development of the Austin music scene.

Cosmic Austin

Austin played a significant role in the transformation of country music in the 1970s as it adapted to the experiments of the region's youth counterculture. Michael Murphey's "Cosmic Cowboy, Pt. 1" contributed to this process, capturing the new spirit of country music both lyrically and musically. Murphey wrote "Cosmic Cowboy, Pt. 1" about an urban hippie who hopes to escape to Texas and take up the rural "cowboy" lifestyle – longing to be a "supernatural country-rockin' galoot."⁵ The song, which positions itself with an antimodern attitude and a spirit of nostalgia, draws on a particular style of musical romanticism which dates back to the early 1900s with the publication of John Lomax's *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads*.⁶ The cosmic cowboy character in Murphey's song developed as a direct product of both the ongoing "cosmic" drug culture of the time and the image of the conservative Texas "cowboy," which had

⁵ Michael Martin Murphey, "Cosmic Cowboy (Part 1)," recorded 1972, track 1 on *Cosmic Cowboy Souvenir*, A&M Records.

⁶ Lomax emphasized the uniqueness of his musical findings in Appalachia, drawing on their inherent authenticity and distinctiveness of the region's rich musical history. This symbolic history, which is exhibited in Murphey's song and acts as a sort of countermeasure to modernization, also paints Texas as a distinct and authentic nexus of musical and cultural production. See: [John Avery Lomax, *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads* (New York: Sturgis and Walton Company, 1910).]

recently resurged in popularity. The work strategically uses country music instrumentation, such as steel guitar and fiddle, and Texas-oriented lyrics. Because of Murphey's song, the understanding of country music was further transformed into a flourishing, hybrid style of music that would come to be consumed by hippies and cowboys alike.

Within a few months of its release, "Cosmic Cowboy, Pt. 1" would evolve into a defining song of the burgeoning progressive country music scene in Austin. While the song was briefly a country-rock favorite, the title remained in public consciousness even when it dropped off the charts.⁷ Craig Hillis explains that the term "cosmic cowboy" became a "handy journalistic/media metaphor" for the aesthetic of Austin's intricate scene that was characterized by cultural tensions, an ongoing generational divide, and a blending of music and lifestyles.⁸ Many Austinites embraced the idea of "hippies" who smoked marijuana and participated in the counterculture yet dressed in faded blue jeans, cowboy hats, and big belt buckles. Stimeling maintains that the cosmic cowboy identity sprang forth partially from "a bundle of cultural conflicts...[including] the intersection of communal music making and the national music industry, the ongoing debate about civil rights, and the invocation of rural romanticism in an American metropolis."⁹ In a time of racial struggle, dissent about the Vietnam War, and changing definitions of morality, it

⁷ Archie Green, "Austin's Cosmic Cowboy: Words in Collision," in *And Other Neighborly Names: Social Process and Cultural Image in Texas Folklore*, ed. Richard Bauman and Roger D. Abrahams (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 173.

⁸ Craig Hillis, "The Austin Music Scene in the 1970s: Songs and Songwriters" (doctoral dissertation, University of Texas, 2011), 49.

⁹ Stimeling, *Cosmic Cowboys and New Hicks*, 42.

was nearly impossible for social taste and musical style to remain compartmentalized. Music was starting to cross the lines of race, class, and status.¹⁰

By the time Murphey wrote “Cosmic Cowboy, Pt. 1” in 1972, Austin was a microcosm of the ways that changing understandings of not only race, gender, and identity, but also of established authority, were reshaping popular culture across the country. Many young people in Austin became increasingly skeptical of the presumed expertise of the activists, intellectuals, and politicians of the 1960s. These nonconformists were frequently associated with the folk music scene that, as mentioned in Chapter One, had developed in-part because of the young clan of singer-songwriters who attended the University of Texas, played at Threadgill’s, and were often engaged in civil rights activism and left-wing politics. In this way, they stood in opposition to the town’s overarching conservative attitudes.¹¹

As the counterculture became more prevalent in Austin in the early 1970s, music venues across the city began to adopt values that aligned with this movement. The aforementioned Armadillo World Headquarters, which opened in August of 1970, grew into one of the largest music venues in town and became a foundational cornerstone in the establishment of the progressive country music scene. In an interview with Leea Mechling, a former employee of the Armadillo from 1974-1980, she describes the venue as a “big community center.” While the venue hosted various artists from a multitude of musical genres and had live music every night of the week, they also showcased talent from other categories of Austin’s cultural sector, including art and theater productions,

¹⁰ Green, “Austin’s Cosmic Cowboy: Words in Collision,” 165.

¹¹ Jason Mellard, *Progressive Country: How the 1970s Transformed the Texan in Popular Culture* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013), 60.

and held political rallies and fundraisers for progressive candidates, the Vietnam Veterans Against the War, striking workers, and the National Lawyers Guild.¹²

The Armadillo created a warm, welcoming environment for musicians of all genres to relax before their show. Mechling explains that artists would often look forward to playing at the Armadillo on their tour after being on the road for weeks at a time. When they arrived there, they were able to eat a warm, homecooked meal from the venue's kitchen and put in a load of laundry upstairs. Then, they were able to enjoy the laid-back environment and relax with a beer during their soundcheck before the show. According to Mechling, the Armadillo staff always tried their best to be friendly and welcoming, shrugging at "it's just better to be nice to people."¹³

While the cosmic cowboy craze wouldn't gain significant traction until 1972, Armadillo owner Eddie Wilson maintains that a merging of musical cultures was happening since the venue's opening. As it struggled to financially make it through 1970 and 1971, the Armadillo hosted a number of bands who pushed country-western music outside of its confines, such as an early performance by The Flying Burrito Brothers – a newly-formed country-rock group from California – in addition to local acts such as Freda and the Firedogs, Greezy Wheels, and Balcones Fault, who creatively combined country, boogie-woogie, and psychedelic sounds.¹⁴ In addition, folk singer-songwriters who incorporated sounds of blues, rock, and country – such as Guy Clark and Jerry Jeff Walker – took the stage at the Armadillo during its early years of operation. The

¹² Leea Mechling, in conversation with author, April 2022.

¹³ Leea Mechling, in conversation with author, April 2022.

¹⁴ Eddie Wilson and Jesse Sublett, *Armadillo World Headquarters* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017), 150.

showcasing of acts such as these solidified the Armadillo's role in defining Austin's eclectic and experimental sound.

Willie Nelson's 1972 performance at the Armadillo is considered by many Texas music scholars to be the most significant catalyst for the cementation of the hippie-redneck alliance. Jason Mellard describes how Nelson effectively "joined crowds across generation and class to form a country-western music infused with the sensibilities of the counterculture's folksy, improvisational rock."¹⁵ Although this coalescence is referred to by many scholars as the genesis of the progressive country scene, Mellard is quick to point out the aforementioned acts such as Freda and the Firedogs and Jerry Jeff Walker, who took the Armadillo stage before Nelson. However, Nelson exuded a certain aura that "tapped a deep discursive stream transcending oppositions – hippie/redneck, urban/rural, country/rock, masculine/feminine, young/old."¹⁶ As the progressive country scene took shape, however, Austin artists such as Michael Murphey, Jerry Jeff Walker, and the Lost Gonzo Band would prove to solidify this cosmic cowboy persona and nurture the growth, success, and reputation of the Austin music scene.

Michael Murphey and the Austin Interchangeable Band

With the recording of *Geronimo's Cadillac* under their belt, Michael Murphey, Bob Livingston and Gary P. Nunn migrated back to their home base in Austin and decided to assemble a full, dependable back-up band to use on future albums. This band featured Nunn on piano, Livingston on bass, Craig Hillis on lead guitar and Michael

¹⁵ Mellard, *Progressive Country*, 71.

¹⁶ Mellard, *Progressive Country*, 75.

McGeary on drums. Murphey's newly assembled band came from a variety of backgrounds, had previously played in numerous musical genres, and were incredibly adept at morphing their styles to fit which artist they were playing with. This group of musicians easily moved around from band to band and required little to no rehearsal when switching between genres, proving their uncanny ability to improvise and mold their craft in accordance with the musicians they were playing with.

Murphey cared little for the rigors of being on the road, leaving the members of his band with a considerable amount of free time between tours. They spent this free time picking and singing with one another in jam sessions and building a bond as friends and musical partners. Because of their reputation of adaptability and wide-ranging talent, the city's most versatile group of musicians became known as the "Austin Interchangeable Band."¹⁷ The group that played with Murphey, along with a number of others scattered across the city, were known for their exceptional ability to float between musical acts in various genres. Frontmen and singer-songwriters knew this "band" as being dependable, adaptable, and willing to experiment.

As previously mentioned, Michael Murphey and the Austin Interchangeable Band effectively coined a "look" for the progressive country music scene when they recorded "Cosmic Cowboy, Pt.1" in 1973. As stated by folklorist Archie Green, the song "helped

¹⁷ For the sake of this thesis, I will continue to refer to Murphey's band as the "Austin Interchangeable Band," although this was never their official name; rather, this was the name that points to the larger group of flexible, dependable Austin musicians, which includes Murphey's band among others. According to Craig Hillis's dissertation and Jerry Jeff Walker's autobiography, Steven Fromholz came up with the name to describe the group of musicians in the early 1970s. The name of Murphey's specific group of musicians changed over time, but was commonly referred to as the "Cosmic Cowboy Orchestra."

pull country musicians and rock fans into one milieu by giving them at last a label they could both use.”¹⁸ After the song’s release on *Cosmic Cowboy Souvenir*, Murphey and the Austin Interchangeable Band suddenly became the embodiment of what it meant to be a “cosmic cowboy” in Texas. They donned big belt buckles, wore faded blue jeans, and drank Lone Star beer while also sporting long hippie hair and scraggly beards, smoking marijuana, and engaging with the counterculture in Austin.

“Cosmic Cowboy, Pt. 1,” Murphey claimed, was initially written as a joke aimed at Bob Livingston, whose nickname was “Cosmic Bob.” In an interview with Livingston, he explains that this nickname originated because he “brought a lot of energy to the show...but [he] was kind of spacey, too.” Livingston considers himself more “cosmic” than “cowboy,” claiming that “boots hurt [his] feet.”¹⁹ Guitarist Craig Hillis calls the cosmic cowboy get-up “protective coloration,” used to blend in and communicate their inclusion in a particular group, but not totally authentic.²⁰ However, other members of the Austin Interchangeable Band, such as Gary P. Nunn, fully and genuinely exhibited the cowboy image – complete with a bandana, cowboy hat, and Wranglers that signified his small-town Oklahoma roots.²¹ Murphey later insisted that the lyrics to the song were satirical, remarking that he “never intended that it be taken seriously,” lamenting that “somehow that phrase caught on and people said, ‘Yeah, that’s what we are,’ and they started wearing boots and huge cowboy hats. It went too far.”²² Whether the lyrics to the song were genuine or truly satirical, “Cosmic Cowboy, Pt. 1” still went on to define the

¹⁸ Green, “Austin’s Cosmic Cowboy,” 173.

¹⁹ Bob Livingston, in conversation with author, November 2021.

²⁰ Craig Hillis, in conversation with author, April 2021.

²¹ Bob Livingston, in conversation with author, November 2021.

²² Michael Martin Murphey, quoted in Stimeling, *Cosmic Cowboys and New Hicks*, 60.

identity of Austin's emerging brood of hippie-redneck crossovers. This duality of cowboy hats and Lone Stars alongside long hair and marijuana, which is clearly exhibited in the identities of the Austin Interchangeable Band, made the group relatable to rednecks, hippies, and everyone in between.

Artists from other regions of the nation continued to migrate to Austin to take part in the growing music scene; one of these artists, who would go on to define the sounds of Austin's progressive country music, was Jerry Jeff Walker. A folkie whose sound was molded by music scenes in New Orleans, Florida, and New York, Walker also travelled to Texas, New Mexico, and California the late 1960s. He met Bob Livingston in Los Angeles and the two kept in touch when Walker went back to playing in New York.²³ In 1971, after years of living as a travelling troubadour on the road, Walker packed up his belongings and headed to Texas. He arrived in Austin with a recently negotiated recording contract with MCA Records, which included a promise to produce a new album. In order to fulfill this promise, he needed a band. However, Walker didn't want just any band – he wanted to work with a group of musicians who would fit in with his beliefs and philosophies about music and performing and who listened to “jazz and blues, some rock and roll, some country... guys with the background to follow [him] wherever [his] impulses led.”²⁴

While Austin was full of good musicians, the Austin Interchangeable Band had a growing reputation for being the best in town. Gary P. Nunn could play “just about every instrument around a country-western band,” Craig Hillis played with skilled, poetic

²³ Bob Livingston, in conversation with author, November 2021.

²⁴ Jerry Jeff Walker, *Gypsy Songman* (Duane Press, 1999), 113.

singer-songwriters such as Steven Fromholz and Dan McCrimmon, Bob Livingston was a “professional” character who had ample experience with a multitude of folk bands across the South, and Michael McGearly held it all together with a steady beat.²⁵ One fateful night, Walker arrived at an old motor court on Lamar Boulevard in Austin where Murphey was practicing with the Austin Interchangeable Band. After joining in on a lengthy jam session with the band where Walker fit right in, Murphey agreed to loan him the band so he could cut his promised record for MCA.

The recording that followed became one of the most formative recordings in Austin music history. When the band recorded *Jerry Jeff Walker* in the abandoned Rapp’s Cleaners, progressive country music began to take on a defined form as the band prioritized improvisation and creativity, taking a free-wheeling approach to music.²⁶ The recording session also featured Herb Steiner, who Livingston claims essentially “invented progressive country music on the spot” with his steel guitar playing, and Kelly Dunn, who played the B3 organ.²⁷ *Jerry Jeff Walker* would serve as a model for Walker’s future albums and inspire the core values of the city’s sprouting progressive country music scene.

After the album’s release, the Austin Interchangeable Band decided to split their time between Walker and Murphey, simultaneously promoting *Jerry Jeff Walker* and *Cosmic Cowboy Souvenir*. In his dissertation, Craig Hillis noted that a typical promotional tour with Walker or Murphey “might include a two-month road adventure

²⁵ Walker, *Gypsy Songman*, 113.

²⁶ *Jerry Jeff Walker* was also the first of Walker’s albums where he was pictured wearing a cowboy hat on the cover, signifying his shift into the Texas “progressive country” genre. On his previous album covers, he wore fedoras, reflecting his tie to the folk scene.

²⁷ Bob Livingston, in conversation with author, November 2021.

that would include six to eight multi-night engagements in key national markets and various one-nighters along the way,” taking the band all over the country – from Texas, to Colorado, to New York, to San Francisco.²⁸ They stopped in Austin frequently and played at venues such as Castle Creek and the Armadillo. The crowd at the Armadillo, which Gary Nunn describes in his book as a “hippie rock emporium,” was also drawn to Murphey’s style of music.²⁹ As Murphey and the band played songs from *Cosmic Cowboy Souvenir* to Armadillo audiences, Austin’s hippie-redneck confluence continued to take form.

As the Austin Interchangeable Band continued to work with Walker, they became increasingly attracted to his laid back, free-wheeling approach to recording and performing. Murphey, in opposition to Walker, was an exacting disciplinarian who prioritized professionalism. This directly grated against the band’s anti-commercial ideologies and flexible attitudes. Livingston compares Murphey to the “Vincent Van Gogh of country rock...he’s a genius, and he wrote these incredible songs, but it just felt like he was going to cut his ear off at any moment.”³⁰ The band (with the exception of Herb Steiner and Gary P. Nunn, who had an unfinished song with Murphey called “Southern Canadian River Song” that he wanted credit for) decided to quit working with Michael Murphey and officially join forces with Jerry Jeff Walker.³¹

²⁸ Hillis, “The Austin Music Scene in the 1970s,” 168-169.

²⁹ Nunn, *At Home with the Armadillo*, 159.

³⁰ Bob Livingston, quoted in Richard Skanse, “A Man Must Carry On,” *Texas Music Magazine*, Spring 2004.

³¹ Gary P. Nunn, in conversation with author, October 2021.

¡Viva Terlingua!

Jerry Jeff Walker and the Austin Interchangeable Band further explored the concept of impromptu live recordings on their next album together, recorded in the German dance hall in Luckenbach, Texas, a tiny German town in the Texas Hill Country. Luckenbach, a former Comanche trading post named in the 1850s for postmaster Carl Albert Luckenbach, consisted of five permanent structures, including a dance hall and a post office.³² In 1971, John Russell “Hondo” Crouch bought the entire town, along with his business partner William “Guich” Kooock (pronounced “Geech Cook”), after they saw a “town for sale” ad in the *Fredricksburg Standard*. Crouch was a jack of all trades: writer, musician, goat rancher, All-American swimmer, poet, chili cook, singer of Mexican corridos, and self-described “Imagineer” of Luckenbach. His plans for Luckenbach were to transform it from a sleepy town into a hangout spot where people could relax, drink beer, and play music in the Texas Hill Country.

While Crouch’s Hill Country hamlet exuded an aura of tranquility and friendliness, Jan Reid notes that Luckenbach also “had a few drawbacks. Its economic sustenance was beer, and regardless of prevalent friendliness, drunks occasionally turned vomity and mean.”³³ This might seem slightly off-putting – but for Walker, this was the perfect environment to launch the musical philosophy that he had been building for over a decade. Walker became acquainted with Crouch on a previous trip to Texas in the late 1960s and was immediately enchanted by him. He looked to Crouch, who he refers to as “the guiding light of Luckenbach,” as a mentor, a friend, and somewhat of a father

³² Reid, *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*, 92.

³³ Reid, *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*, 96.

figure.³⁴ When Walker received news that Crouch had bought Luckenbach, he knew it was the perfect recording opportunity. As Stimeling puts it, “Luckenbach represented to Walker a space in which the pastoral visions of the cosmic cowboy and the natural musical aesthetics resulting from live performance could be fully realized.”³⁵

In August 1973, the band set up in Luckenbach’s dance hall, using bales of hay as sound baffles and running microphones to the mobile recording studio, “Dale Ashby and Father Sound Recorders,” parked out under the oak trees.³⁶ The heat of the summer sat stagnant in the unairconditioned dancehall, causing band members to sweat and feel delirious throughout the session.³⁷ To record the album, the band also brought along Mary Egan, a remarkable fiddle player from the Armadillo World Headquarters’ house band, Greezy Wheels, who adds female voice and talent into the recordings.³⁸ They also brought harmonica player Mickey Raphael, who played extensively with Willie Nelson over the years and remains in his band today. Walker had virtually nothing written when they arrived in Luckenbach – just some “ditties” and a few covers that he liked from other artists. The rest of the week was spent sitting around in a circle in the middle of the dance hall, taking part in something that mimicked a “sophisticated jam sesh.”³⁹ This jam sesh would go on to become one of the most renowned works in Austin’s music history:

¡Viva Terlingua!

³⁴ Walker, *Gypsy Songman*, 117.

³⁵ Stimeling, *Cosmic Cowboys and New Hicks*, 85.

³⁶ Walker, *Gypsy Songman*, 120.

³⁷ Craig Hillis, in conversation with author, April 2021.

³⁸ Tape #006, “Dale Ashby and Father Mobile, Luckenbach, Texas,” August 16, 1973, audio recording, Jerry Jeff Walker Collection, Wittliff Collections, Texas State University.

³⁹ Craig Hillis, in conversation with author, April 2021.

Walker cultivated a recording environment which encouraged the band to take a free-wheeling and collaborative approach, allowing for genuine creativity when producing *jViva Terlingua!*. All of the songs on the album were produced somewhat spontaneously and were recorded on essentially one single take, rather than being dubbed together, as with songs that are produced in recording studios. This, along with the laid-back, rugged recording environment of Luckenbach, allowed for the band to feel at-ease – much like they did while recording *Jerry Jeff Walker*.⁴⁰ Craig Hillis notes that *jViva Terlingua!* seemed so free-flowing partly because the members of the band were able to improvise and have fun. He remarked that each song proved to be loose, friendly, and engaging because “everybody just put something in the Gonzo soup and stirred it up.”⁴¹ As evident on tapes from the recording session, the band truly knew how to harmonize; not only did they play well together, but they were able to match pitch and construct harmonies, adding to the breadth of the sound on the album.⁴²

The first track on *jViva Terlingua!*, “Gettin’ By,” started as a ditty that was written one afternoon under the shade of the oak tree outside the dancehall. As the band set up and Dale Ashby in the recording truck said, “We’re rollin’,” to signal a mic check, Walker responded with, “Hey, in the truck / It’s Camp Walker time again / Going to try and slide one by you once more.” This mic check turned out to be a future classic Jerry Jeff call line, turning into, “Hi, Buckaroos / Scamp Walker time again / Going to try and slide one by you once more.” Hillis explains that after the initial mic check, Walker kept

⁴⁰ Jerry Jeff Walker, *jViva Terlingua!*, recorded 1973, MCA Records, vinyl LP.

⁴¹ Craig Hillis, in conversation with author, April 2021.

⁴² Tape #005, “5B Live” (Dale Ashby and Father Mobile, Luckenbach, Texas), August 16, 1973, audio recording, Jerry Jeff Walker Collection, Wittliff Collections, Texas State University.

singing and picking away. The band followed along, singing, “Gettin’ by on gettin’ by’s my stock and trade / Livin’ it day to day, pickin’ up the pieces wherever they fall...”⁴³ The song ended up describing exactly what was happening in the moment; Walker was documenting the beginnings of the making of *jViva Terlingua!*.

While “Gettin’ By” started off as a spur-of-the-moment mic check song, it evolved into an iconic Texas melody. Walker’s decision to leave “Gettin’ By” on the album and, even more so, choosing it to be *jViva Terlingua!*’s first track, sets the mission and methodology for the rest of the album. A “ditty” that had virtually no meaning at its genesis sent a larger, deeper message about Walker and the Austin Interchangeable Band’s ideas about recording. Walker and the band were effectively mocking the seriousness of the music industry while rejecting proper recording styles and lyrical depth.

The spontaneity in developing the opening track for the album established a precedent for the other songs that would transpire during that week in Luckenbach. The tracks that followed included original, somewhat spontaneous songs such as “Sangria Wine,” a musical recipe for homemade sangria wine that ended up with more of a reggae feel; “Wheel,” a slower, emotional composition which is rooted partially in the memory of the tragic passing of Walker’s grandfather; “Little Bird,” a reprised version of an old love song that Walker wrote on his first trip to Texas in the 1960s; and “Get it Out,” a “new upbeat composition about uninhibited emotional expression as a healthy tonic for a

⁴³ Jerry Jeff Walker, “Gettin’ By,” recorded 1973, track 1 on *jViva Terlingua!*, MCA Records.

relationship.”⁴⁴ Along with “Gettin’ By,” these original songs comprised approximately half of the album. Walker emphasized his musicianship with these original works, but also exhibited a more spontaneous and playful side of his music by improvising lyrics and encouraging the Austin Interchangeable Band’s continued egalitarian jam sesh. The informal approach to recording is further exhibited, as Stimeling notes, through the background vocals performed by members of the Austin Interchangeable Band on several of the songs. He claims that the band’s “imprecise vocal performance” added an element of “realism” to the album.⁴⁵

The other half of *¡Viva Terlingua!* was comprised of tracks written by other artists such as Guy Clark, Michael Murphey, Gary P. Nunn, and Ray Wylie Hubbard. Clark’s “Desperados Waiting for a Train” and Murphey’s “Backslider’s Wine” were both recorded in the dancehall during daytime recording sessions. These compositions both held a slower tempo and were composed of thoughtful, heartfelt lyrics that told a deeper story. Aside from the poetic songwriting that is evident in “Desperados Waiting for a Train,” the musical composition is also emotive and moving. Mary Egan sets the mood at the start of the song with a delicate, subtle fiddle intro; by the end, the band is rocking out on guitars, making it feel like you’re on a fast-moving train yourself. “Backslider’s Wine,” a slow, bluesy take on Murphey’s folk tune first featured on *Geronimo’s Cadillac*, was a song about struggling to regain sobriety and emotional stability after

⁴⁴ Craig Hillis, “Steven Fromholz, Michael Martin Murphey, and Jerry Jeff Walker: Poetic in Lyric, Message, and Musical Method” in *Pickers and Poets*, ed. Craig Clifford and Craig Hillis (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2016), 79.

⁴⁵ Travis Stimeling, “*¡Viva Terlingua!*: Jerry Jeff Walker, Live Recordings and the Authenticity of Progressive Country Music,” *Journal of Texas Music History* 8, no.1 (2008): 24.

falling off the wagon. Walker claims that he felt like he could “sing [the song] and mean it” because he “had the reputation, which convinced people [he] was singing the truth.”⁴⁶ The fact that Walker chose to showcase up-and-coming artists alongside his own work is one of the critical pieces in making *Viva Terlingua!* an important document in the progressive country movement.

After a long week of recording in Luckenbach, Walker and the Austin Interchangeable Band hosted a “live recording concert” at the dance hall where admission was just a dollar. The other two covered works, Nunn’s “London Homesick Blues” and Hubbard’s “Up Against the Wall, Redneck Mother” were performed and recorded live on Saturday night. “London Homesick Blues” would become a true Texas anthem, written by Nunn when he was abroad in England with Michael Murphey.⁴⁷ Nunn sang lead vocals on the recording, and the crowd responded in excited uproar; in his book, Nunn explains that he can say, “without reservation” that playing the song in Luckenbach elicited the “greatest response [he] had ever gotten for [him]self – or for one of [his] songs.”⁴⁸

Because of its inclusion on *Viva Terlingua!*, “Up Against the Wall, Redneck Mother” would also develop into a Texas anthem. Originally written by Hubbard in Red

⁴⁶ Jerry Jeff Walker, quoted in Hillis, *Pickers and Poets*, 80.

⁴⁷ Murphey and Nunn were in England to promote *Cosmic Cowboy Souvenir* after signing with a European worldwide label (EMI Records). Murphey was attending one promo function after another, at most of which Nunn’s presence was not requested, so Nunn stayed cooped up in a cold flat with little food and no heat. He spent his days walking around the cold apartment, missing Texas, and thinking up the lyrics to “London Homesick Blues.” For more information about Nunn’s song, reference his article in *Lone Star Music Magazine* entitled “Heartworn Highways: The Story Behind ‘London Homesick Blues.’” <https://lonestarmusicmagazine.com/heartworn-highways-the-story-behind-london-homesick-blues/>

⁴⁸ Nunn, *At Home with the Armadillo*, 187.

River, New Mexico, after he was almost beat up in a redneck country bar, the song aimed to draw attention to and debase the “ignorance and close-mindedness of redneck country culture.”⁴⁹ In an interview with the Wittliff Collections at Texas State University, Walker explains that his shift from folk singer-songwriter to “bar band yahoo” happened when he cut “Up Against The Wall, Redneck Mother.”⁵⁰ This song quickly became a fan-favorite and saw Walker’s successful transformation from folkie to outlaw.

Both Nunn’s and Hubbard’s songs would evolve into progressive country classics which became synonymous with the Austin music scene and the cosmic cowboy movement, due, in large part, to the way they were executed on *Viva Terlingua!*. When listening to the live concert recordings on the album, the audience aspect of the songs is arguably just as important as the music itself. Hillis explains that the live audience became “an additional instrument in the recording process,” which added a layer of authenticity and excitement to the album, making the listener feel like they were there, hanging from the rafters – which almost collapsed that night in the old dancehall – screaming “REDNECK!” along with everyone else.⁵¹

Walker and the Austin Interchangeable Band’s strategic incorporation of songs by other artists and live concert recordings set *Viva Terlingua!* apart. Including other artists’ songs exhibited both Walker’s and the Austin Interchangeable Band’s musical flexibility and their willingness to credit other up-and-coming Austin musicians. Before Hubbard, Clark, and Nunn were producing anything significant on their own, Walker

⁴⁹ Cory Lock, “Counterculture Cowboys: Progressive Texas Country of the 1970s and 1980s,” *Journal of Texas Music History* 3, no. 1 (2003): 19.

⁵⁰ Jerry Jeff and Susan Walker, interview by Hector Saldana, *A conversation with Susan and Jerry Jeff Walker – June 2018*, Wittliff Collections, June 21, 2018.

⁵¹ Hillis, “The Austin Music Scene in the 1970s,” 51.

decided to feature their songs on *jViva Terlingua!* and give them credit for it.⁵² In this way, Walker proves himself as a “great advocate for the songwriter.”⁵³ Furthermore, through the live music elements of albums such as *jViva Terlingua!*, Stimeling contends that Austin’s progressive country music scene ultimately challenged listeners to “turn away from overtly mediated musical experiences,” such as radio broadcasts and major record label productions, and “join with their local community in the shared experience of live musical performance” instead.⁵⁴ The shared experience of live music, emphasized by Walker and the Austin Interchangeable Band, is central to the character of the Austin music scene and the progressive country movement.

The fact that Walker and the Austin Interchangeable Band recorded *jViva Terlingua!* in a primitive setting with very little previous rehearsal proves that they were not concerned with the typical ways of making music. Their decision to record in the Luckenbach dance hall in the middle of August with no “proper” recording equipment is telling of their recording philosophy and their rejection of the corporate music industry. Moreover, including improvised songs such as “Gettin’ By” exhibited the spontaneous and impulsive nature of the band while also showing the ability for the Austin Interchangeable Band to follow along with Walker, even as he is making lyrics up on the spot. These two elements of *jViva Terlingua!* resulted in the album emanating a genuine, homegrown feel. Although Walker’s recording tactics seem rather haphazard, they were conscious decisions that were professionally made for a specific purpose. Gary Nunn

⁵² At the beginning of “Up Against the Wall, Redneck Mother,” Bob Livingston says, “This song is by Ray Wylie Hubbard”; the label wanted to take that part off, but Walker and the band insisted on keeping it on the track.

⁵³ Craig Hillis, in conversation with author, April 2021.

⁵⁴ Travis Stimeling, *Cosmic Cowboys and New Hicks*, 7.

notes that Walker's loose musical approach and Luckenbach's pastoral, unrefined atmosphere resulted in the album feeling "like it was real."⁵⁵

Ultimately, Walker and the Austin Interchangeable Band successfully aided in redefining the Austin music scene by emphasizing collaboration, anti-commodification, and spontaneity on *jViva Terlingua!*. Disorderly yet ingenious and silly yet sincere, the album proved to be, as Jan Reid puts it, "empathetically Walker, empathetically Austin."⁵⁶ In his memoir, Walker explains that while Michael Murphey's "Cosmic Cowboy" had given progressive country an image, *jViva Terlingua!* was giving it a sound.⁵⁷ The Austin Interchangeable Band, with their flexibility, keenness, and talent, were the backbone of both of these formative documents in Texas music.

The Genesis of Gonzo and Success of *jViva Terlingua!*

While stereo purists and radio executives snarked that *jViva Terlingua!* was "poorly recorded," the album certainly established Walker's popularity as the patron saint of progressive country music in Texas.⁵⁸ Upon its release, *jViva Terlingua!* swiftly sold 50,000 copies in Texas and only 20,000 more in the rest of the country, solidifying its status as a cult classic in the Lone Star State.⁵⁹ Walker's band decided to officially christen themselves with a new name as they embarked on a new leg of their journey together. They collectively decided on the "Lost Gonzo Band" in honor of Hunter S.

⁵⁵ Gary P. Nunn, in conversation with author, October 2021.

⁵⁶ Reid, *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*, 105.

⁵⁷ Walker, *Gypsy Songman*, 127.

⁵⁸ Reid, *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*, 107.

⁵⁹ Jeff Gage, "Jerry Jeff Walker's 'Viva Terlingua': Inside the Fringe Country Album," *Rolling Stone* (2020), <https://www.rollingstone.com/feature/viva-terlingua-jerry-jeff-walker-outlaw-country-772406/>

Thompson, the patron of the “Gonzo journalism” movement.⁶⁰ Although complicated to define, *Austin Chronicle* writer Clay Smith describes “Mad Dogs” as “the chosen name of a band of rebellious artists – mainly writers and journalists but also musicians and painters – who lived in Texas, mostly in Austin, in the late Sixties and early Seventies who partied and wrote in an identifiably Texan, outlaw manner.”⁶¹ These artists, including Thompson, were often associated with the Sixties counterculture and actively fought to change the culture in Austin, a traditionally conservative city.

Literary curator and author Steven Davis notes that Thompson’s style of “drug-fueled participatory journalism” made him “a celebrity among the counterculture, and his seemingly inexhaustible intake of drugs gave him a legendary aura among partyers.”⁶² Gonzo journalism, therefore, seemed to be the perfect namesake for the flexible, noncommercialized band of cosmic cowboys. Many Austin musicians frequented the same hangouts as Gonzo journalists, as both groups essentially rejected corporate controls and preferred existing in an environment where they could nurture homegrown artistic visions.⁶³ In his book, Walker explains “Gonzo-ism” as “taking an unknown thing to an unknown place for an unknown purpose,” claiming “that’s what [the band] was

⁶⁰ Prior to the official naming of the Lost Gonzo Band, Bob Livingston notes that he would introduce the band with a different name every time they performed. Some examples he gave in an interview were “Jerry Jeff Walker and the Unborn Calves,” “Jerry Jeff Walker and the Rodeo-deo Riff-Raffs,” and “Jerry Jeff Walker and the Blue-bonic Plague.”

⁶¹ Clay Smith, “Notes on Mad Dogs: On Being Young Talented, and Slightly Insane in Old Austin,” *The Austin Chronicle*, January 26, 2001. <https://www.austinchronicle.com/books/2001-01-26/80284/>.

⁶² Steven L. Davis, *Texas Literary Outlaws: Six Writers in the Sixties and Beyond* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 2004), 300.

⁶³ Davis, *Texas Literary Outlaws*, 299.

doing, but we were also lost.”⁶⁴ Austin’s countercultural characters latched onto this notion of “Gonzo-ism,” as it gave them a sense of anti-commercial realness, indefinability, and spontaneity.

Following the genesis of the Lost Gonzo Band, the group’s members began to change as well. Craig Hillis left the Lost Gonzo Band after the production of *jViva Terlingua!* to play with Michael Murphey as he produced his self-titled album in 1973.⁶⁵ Hillis was replaced by John Inmon, the talented guitar player who played with Gary P. Nunn back in the early 1970s in Genesee. Inmon’s background in rock ‘n’ roll guitar and his adaptable playing abilities fit perfectly with the Lost Gonzo Band’s musical style. He admits that he doesn’t know how to read music, noting in an interview with the *Austin American Statesman* that he just “hear[s] notes in [his] head and play[s] them.”⁶⁶ This, along with Inmon’s natural talent to improvise and adapt, furthered the narrative of the collaborative, flexible, non-traditional nature of the Lost Gonzo Band and their contribution to the Austin music scene in the 1970s.

Michael McGeary left the band in 1973 as well, due to differences between him and Walker. Nunn notes that McGeary and Walker both had the same type of “in-your-face” personality, recalling that they didn’t always work well together.⁶⁷ He was replaced by Donny Dolan, a friend of Inmon’s from when he lived in Temple. Tomás Ramirez, a renowned saxophone player, also became a mainstay in the Lost Gonzo Band during this time, adding another distinct layer to the band’s eclectic country-crossover sound.

⁶⁴ Walker, *Gypsy Songman*, 126.

⁶⁵ Craig Hillis, “The Austin Music Scene in the 1970s,” 13.

⁶⁶ Terry Hagerty, “‘Cosmic Cowboy’ guitarist John Inmon continues storied career in Bastrop,” *Austin American Statesman* (Austin, TX), June 18, 2021.

⁶⁷ Gary P. Nunn, in conversation with author, October 2021.

Ramirez was trained as a jazz saxophonist at the University of Texas and also had substantial experience playing R&B music and, according to Nunn, also had a great sense of humor.⁶⁸

¡Viva Terlingua! brought a significant amount of regional and national fame to Walker and the Gonzos. Although Walker was a folk singer by reputation, his voice was undoubtedly country – and he fully embraced the cowboy image after *¡Viva Terlingua!*'s release. Walker and the band never used a set list during their live recordings; rather, Walker would call songs by responding to the crowd's wishes, and the band would follow suit.⁶⁹ This furthers the notion that Walker and the Gonzos were rather unconcerned with production and choreographed performance and instead put emphasis on interacting with the audience, playing what they wanted to, and having fun while doing it.

Walker's music began to draw a rowdy crowd – what some have even called a “cult following” – complete with every character: old hippies, rednecks, and college fraternity boys. Inmon claims that college students “went nuts about this music because they're all learning how to drink...all the coming-of-age stuff was going on [in the mid-1970s], and [Walker] was the perfect soundtrack for that.”⁷⁰ However, this cult following that Walker had nurtured had its fair share of setbacks; when he wanted to play something slower and more sentimental on stage (such as “My Old Man,” written about his father, or “Wheel,” written about his grandfather), the crowd often screamed at him to

⁶⁸ Nunn, *At Home with the Armadillo*, 199.

⁶⁹ Butch House, “Jerry Jeff Warms Boulder Crowd,” *Denver Post* (Denver, CO), undated, Box 2, Folder 21, Jerry Jeff Walker Collection, Wittliff Collections, Texas State University.

⁷⁰ John Inmon, in conversation with author, February 2022.

play one of his well-known party anthems (such as “Up Against the Wall, Redneck Mother”). Inmon recalls that this really “pissed Jerry off.”⁷¹

As the progressive country boom was at its height in the mid-1970s, Walker and the Gonzos continued to record more albums that elicited their values of spontaneity, collaboration, sincerity, and live performance. Inmon explains that rehearsals and soundchecks usually involved marijuana, noting that the Gonzos would frequently “get stoned and come up with really creative ideas.”⁷² They cut *Walker’s Collectibles* in 1974, which included “Rock Me, Roll Me,”⁷³ and “Well of the Blues,” both written by Gary P. Nunn. Livingston describes *Walker’s Collectibles* as a “party album” of sorts that was rough and real, much like *Viva Terlingua!*.⁷⁴ The next year, they recorded *Ridin’ High*, which was more polished and clean, and almost as successful as *Viva Terlingua!*. *Ridin’ High* included songs written by Livingston and Nunn (“Public Domain”), and Inmon (“Goodbye Easy Street”), who also sang backup vocals on the album. Walker and the band recorded a second album in 1975 called *It’s a Good Night for Singin’*, which also included songs written by members of the Lost Gonzo Band.⁷⁵ This album was cut from the same cloth as *Ridin’ High* – it was more refined, but still genuine in nature.⁷⁶

However, as Walker became a bigger star and began earning more money, his antics got wilder – and the Gonzos were simply “along for the ride” as Walker quickly

⁷¹ John Inmon, in conversation with author, February 2022.

⁷² John Inmon, in conversation with author, February 2022.

⁷³ This track was recorded live and sung by Gary P. Nunn on the album.

⁷⁴ Bob Livingston, in conversation with author, April 2022.

⁷⁵ Gary P. Nunn wrote “Couldn’t Do Nothing Right,” and Bob Livingston wrote “Head Full of Nothin’” and the title track, “It’s a Good Night for Singin’.”

⁷⁶ Johnny Gimble, who famously played with Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys, played fiddle on *It’s a Good Night for Singin’*.

ascended into the limelight.⁷⁷ One particular night at the Armadillo stands out for the venue's owner, Eddie Wilson, who describes Walker in his memoir as having a "reputation for gregariousness, which wasn't necessarily a euphemism for being a beer-guzzling fool, but sometimes even the latter was an understatement."⁷⁸ According to Wilson, Walker made a drunken fool of himself on the Armadillo stage and then continued his "clownish rampage" backstage. After relieving himself in a beer pitcher, trying to pass it around the room, and ripping a phone off the wall, Walker stumbled out into the beer garden and disappeared into the night.

A similar drunken performance took place when Walker and the Gonzos were scheduled to play at Castle Creek, a folk club in Austin. Jan Reid, who was present that night, recalls the crowd being "boisterous" in anticipation for Walker. Once onstage, a drunken Walker had "a hell of a time singing," and, even more so, "a hell of a time standing up."⁷⁹ Hillis, who was still playing with Walker at the time, remembers that one by one, the band filed off the stage, to "make their escape."⁸⁰ The night ended with Walker passed out onstage and a significant amount of unhappy concert-goers who demanded their money back.

Walker and the Lost Gonzo Band really were "riding high," as they refer to it; by the mid-1970s, they were playing for crowds of ten-thousand people at music festivals, staying in fancy hotels, and travelling across the country in a private plane. In the midst of copious amounts of drugs and alcohol, Reid claims that Gary Nunn often looked out

⁷⁷ John Inmon, in conversation with author, February 2022.

⁷⁸ Wilson, *Armadillo World Headquarters*, 169.

⁷⁹ Reid, *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*, 102.

⁸⁰ Craig Hillis, in conversation with author, April 2021.

for Walker during his times of “drunken vulnerability,” calling him somewhat of a “mother hen.”⁸¹ In an interview, Nunn notes that he always tried to look after Walker in “all sorts of ways...in his music, on the road, and [on]stage.”⁸²

The Lost Gonzo Band’s experiences with Michael Murphey and Jerry Jeff Walker helped them to formulate an identity for themselves. The band’s humble beginnings under Murphey’s wing would give each band member experiences that would encourage their songwriting and push them out of their comfort zone. When they began working with Walker and recognized that their own values aligned with his musical philosophy, they made the decision to leave Murphey and fully dedicate themselves to this new way of thinking. Working with Walker allowed their musical ideologies to manifest through working on albums such as *Jerry Jeff Walker, ¡Viva Terlingua!*, *Walker’s Collectibles*, *Ridin’ High* and *It’s a Good Night For Singin’*. Furthermore, their personal songs gained exposure through being included on these albums, and they developed a sense of their own identity as a band and gained a public following through their alliance with Walker and their constant exposure as the opening act for his performances.⁸³

Through their association with both Murphey and Walker, the Lost Gonzo Band created a distinct musical philosophy and pioneered foundational ideologies that became central to Austin’s music scene. Their critical involvement in the creation of albums which laid the groundwork for the progressive country movement would ultimately

⁸¹ Reid, *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*, 106.

⁸² Gary P. Nunn, in conversation with author, October 2021.

⁸³ Hugh Cullen Sparks, “Stylistic Development and Compositional Processes of Selected Solo Singer/Songwriters in Austin, Texas,” (doctoral dissertation, University of Texas, 1984), 53.

secure the band's status as movers and shakers in cultivating Austin's reputation as a center of musical performance.

IV. A NEW ERA OF GONZO: INDEPENDENT ALBUMS, INDIVIDUAL CAREERS, AND COLLECTIVE LEGACY

At the beginning of 1976, Jerry Jeff Walker and the Lost Gonzo Band were certainly “riding high” and enjoying the pleasures of being national stars. Since the completion of *¡Viva Terlingua!* in 1973, Walker and the band had been sporadically recording a collection of songs – in a variety of recording environments – for another album that would later be named *A Man Must Carry On*. The album followed the same formula that had worked so well with *¡Viva Terlingua!*, *Walker’s Collectibles*, *Ridin’ High*, and *It’s a Good Night for Singin’*, pulling songs to cover from artists such as Rusty Weir, Bob Dylan, Paul Siebel, and Rodney Crowell. The album also included live concert recordings of songs – including everyone’s favorite Jerry Jeff rock ‘n’ roll anthems, a sprinkling of his singer-songwriter classics, and even some spirituals – as well as a number of studio cuts, and a few spoken word tracks performed by Charles John Quarto and Luckenbach “Imagineer” Hondo Crouch.¹

After years of recordings and countless hours of tape, Walker and the Gonzos decided to record some live sessions in Luckenbach to capture the *¡Viva Terlingua!* magic. In true Gonzo fashion, the band recorded the first track, “Stereo Chickens,” in a spur-of-the-moment picking session under the big oak tree behind the post office in Luckenbach. Gary Nunn and Bob Livingston sat with their guitars and observed the town’s small brood of resident chickens. They started to pick and sing a ditty that was

¹ Jerry Jeff Walker, *A Man Must Carry On*, recorded 1977, MCA Records, 2 x vinyl LP. [Note: Charles John Quarto was a poet, songwriter, and spiritual teacher who befriended Walker and wrote songs for him.]

inspired by a song from *The Music Man*.² Luckily, microphones were hung from the oak tree overhead, caught the picking session amidst the clucking of the birds, and fed the signal to the mobile recording truck. The band, and the onlookers, were exceedingly entertained by the unconventional nature of the recording, which went on to become the album's opening song.³

A week after the band left Luckenbach, Hondo Crouch – the man behind making Luckenbach a musical center – passed away of a heart attack at the young age of 59. Crouch's death took a considerable toll on Walker, who already had a habit of binge drinking and staying out all night. In the fall of 1976, Walker and the Lost Gonzo Band were heading off to another show in their private plane. When the band boarded the plane, they discovered a disheveled Walker in the cockpit, asleep in the co-pilot's seat. The plane took off while Walker was still asleep – but when he came to his senses, he panicked out of confusion, grabbed the yoke, and sent the plane into a nosedive. Fortunately, the pilot quickly recovered and leveled out the plane. Although Walker and the band were spared from death, Nunn notes in his book that “the damage was done.”⁴ Upon landing, the Lost Gonzo Band came to a collective agreement that they could not continue to work with Walker. In an interview with John Inmon, he says the band realized that Walker was on a track that could hurt himself, and hurt the band along with him.⁵

² The song is a combination of “Pick-A-Little, Talk-A-Little” and “Goodnight Ladies” which are sung over each other in *The Music Man*, a musical originally performed on Broadway in 1957, with subsequent revival productions on Broadway in 1980, 2000, and 2022.

³ Nunn, *At Home with the Armadillo*, (Austin: Greenleaf Book Group Press, 2018), 209.

⁴ Nunn, *At Home with the Armadillo*, 211.

⁵ John Inmon, in conversation with author, February 2022.

The Lost Gonzo Band decided that their upcoming New Year’s Eve show (December 31st, 1976) would be the last show they officially played with Walker. Even though the band was still working on recording parts of *A Man Must Carry On*, they collectively agreed that leaving Walker was the best decision for their personal safety and well-being. The Gonzos admit that it wasn’t an easy decision; as the end of the year tolled, Nunn claims he “felt like [he] was leaving a part of himself behind.”⁶ The New Year’s Eve Show seemed like a grand finale of sorts – Walker and the band shared the stage at the Summit in Houston with Willie Nelson and a number of other big-name acts. When the show ended, Nunn describes that the “whole crew joined in the impending exodus,” and the Lost Gonzo Band ventured off on their own.⁷

This final chapter will unfold in three sections. First, it will illustrate the Lost Gonzo Band’s solo career after they parted ways with Walker and simultaneously analyze the band’s lasting impact on Austin music, specifically looking at the city’s blues and punk scenes. The chapter will then shift to introduce a new Gonzo, Freddie Krc, who played with Walker after the original Lost Gonzo Band left him. Krc plays a key role in the story of the Gonzos, as he goes on to establish himself as a member of the “Gonzo Survivors” and the “Gonzo Compadres,” and plays a central role in the reuniting of the Lost Gonzo Band in 2021. In the chapter’s third and final subsection, I will explore the individual endeavors of the band members in the 1980s, specifically elaborating on Hillis’s career shifts in management and club ownership, Livingston’s time touring with the U.S. State Department in India, Inmon’s continuing performance in Texas music , and

⁶ Nunn, *At Home with the Armadillo*, 212.

⁷ Nunn, *At Home with the Armadillo*, 212.

Nunn's solo career as a singer-songwriter. The analysis of these events and changes in the 1980s will further exhibit the lasting legacy of the Lost Gonzo Band and draw conclusions about their centrality to Austin's cultural and social history.

The (Solo) Lost Gonzo Band & Austin's Changing Musical Environment

In 1975, the hit television program *Austin City Limits* was created as what Jan Reid describes as a result of “university construction, not creative expression.”⁸ The University of Texas's television outlet, KLRN (later KLRU) had been recently transformed into a full-blown television station with numerous studios and expensive equipment. *Austin City Limits* was launched by PBS, which was still in its infancy, as a campaign to syndicate national shows produced by local affiliates. The pilot episode included a performance by Willie Nelson, whose local and national success inaugurated the show.⁹ His appearance successfully “communicated the feel of a small-venue performance, only a television screen away, and artfully [made] that seem not very far at all.”¹⁰ Nelson's rising national fame and the genesis of *Austin City Limits* coincided, which placed them together in a unique position: establishing a strong local identity, while simultaneously eliciting a powerful sense of national relevance.

The show's first full season was kicked off by Western swing revival group Asleep at the Wheel, followed by episodes featuring a number of local Texas artists such as Townes Van Zandt, Flaco Jiménez, Marcia Ball, and Doug Sahm, weaving together a

⁸ Reid, *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*, 280.

⁹ The pilot episode aired the same year that Willie Nelson released *Red Headed Stranger*, which was certified multi-platinum.

¹⁰ Tracey E. W. Laird, *Austin City Limits: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 14.

particular image of Texas identity: “Austin hipness, progressive country romanticism, and Armadillo-hippie-cowboy-folk-Lone Star-spirit.”¹¹ The first season appropriately concluded with an episode that featured Jerry Jeff Walker and the Lost Gonzo Band. At the beginning of the show’s second season, Nunn’s “London Homesick Blues” became the program’s theme song. The song’s chorus sings: “I wanna go home with the Armadillo / Good country music from Amarillo and Abilene / The friendliest people and the prettiest women you’ve ever seen.”¹² The producers of *Austin City Limits* made the conscious decision to use the live recording of the song from Luckenbach, which captured the participatory, homegrown nature of Austin’s music that was brewed in local honky-tonks and dancehalls.

A quintessential work in the progressive country scene, Nunn’s song was carefully chosen as the theme song of *Austin City Limits* to celebrate the program’s Texas roots and the Austin music scene’s critical role in setting the state apart on a national musical scale. Nunn’s recording of “London Homesick Blues” is synonymous with the Austin sound and progressive country music as a whole; written while Nunn was in England with Michael Murphey, it speaks to the scene’s larger impact. In his doctoral dissertation, Hugh Cullen Sparks maintains that Nunn’s song, which he describes as “a paean to Austin music and all things Texan,” was an “ideal representation of the loose, rock- and folk-inspired, tongue-in-cheek approach to music [that was] characteristic of

¹¹ Laird, *Austin City Limits*, 40.

¹² Gary P. Nunn, “London Homesick Blues,” recorded 1973, track 9 on *Viva Terlingua!*, MCA Records.

the [Lost Gonzo Band]” and members of the larger Austin Interchangeable Band.¹³

Sparks traces the musical characteristics of Austin’s progressive country music – those of anti-commercialism, spontaneity, and collaborative creativity – to the original members of the Lost Gonzo Band.

As *Austin City Limits* was airing “London Homesick Blues” as a musical representation of the city, the Lost Gonzo Band was beginning to experiment with new genres and sounds that were not country. The band’s solo sound differed greatly from theirs with Walker and incorporated elements of funk and disco, in addition to their traditional folk, rock, and country sensibilities. Their first solo album came out in 1975 while they were still working with Walker (the same year as *Ridin’ High*), titled *The Lost Gonzo Band*. This album featured Bob Livingston, Gary Nunn, John Inmon, Kelly Dunn (keyboards), Donny Dolan (drums), and Tomás Ramirez (saxophone). Bob Livingston contends that this first album aimed to “muddy the waters about what so-called progressive country music [was] about...throw a stick in the spokes.”¹⁴ Livingston, Nunn, and Inmon each brought their own collection of songs to the Nashville recording sessions, and the three of them “shared the spotlight,” each being individually featured on the album.¹⁵ *The Lost Gonzo Band* is truly a mixed bag – “Desperadoes” has a grungy hard-rock sound, “Take Advantage of Your Chances” features a banjo, giving off a

¹³ Hugh Cullen Sparks, “Stylistic Development and Compositional Processes of Selected Solo Singer/Songwriters in Austin, Texas,” (doctoral dissertation, University of Texas, 1984), 53.

¹⁴ M.D. Shafter, quoting Bob Livingston, “Lost with the Gonzos Again,” *Buddy Magazine*, November 1975, 15. [Note: M.D. Shafter, likely “Mad Dog Shafter,” is a pseudonym likely used by one of the Mad Dog literary outlaws who were discussed in Chapter Two. “Shafter” refers to the Texas town, about forty miles south of Marfa, that the group had aspirations to buy in hopes of making it into another Luckenbach.]

¹⁵ Nunn, *At Home with the Armadillo*, 201.

hillbilly-bluegrass sound, while “Love Drops” and “People Will Dance” are funky with a lot of saxophone.

After their first album, which was clearly a “departure from the Jerry Jeff thing,” the Gonzos continued to explore creative outlets that were not confined to the “progressive country” genre.¹⁶ In 1976, the band released *Thrills* under MCA Records while they were still with Walker. Like *The Lost Gonzo Band*, *Thrills* was a collection of songs written by Livingston, Nunn, and Inmon. *Thrills* also effectively combined the instrumentation and sounds from a multitude of genres and pushed the Gonzos further into pioneering the developing genre of Americana music. The original works that were recorded on both *The Lost Gonzo Band* and *Thrills* are evidence of the influence of acts such as The Beatles and Neil Young on the Gonzos’ music. The band embarked on a tour to promote *Thrills* and travelled all over the United States – from Seattle, to New York, to Los Angeles, to Georgia, to Chicago – in a station wagon with a cube van in tow, which stored their equipment.¹⁷ However, the “excitement created by [Walker] and the Lost Gonzo Band did not follow [them]”; the tour was not as successful as they had hoped, and they played to “half-filled rooms” most of the time.¹⁸

While it was evident that the Gonzos’ music was struggling to significantly reach a national audience, the band was encouraged by their loyal local following in Austin. After the tour, the Lost Gonzo Band frequented Austin clubs such as Castle Creek and the Soap Creek Saloon. The Soap Creek Saloon was a honky-tonk west of town opened by George and Carlyne Majewski in 1972. After the Armadillo’s switch to focusing on

¹⁶ Nunn, *At Home with the Armadillo*, 201.

¹⁷ John Inmon, in conversation with author, February 2022.

¹⁸ Nunn, *At Home with the Armadillo*, 213.

national acts, Soap Creek aimed to provide greater opportunities for local musicians.¹⁹

Soap Creek kept a regional focus on the Austin music scene, showcasing acts such as blues guitarist Stevie Ray Vaughan, Western-swing revivalists Asleep at the Wheel, and the Dixieland jazz sounds of Balcones Fault.²⁰

After their official break with Walker, the Lost Gonzo Band released a third album together in 1977 titled *Signs of Life*. This record was produced under a new record company, Capitol Records, because, as Livingston describes, “[MCA] said, ‘Where’s the country band we signed?’ and dropped [the Gonzos] from the label.”²¹ MCA’s rejection of the bands’ third album proves how the band was continuing to move away from the country sound and explore new expressions of musical style. Nunn claims Capitol Records to be “the epitome of the record industry” at that time, because they previously had the Beatles on their label.²² Having two albums already completed and a “packet full of songs” that they wrote, the Gonzos were feeling confident and excited about recording their third album.²³ However, *Signs of Life* didn’t achieve as much success as the band’s first two records. They had switched to writing songs that were “heartfelt, reflective, and sensitive expressions,” which Nunn suggests were “probably more suited to the mid-sixties than the late seventies.” By the end of the seventies, disco was becoming increasingly popular and the world was “looking for party songs.”²⁴

¹⁹ Shank, *Dissonant Identities*, 72.

²⁰ Margaret Moser, “Groover’s Paradise: The Ballad of Soap Creek Saloon,” *The Austin Chronicle* (Austin, Texas), October 12, 2001.
<https://www.austinchronicle.com/music/2001-10-12/83273/>.

²¹ Bob Livingston, in conversation with author, November 2021.

²² Nunn, *At Home with the Armadillo*, 223.

²³ John Inmon, in conversation with author, February 2022.

²⁴ Nunn, *At Home with the Armadillo*, 226.

In an interview, Livingston laments about how the Lost Gonzo Band's solo career didn't fully "embrace" the music they made with Walker and Murphey, but instead wrote new, original material, which he believes was ultimately "to a fault."²⁵ They ceased playing the songs that aided them gaining an initial following, such as Nunn's "London Homesick Blues" on *Viva Terlingua!*, and Livingston and Nunn's "Public Domain," and Inmon's "Goodbye Easy Street" on *Ridin' High*. After an unsuccessful promotional tour for *Signs of Life*, which contained just two shows in the Pacific Northwest, underlying tensions and disagreements within the Lost Gonzo Band began to surface.

The Lost Gonzo Band began to experience differences of opinion and conflicts of interest among band members. Nunn had been recently hired as a staff producer at Free Flow Productions with Michael Brovsky, the Gonzo manager who also produced most of Walker's albums since *Jerry Jeff Walker* in 1972. Although Nunn's project with the production company never achieved much success, it was clear to him that his focus was beginning to extend beyond just playing music with the Lost Gonzo Band.²⁶ Nunn ultimately quit the Lost Gonzo Band in 1979 and embarked on a solo career.

After Nunn's departure, Livingston and Inmon were contacted by Ray Wylie Hubbard, whose band had just recently left him.²⁷ The two joined Hubbard and became the "Ray Wylie Hubbard Band" for the next three years, up until about 1982. Inmon recalls working with Hubbard as being "a hell of a good time," claiming that "Ray was one of the best guys I ever worked with. He was really, really fair-minded and really

²⁵ Bob Livingston, in conversation with author, November 2021.

²⁶ Nunn, *At Home with the Armadillo*, 218.

²⁷ Hubbard's band was still Three Faces West – the band Livingston played with on his stint in New Mexico while working with Murphey on *Geronimo's Cadillac*.

sweet-natured, easy to work with...”²⁸ He calls the new type of music they were playing “new wave punk country,” explaining that Hubbard, who was inspired in-part by the performances of Bruce Springsteen, wanted to put on a “big, high-energy rock ‘n’ roll show” where they would play “loud” and “hard.”²⁹ In terms of chord progressions and structures, however, Inmon explains that Hubbard’s music was ultimately very similar to the progressive country music they had been playing with Walker; after a few years of experimenting with new sounds on their own, the Gonzos were back to playing a kind of country music.

While *Austin City Limits* continued to grow into a nationally acclaimed television program throughout the 1970s, the progressive country scene began to wane in popularity by the end of the decade. The music no longer resonated as it once had; as ethnomusicologist Tracey Laird puts it, progressive country “had completed its cycle of vitality and usefulness to distinguish Austin’s contemporary scene and consequently fell out of circulation.”³⁰ This paradox manifested itself in the downward financial spiral of the scene’s centerpiece, the Armadillo World Headquarters. Although the Armadillo closed in 1980, it remained poignant in the collective memories of Texans and is still regarded as the spiritual epicenter of Austin’s progressive country music scene.

Scholars have shared differing perspectives and opinions on the decline of the progressive country scene’s prominence in Austin. According to Jan Reid, the honest pastoral vision of progressive country music had been transformed into a virulent record company sales gimmick, and the wholesome cosmic cowboy character had evolved into a

²⁸ John Inmon, in conversation with author, February 2022.

²⁹ John Inmon, in conversation with author, February 2022.

³⁰ Laird, *Austin City Limits*, 43.

macho, drunk and sloppy concert-goer.³¹ Barry Shank furthers Reid's claim by declaring that the genre of progressive country had fallen victim to "the constraints of what was by now a nationally and commercially disseminated identity that had been stripped of its local anti-commercial resonance."³² Reid and Shank mutually contend that the progressive country initiative "collapsed" from a loss of local and regional relevance. However, Craig Hillis disputes this theory of cosmic cowboy disintegration. He maintains that the progressive country scene experienced a "dissipation" of the talent that made up Austin's music scene in the early 1970s. Therefore, Hillis claims that the "collapse" can be more accurately described as a "rearrangement."³³ Hillis is correct in his assertion, as Austin's hometown cosmic cowboys grew up and moved on to larger markets. Jerry Jeff Walker, Michael Murphey, and Willie Nelson went on to have successful national careers, and other local Austin acts such as Ray Wylie Hubbard, B.W. Stevenson, and Rusty Weir thrived in the eighties through live performance and album sales. Each artist continued to develop their craft and grow into an older, more mature version of themselves. Nevertheless, it was evident that Austinites were hanging up their Stetsons and putting up their boots to go explore the blues, rock, and punk acts that were becoming more prominent at local venues around town.

As early as 1975, Austin blues was emerging to provide a contrasting musical scene to the progressive country genre. Reid notes that while Austin's blues players felt like they were always "slighted" from the Armadillo, they found other places to play

³¹ Jan Reid, "Who Killed Redneck Rock?," *Texas Monthly*, December 1976.

³² Shank, *Dissonant Identities*, 75.

³³ Craig Hillis, "The Austin Music Scene in the 1970s: Songs and Songwriters" (doctoral dissertation, University of Texas, 2011), 171.

around town, such as Antone's, Soap Creek Saloon, and the Rome Inn – a pizza and spaghetti café near the University of Texas.³⁴ Antone's was becoming increasingly popular and developed into the launching pad for national blues acts such as Stevie Ray Vaughan and the Fabulous Thunderbirds. Because he felt that his heroes of Chicago and Texas blues were being forgotten or marginalized, founder Clifford Antone opened the club in 1975 to solidify the longevity of the blues scene in Austin. The first act to perform there was Clifton Chenier, the legendary father of zydeco music. Antone's became more than just a nightclub; it evolved into a “home to the blues, where white and black performers could jam and learn from each other.”³⁵ This mixing of races was not prevalent in the progressive country scene as most performers were white men, so the blues scene became an important building block for Austin's music scene to become inclusive and encouraging of a variety of acts.

The Lost Gonzo Band's influence was evident in the Austin blues scene, which rose to prominence with the successful career of Stevie Ray Vaughan. By the late 1970s, Vaughan had become a central fixture in the Austin music scene.³⁶ Reid claims that Vaughan was “not an easy sell,” noting he refused to turn down his amp volume, even after owners and customers complained, and occasionally didn't show up for performances at all.³⁷ When *Austin City Limits* booked Vaughan and the Fabulous Thunderbirds for the 1984 season, he played so loud that pieces of insulation from the studio ceiling dislodged themselves and flurried down onto the audience below.

³⁴ Reid, *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*, 288.

³⁵ Paul Ray in Jan Reid, *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*, 290.

³⁶ In his dissertation, Craig Hillis notes that Vaughan was a fixture at his Steamboat nightclub before he achieved national stature.

³⁷ Reid, *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*, 292.

Vaughan's care-free and unyielding attitude was a reflection of the approach to music that was exemplified by Walker and the Gonzos – he played what he wanted, when he wanted to, and how he wanted to.

The Lost Gonzo Band was also influential, if indirectly, in Austin's growing punk scene, which also took off in the late 1970s. In his work about Austin's punk scene, Shank traces the musical roots of American punk rock to the garage rock music of the 1960s, which, in conjunction with British rock 'n' roll bands such as The Ramones and the Sex Pistols, gave way to a new type of rock 'n' roll music. Although Shank is predominantly critical of Austin's progressive country movement, he has a begrudging respect for the members of the Lost Gonzo Band. He praises their "authentic" approach to performing and recording, their conscious commitment to remaining relatable and putting energy into the local scene, and their effort in avoiding the commercial and larger marketing schemes of the music industry. Shank contends that the tendency the Gonzos had to not take themselves too seriously (and not work with those who did) went on to define the next ten years of local musicians' attitudes.³⁸

However, Shank does not give the Gonzos full credit for laying the groundwork for Austin's punk scene. Shank describes that the punk musicians put a "renewed emphasis on local participation and a guarantee of personal interaction between performer and audience."³⁹ This "renewed emphasis" that Shank describes is, in fact, not a "renewal" at all; the commitment to Austin's local scene and the prioritization of audience engagement had been exhibited by the Gonzos' involvement in the progressive

³⁸ Shank, *Dissonant Identities*, 61.

³⁹ Shank, *Dissonant Identities*, 99.

country movement for the past decade. While Shank acknowledges the Lost Gonzo Band for their care-free, adaptable, and spontaneous musical approach, he fails to recognize both Walker's and the band's emphasis of audience engagement (and utilizing live recordings on albums to further connect the listener), and their dedication to Austin's music scene over their ambition to work their way up in the national music industry. Shank attempts to further differentiate the punks from the cosmic cowboys by claiming that "if [punk bands] wanted to record, they rented a four-track machine, set up in a garage, and laid down the tracks," rather than utilizing a traditional recording studio. This was also done by Walker and the Gonzos, namely at Rapp's Cleaners on *Jerry Jeff Walker*, and in the Luckenbach dance hall on *Viva Terlingua!* and *A Man Must Carry On*.

A central member of this growing punk scene was Freddie Krc from La Porte, Texas. Krc played with Roky Erickson and The Explosives, who were foundational in building the punk scene in Austin. Krc also played with Jerry Jeff Walker in the "Bandito Band," who backed him up in the years after the Gonzos split from him. His career would become increasingly intertwined with those of the other Gonzos while simultaneously remaining integral in the Austin punk and psych scenes.

Freddie "Steady" Krc

Freddie Krc grew up in La Porte, a small town between Houston and Galveston on the Gulf of Mexico. His father worked for Shell Oil Company, and his mother was a substitute teacher and worked at the library at the local high school.⁴⁰ Krc came from a

⁴⁰ Freddie Krc, in conversation with author, September 2022.

musical family; his paternal grandmother and her family played in the Czech Krenek family orchestra since 1864, arguably making them the oldest family band in the United States.⁴¹ Because of this, Krc was exposed to and began playing music at a young age, describing himself as a true “Beatle Kid” who became obsessed with music after seeing The Beatles on *The Ed Sullivan Show* in 1964. At nine years old, he began taking drum lessons and started a rock band called The Sound Kings that played at the community center in La Porte.⁴²

Krc’s family home was situated out in the countryside, which allowed him to practice at any time of the day without bothering the neighbors. He played in a horn band that performed splash-down parties for the astronauts on the Apollo 12 and Apollo 13 missions at Johnson Space Center. He was in the high school band as well and notes that he was “well advanced” going into his freshman year. He learned how to read trap charts (drum music) and was asked to play with the junior college jazz band while he was still in high school. When Krc graduated high school a half-year early, he enrolled in Lon Morris Junior College in Jacksonville, Texas, where majored in Theology and minored in English – both subjects he thoroughly enjoyed. However, Krc explains that he “just couldn’t quit playing music.”⁴³

Krc decided to quit school to pursue what he was truly passionate about. When he dropped out of college, he moved to Dallas in hopes of pursuing a career in music but was unable to get many drumming gigs. He migrated south to Houston and played in a hotel lounge band, claiming that he was “having so much fun getting to play for four to

⁴¹ Freddie Krc, in conversation with author, September 2022.

⁴² Freddie Krc, in conversation with author, September 2022.

⁴³ Freddie Krc, in conversation with author, September 2022.

six hours a night” that he didn’t consider “how uncool it was.”⁴⁴ The trajectory of Krc’s life changed forever when he went to see Michael Murphey play at the Liberty Hall in Houston one night. Krc ventured backstage at the venue and met Herb Steiner – the steel guitarist for Murphey, and previously for Jerry Jeff Walker. When Krc questioned Steiner, who was a little over ten years older than him, about how to get serious about playing music, Steiner exclaimed, “Well, move to where the music is!”⁴⁵ With a new sense of excitement, Krc settled in Austin in 1974.

In Austin, the music scene was thriving after the success of Walker’s *Viva Terlingua!*, Murphey’s *Geronimo’s Cadillac* and *Cosmic Cowboy Souvenir*, and Willie Nelson’s *Shotgun Willie*.⁴⁶ Krc moved to Austin in January of 1974 and got a gig playing five days a week at a barbecue restaurant in a Dixieland band. For every gig, he recalls that he made “five dollars, a plate of barbecue, and all the tips [he] was too painfully shy to ask for.”⁴⁷ Living on the average of about \$40 per week, Krc was consistently on the lookout for drumming gigs and sat by his phone all day waiting for calls.

In June 1975, Krc was hired to play drums by B.W. Stevenson, who he remembers as “one of the sweetest, nicest people, and one of the best singers to ever come out of Texas.”⁴⁸ Stevenson was a Dallas native and lived there throughout most of his musical career, although Austin claimed him as their own. At twenty-four years old, he became a national star after his big hit, “My Maria,” topped the charts in 1973.

⁴⁴ Freddie Krc, in conversation with author, September 2022.

⁴⁵ Freddie Krc, in conversation with author, September 2022.

⁴⁶ Although *Shotgun Willie* suffered from poor sales, it was a defining piece of work in laying the foundation for the growing progressive country scene that was taking Austin by storm.

⁴⁷ Freddie Krc, in conversation with author, September 2022.

⁴⁸ Freddie Krc, in conversation with author, September 2022.

However, Stevenson was dropped from his record deal with RCA after recording four albums with them. Krc notes that this was likely because of Stevenson's crippling stage fright, which he overcompensated for with alcohol. A few weeks after he was hired to work with Stevenson, Krc notes that Warner Brothers came to watch one of the band's performances in San Antonio and offered Stevenson a record deal. At the age of twenty-one and after only two months of being in the band, Krc travelled to Los Angeles to make a record with Stevenson called *We Be Sailin'*.

The record Stevenson and the band made in Los Angeles ultimately gave Krc the credibility to launch his professional career as a musician. At the studio, Stevenson made the risky demand that he would only record the album if he could use his own band and refused to use studio musicians. Krc feels lucky that even though he had never been on a major record label and didn't have much professional experience, Stevenson still trusted and believed in him, which brought him a significant amount of recognition in the music industry. Krc played with Stevenson for a little over a year and a half, claiming it to be one of the most rewarding experiences of his career.⁴⁹

In early 1977 at the young age of twenty-three, Krc received an invitation from Jerry Jeff Walker to play drums on the final tracks of *A Man Must Carry On*.⁵⁰ He joined a group of backing musicians who would come to be known as the "Bandito Band" which included former Gonzo saxophonist Tomás Ramirez; bassist Ron Cobb, who previously played with Michael Murphey in Boulder; Dave Perkins on lead guitar; Leo LeBlanc on steel guitar; Bobby Rambo on electric guitar; and Reese Wynans on

⁴⁹ Freddie Krc, in conversation with author, September 2022.

⁵⁰ Krc played on "Leavin' Texas" and "The Stranger (He was the Kind)."

keyboards.⁵¹ Krc describes their first gig in Aspen, Colorado as nerve-wracking, as the club was packed with big names such as Hunter S. Thompson, the Gonzo journalist who inspired the Lost Gonzo Band's namesake, and Steve Weissberg, who played with John Denver.⁵² Walker and the Bandito Band recorded the remaining songs on *A Man Must Carry On*, along with three other albums: *Contrary to Ordinary*, *Jerry Jeff*, and *Too Old To Change*.

Krc describes his experience working with Walker as “one of the most enjoyable things [he] ever did.”⁵³ He claims this is due to a few reasons: first, Walker genuinely cared about the music he was producing. Even with all the “wobbly, weird-y stuff he did,” Krc reminisces that Walker had an honest passion about music, performing and entertaining. Second, Krc claims Walker to be one of the greatest mentors he ever had. He gained a great amount of knowledge about the music industry just from watching Walker – learning both what to do, and what not to do. Third, Krc recalls the versatility of Walker as a musician, songwriter, and performer, praising Walker for his ability to switch from a rock ‘n’ roll song, such as “Hill Country Rain,” to something soft and poetic such as “Little Bird” or “Mr. Bojangles.”

However, after three years with Walker, Krc decided that he wanted to pursue a new musical endeavor – something that would challenge him and help him grow into a better musician.⁵⁴ He quit working with Walker and the Bandito Band and ventured off

⁵¹ In an interview with Krc, he talked highly of Reese Wynans, regarding him as one of the “best keyboard players in the world.” Wynans is best known for his work with Stevie Ray Vaughan.

⁵² Freddie Krc, in conversation with author, September 2022.

⁵³ Freddie Krc, in conversation with author, September 2022.

⁵⁴ Freddie Krc, in conversation with author, September 2022.

on his own. Inspired by the new pop-inspired sounds on the Austin music scene, Krc formed what he describes as a “power pop” group with Cam King (lead guitar and vocals) and Waller Collie (bass guitar and vocals) called The Explosives.⁵⁵ The Explosives rose to local and regional fame fairly quickly, playing at new wave and punk venues along with traditional rock ‘n’ roll venues around town. Before long, they were opening for acts such as The B-52s, The Ramones, and Joe Cocker.⁵⁶ When asked about the differences in audiences between Walker and The Explosives, Krc maintains that the crowd that Walker attracted was far more raucous, even though The Explosives’ audiences were younger. He chuckles at the idea of punk artists thinking their audiences are crazy, claiming that, “if you want to get crazy...go see Jerry Jeff Walker.”⁵⁷ While the new wave punk bands of the 1980s aimed to emulate the rowdy crowds that Walker and the Gonzos had drawn for over almost a decade, Krc proves that they could never quite reproduce the cosmic cowboy energy of the 1970s.

After a few months on their own, The Explosives began playing with Roky Erickson, who pioneered 1960s psychedelic rock in Austin with his band, the 13th Floor Elevators.⁵⁸ Radio deejay Woody Roberts was in attendance at an Elevators’ shows at the Vulcan Gas Company and describes their performances as “high-energy” with “a sound like no other [band] since.”⁵⁹ Erickson’s singing was intense and raw-edged, which

⁵⁵ Freddie Krc, in conversation with author, September 2022.

⁵⁶ Freddie Krc, interview by Kevin Rathert, *It’s Psychedelic Baby Magazine*, August 6, 2017. <https://www.psychedelicbabymag.com/2017/08/interview-with-freddie-steady-krc-of.html>.

⁵⁷ Freddie Krc, in conversation with author, September 2022.

⁵⁸ The 13th Floor Elevators had a psychedelic punk rock sound inspired musical acts such as R.E.M., ZZ Top, and Janis Joplin.

⁵⁹ Woody Roberts, *Horse Racing and Rock ‘n’ Roll* (Austin: Treaty Oak Publishers, 2020), 150.

excited the crowd, and Tommy Hall's rhythmic electric jug set the band's style apart from any other band in Austin. Only a few years into playing together, however, the 13th Floor Elevators fell apart when Erickson, who suffered from paranoid schizophrenia, was institutionalized in 1968 at the Rusk hospital in East Texas following an arrest for marijuana possession. While he was there, Erikson formed a band, played music, and wrote poems that he smuggled out of the hospital which would, eventually, be published in a book titled *Openers*.

Along with playing shows on their own, Krc and The Explosives became Erickson's backup band from 1979-1981. Krc notes that he and Erickson became very close friends over the three years they worked together; because Erickson did not have a driver's license, Krc drove him around town and accompanied him on errands. The two musicians spent a significant amount of time together, talking, laughing and telling stories. In regard to his music, Krc claims that Erickson "always impressed [him]...he absolutely understood the craft of songwriting and form."⁶⁰ Referring to his 1981 release "Two-Headed Dog," Krc recalls that Erickson "would get off on these verses and be riffin' and trippin' about imagery and different things, and then when it came to that chorus, BAM! He'd hit you again with it. That's great songwriting!"⁶¹ While Erickson was primarily influenced by rock 'n' roll and psychedelia, he also adopted the same attitudes and values about songwriting as the musicians in the progressive country

⁶⁰ Freddie Krc, in conversation with author, September 2022.

⁶¹ Freddie Krc, in conversation with author, September 2022.

scene.⁶²After four years together and eight albums released, The Explosives separated after the release of their last album, *Restless Natives*, in 1982.

As the Austin music scene continued to shift throughout the 1980s, Krc remained a central piece in the punk scene, the psych scene, and what had become of the progressive country scene. His cross-genre musical endeavors allowed him to be an adaptable and resourceful backing musician for Stevenson, Walker, and Erickson, while the experience he acquired from forming and leading The Explosives provided him with greater skills to use in his future solo career. Krc also became influential in the later incarnations of the Lost Gonzo Band and would go on to play an essential role in maintaining the legacy of the progressive country movement and the Austin music scene more broadly.

Gonzos Around the World

The members of the Lost Gonzo Band would go on to leave significant impacts on local, national, and global communities and cultures after their initial separation in the late 1970s. Through Hillis's ownership of clubs and venues in Austin and his later academic pursuits, Livingston's "Cowboys and Indians" musical program in India, Nunn's successful solo career, and Inmon's involvement in the Texas blues scene, each member of the Lost Gonzo Band extended their knowledge and passion for Austin music to their greater communities on a local, national, and international stage.

⁶² When Erickson wrote "Two-Headed Dog," progressive country artist Doug Sahm played lead guitar. The two were good friends, and Sahm had a profound impact on Erickson's musical philosophy.

After his break with Jerry Jeff Walker following *Viva Terlingua!* in 1973, Craig Hillis went back to record another album with Michael Murphey. However, Hillis stopped touring in 1975 to pursue a different aspect of the music business. He was hired at an Austin-based artist management company, Moon Hill Management, which he compares to “a pragmatic graduate program in the entertainment industry.”⁶³ While at Moon Hill, Hillis worked to secure performance dates for local artists at nightclubs and coffee houses across the nation. While Moon Hill acted as a catalyst for Hillis to project himself into the management side of the music industry, the company also aided in establishing Hillis as a record producer. Through Moon Hill, he worked on recording projects with artists such as Steven Fromholz, Rusty Weir, B.W. Stevenson, and Bill and Bonnie Hearne. He also served as the first national talent consultant for *Austin City Limits*, a job which consisted of prepping performers and securing commitments from local and national musical acts for future seasons of the show.⁶⁴

This experience at Moon Hill laid the foundation for Hillis to continue pursuing other avenues of management in Austin’s music industry. In 1978, Hillis was asked to serve as the personal manager for Michael Murphey in Colorado. He notes that one of the highlights of working with Murphey during this time was his involvement on Murphey’s *Lone Wolf* record, which was recorded in Los Angeles with a number of the most acclaimed session players on the West Coast and was produced by John Boylan.⁶⁵ After almost a year and a half of working for Murphey, Hillis moved back to Austin to pursue

⁶³ Craig Hillis, “The Austin Music Scene in the 1970s,” 13.

⁶⁴ Craig Hillis, “The Austin Music Scene in the 1970s,” 15.

⁶⁵ In his dissertation, Hillis writes that Boylan was an acclaimed record producer that was of the same class as Bob Johnston (*Geronimo’s Cadillac*). He produced acts such as Linda Ronstadt, Pure Prairie League, and Ricky Nelson.

another dimension of the music industry: nightclub management. He bought Steamboat, a popular nightclub on Sixth Street, in 1982. He notes that his shift to club ownership “enabled [him] to engage the skills [he] learned by taking a popular nightspot and molding it into a popular performance venue and national showcase.”⁶⁶ Steamboat’s success allowed Hillis to build the new incarnation of the Saxon Pub in 1990, which hosted acts that were prominent in Hillis’s social and professional circles from the 1970s. The Saxon Pub, which is still in operation today, showcases the performances of a number of local and national acts in a low-key, intimate environment. Hillis sold both nightclubs in 1996 when he decided to reinvent himself as an academic, pursuing a PhD in American Studies from the University of Texas. His doctoral dissertation explores the careers and impacts of Austin singer-songwriters in the 1970s.

While the impact of the Lost Gonzo Band is felt in the local Austin music scene, their influence has also expanded to a cross-pollination of cultures on an international stage with Bob Livingston’s sharing of cowboy songs. Livingston began following the spiritual teachings of an Indian guru in the 1970s, which took him and his wife, Iris, back and forth between America and India.⁶⁷ In 1986, he learned of an opportunity to work for the U.S. State Department as a cultural emissary. On the way to his audition (along with John Inmon, who joined him on this particular trip), he gazed out the window of the train and recognized the landscape of India as being very similar to the landscape of West Texas. That got him thinking:

I realized that our two countries not only had a lot in common geographically, but that our people have a tremendous amount in common as well. We all have the

⁶⁶ Craig Hillis, “The Austin Music Scene in the 1970s,” 16.

⁶⁷ Craig Hillis, “Cowboys and Indians: The International Stage” *Journal of Texas Music History* 2, no 1 (2002): 4.

same emotions. We all love, we all have frustrations and fears, we all want the best for our families, there are ‘bad guys’ to look out for and there are heroes.⁶⁸

Livingston realized the best way to convey this was through the image of the American cowboy, telling the fabled stories of the American Wild West.

Livingston got the job with the State Department and immediately started researching the American cowboy. He learned an extensive repertoire of cowboy songs and studied icons in the cowboy lore such as Woody Guthrie, Jimmie Rodgers, and Alan and John Lomax. He also incorporated the teachings of his guru into his musical program, weaving in notes of spiritual enlightenment and unity into his cowboy message of goodwill.⁶⁹ With this message at the forefront of his mind, he embarked on State Department tours in South Asia and the Middle East, aiming to build cultural bridges between East and West. With no guidance or censure from the federal government, Livingston was left to his own devices in developing and delivering the music program that he came to call “Cowboys and Indians.”

Livingston often played with classically-trained Indian musicians, incorporating traditional instruments such as tablas and the sitar into his musical program, in the spirit of cultural exchange.⁷⁰ When performing in India, he often used an exaggerated Texas accent and wore a big cowboy hat while telling stories of the American cowboy. The people of India were incredibly fascinated and enthralled with the concept of the Wild

⁶⁸ Bob Livingston, quoted in Hillis, “Cowboys and Indians,” 4.

⁶⁹ Hillis, “Cowboys and Indians,” 5.

⁷⁰ Tablas are a pair of Indian hand drums. They can be played solo or as an accompaniment in larger musical ensembles. A sitar is a traditional Indian string instrument that is played by plucking the strings with a metallic pick. The sitar was also adopted by Western musicians, such as The Beatles and the Rolling Stones, in popular music of the 1960s and 1970s.

West as part of American culture. In addition to traditional cowboy tunes, Livingston began incorporating songs that were popularized by the progressive country movement in Austin. In an interview, he notes that songs such as Hubbard's "Up Against the Wall, Redneck Mother" had a tendency to "follow [him] around." One night, after an outdoor show in New Delhi, Livingston recalls that "an older woman in a beautiful sari came up and said [to him], 'Tell me one thing: Can you play that song, 'Redneck Mother'? I very much enjoy that one.'"⁷¹ Amidst the rise of mass media in India and the popularization of music channels such as MTV in the latter part of the 20th century, Livingston viewed his program as an "organic" alternative to the commodified American culture that was being consumed by the people of India. He consciously kept his focus on the American cowboy, an image he describes as "one of the purest things that foreigners know about America," to show that there was much more to American culture than the sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll message that was communicated on MTV.⁷²

In the *Journal of Texas Music History* article "Cowboys and Indians," Craig Hillis argues that Livingston's international cultural-exchange program is representative of the scope and power of the 1970s Austin music scene, declaring that Livingston shaped the cowboy image and Texas progressive country music into "an effective tool of American diplomacy."⁷³ The musical confluence that is exhibited through the "Cowboys and Indians" program points to the ability for diverse cultures to come together and lay the foundation for political, economic and civic harmony. As Livingston has effectively brought Texas music across continents while blending cultures and preaching a message

⁷¹ Bob Livingston, in conversation with author, November 2021.

⁷² Bob Livingston, quoted in Hillis, "Cowboys and Indians," 11.

⁷³ Craig Hillis, "Cowboys and Indians," 2.

of “goodwill and unity” throughout Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, he has produced a cultural product that is representative of Austin’s musical traditions.⁷⁴

John Inmon remained increasingly relevant in the Austin music scene after the Gonzos split and continued working with acclaimed musical artists around the city. In 1976, he played guitar and sang back-up vocals for Steven Fromholz’s album entitled *A Rumor in my Own Time*. He also worked with country acts such as Jimmie Dale Gilmore, songwriters such as Bobby Bridger, and blues acts such as Omar and the Howlers throughout the 1980s.⁷⁵ Inmon continued to have the reputation of a dependable and adaptable guitar player who could smoothly transition between genres and impress audiences with complicated guitar licks.

When Gary P. Nunn left the Lost Gonzo Band, he embarked on what would become a very successful solo career. He formed his first band, “Sons of the Bunkhouse” (later called the “Bunkhouse Boys”), and headed out for what he calls a “Southwestern pilgrimage” in 1979.⁷⁶ This pilgrimage took the newly formed band to New Mexico, Colorado, Arizona, and finally California, playing shows at clubs and coffee houses along the way. While he received the opportunity to open for some well-known artists such as George Thorogood, it was clear to Nunn that his new band was inexperienced and his personal folky repertoire of songs was not well-received by rock ‘n’ roll audiences. Discouraged, Nunn retreated back to Austin and played solo gigs in local clubs.

Nunn suddenly had an excited idea: he decided that he wanted to produce his own record. In 1980, he and his band travelled to Los Cerrillos, New Mexico, a tiny adobe

⁷⁴ Hillis, “The Austin Music Scene in the 1970s,” 25.

⁷⁵ John Inmon, in conversation with author, March 2022.

⁷⁶ Nunn, *At Home with the Armadillo*, 242.

town with a small recording studio, and they began recording an album. In true Gonzo fashion, there was no rehearsal beforehand, and Nunn arrived to the studio with a few songs from other artists to record as well. The record, titled *Nobody But Me*, received great praise from critics and music reviewers. Nunn and the Sons of the Bunkhouse did a record release at the Armadillo World Headquarters.

At this point, Nunn was now a songwriter, performing artist, music publisher, record producer, and he owned a record label with just one product in its catalogue. He calls himself a “jack of all trades, a master of none,” which would turn into the inspiration for one of his hit songs in 1996.⁷⁷ Throughout the rest of 1980, Nunn and the Bunkhouse Boys travelled across the country to promote the album, achieving much more success than they did on their first tour. On New Year’s Eve of that year, they performed as the opening act for the “Last Dance At The ‘Dillo” – the final show at the Armadillo World Headquarters before it closed. As if to tip a hat to the iconic run of the progressive country scene that was central at the venue, the show was closed out by none other than Jerry Jeff Walker and the former Lost Gonzo Band.⁷⁸

The Lost Gonzo Band continued to impact Austin’s music scene after the decline of the progressive country movement. Through exploring new ways to engage with the music industry, working with acts from a variety of genres, beginning new solo adventures, and even taking Austin music to a global stage, the Gonzos remained relevant in the Austin music scene and critical in its continued development. After the initial band split, their individual adventures and musical values would serve as statements to their

⁷⁷ Gary P. Nunn, “Jack of All Trades,” recorded 1996, track 6 on *Under My Hat*, Campfire Records.

⁷⁸ Nunn, *At Home with the Armadillo*, 253.

continued dedication for the local music scene and their lasting legacy as Texas music icons.

V. CONCLUSION

As I pulled up to the Lost Gonzo Band rehearsal at the Space ATX recording studio in South Austin, my stomach churned. At that point, I only had a few months of this project under my belt and, as a young woman in her twenties, I was not exactly sure what to expect in this situation. Did the band know who I was? Did they know I was coming? I spoke with the Gonzos' manager, D Foster, on the phone earlier that morning, but our conversation wasn't exactly "reassuring" in regard to my hopes for the day. I composed written interview questions for the band members and was hoping to get time to talk with a few of them during or after the rehearsal. However, the band was on a time crunch before their big reunion show at Gruene Hall that Saturday, so I understandably wasn't Foster's biggest concern. I was told I could come observe their last rehearsal before the big day, but Foster admitted that he was not sure if there would be time for interviews afterward.¹

Space ATX had a very modern vibe to it. Although it was situated under a blanket of oak trees (much like the Luckenbach dance hall), the architecture of the building was made up of straight, clean lines, and the lobby smelled like a dentist office. Everything I knew about the Lost Gonzo Band led me to expect their recording studio of choice to be ragged and informal, but this building was far from Rapp's Cleaners or Dale Ashby and Son's mobile recording truck. However, as I entered the room and the band stood there in front of me, everything I read and researched suddenly began to come to life. As I watched Bob Livingston, Gary P. Nunn, John Inmon, and Freddie Krc, I was finally getting a glimpse of what it really meant to be a Gonzo.

¹ I ended up getting to interview Gary Nunn after the rehearsal.

I grabbed a seat at the front of the room and settled in to watch the action. The band's setlist for the concert was a mix of Murphey's songs, Walker's songs, and their own personal works. The Gonzos seamlessly shifted from folk, to rock, to blues, to country, picking up on each other's non-verbal cues. In the middle of rehearsing a song, they occasionally stopped playing to tease apart a harmony or a guitar lick, and then would start right back up again. While the rehearsal was free-flowing and spontaneous, it was still very put-together. The band mates occasionally bickered like brothers (at one point Inmon jokingly remarked that, "the Gonzo Band is a band that starts every set with an argument"²) but then moments later would break out into a fit of laughter.

The following Saturday night, the Lost Gonzo Band held their sold-out reunion concert at Gruene Hall. The four bandmates were joined by Steve Layne on guitar and David Webb on keyboards as they played and sang a tribute to their years with Jerry Jeff Walker and Michael Murphey.³ When asked about why the Gonzos decided to reunite and start playing music again, Livingston remarks that:

I realize now what we did. We played on all this material. When the Lost Gonzo Band left Jerry Jeff in 1977 and went out on our own, we thought we'd play our own stuff. We didn't embrace the music we already played, like "LA Freeway," "Sangria Wine," "Geronimo's Cadillac," or "Cosmic Cowboy"... so now we're gonna [embrace] it... We want to take credit for some of that Texas Music magic. We were the soundtrack. We were 'the Austin Interchangeable Band.' If anyone deserves to play these songs, it's us.⁴

² John Inmon, quote from Lost Gonzo Band rehearsal, as observed by author, October 2021.

³ Lost Gonzo Band in concert, as observed by author, October 2021.

⁴ Bob Livingston quoted in Joe Nick Patoski, "The Lost Gonzo Band talks Jerry Jeff Walker, Austin Music in the '70s, and Reuniting at Gruene Hall," *Texas Highways*, October 15, 2021. <https://texashighways.com/travel-news/the-lost-gonzo-band-talks-jerry-jeff-walker-austin-music-in-the-70s-and-reuniting-at-gruene-hall/>.

Inmon notes that the Gonzo reunion was also, in part, to pay tribute to Walker, who passed away in October 2020:

[Jerry Jeff] didn't realize it, but he was a good teacher. He also provided opportunities for all of us to grow professionally and musically and personally. There's a lot of gratitude there. It would embarrass him now to say all this to him, but there it is. That's what's in my heart.⁵

The band's reunion after all these years speaks to their continued dedication to the sharing of Austin music and their passion for the art they created together. A common bond and genuine liveliness that was shared between concert attendees at Gruene Hall made the room feel warm and welcoming, almost resembling the likeness of a family reunion. As the concert started and dancing and singing filled the space, the whole room drifted closer together, experiencing a spiritual and emotional interconnectedness. This organic, engaging act of culturally meaningful musical performance, almost fifty years after the release of *Viva Terlingua!* and *Cosmic Cowboy Souvenir*, further emphasizes the Lost Gonzo Band's lasting impact on Austin's musical legacy.

Gonzo Collaboration Post-1980s

After the zenith of progressive country music in the 1970s, the Lost Gonzo Band continued to work together sporadically throughout the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. As Nunn was continuing to explore his solo career in the 1980s, Livingston, Inmon and Krc went back to work with Walker, forming the "Gonzo Survivors," and later the "Gonzo Compadres." Inmon notes that the term "Gonzo" was clearly very capitalized upon during the time.⁶ In 1991, the band received an unexpected proposition from a student at

⁵ John Inmon quoted in Patoski, "The Lost Gonzo Band talks Jerry Jeff Walker."

⁶ John Inmon, in conversation with author, February 2022.

the University of Michigan named Mike Nyland, who loved the Lost Gonzo Band. Nyland was, according to Inmon, a wealthy stockbroker who was very well-versed in money management. He offered money to make another Gonzo record. The Gonzos agreed, Nyland put up the money, and the band – including Nunn – recorded *Rendezvous*.⁷ In 1995, Nyland offered the money to make yet another Lost Gonzo Band record. The Gonzos (without Nunn this time) used Nyland’s donation to record *Hands of Time*. A music reviewer from the *Austin Chronicle* calls this album “a typical Gonzo scattershot,” complete with Inmon’s impressive guitar solos and Livingston’s contribution of Indian-inspired music peppered throughout the album.⁸ Inmon admits that recording *Hands of Time* without Nunn “never did feel quite right,” but he was proud of it nonetheless.⁹

As Livingston, Inmon, Krc, and Nunn continued to tour and produce Gonzo music, Craig Hillis was looking at Austin’s music industry through a new lens. After twenty years in the mainstream music business, Hillis decided to reinvent himself as an academic and enrolled in the University of Texas to complete his undergraduate degree in 1990. After receiving a B.A. in History, Hillis went on to pursue both a M.A. and PhD in American Studies. He has authored and co-edited a total of three books and has written extensively for newspapers and journals such as *The Austin American Statesman*, *The Austin Chronicle*, and *The Journal for Texas Music History*. His scholarly work, which is

⁷ John Inmon, in conversation with author, February 2022.

⁸ Lee Nichols, review of *Hands of Time*, Lost Gonzo Band, *Austin Chronicle*, July 7, 1995.

⁹ John Inmon, in conversation with author, February 2022.

largely written about his experience in the Austin music scene and combines his personal stories with academic analysis, helped me tremendously while writing this thesis.

The Gonzos' influence continued to extend into the 21st century, not only throughout Texas, but also across the world. The continuation of Livingston's cultural program in India proves the lasting impact of progressive country music in different cultures on an international scale. In his article about Livingston's international program, Hillis argues that cultural products from the Austin music scene – such as *Viva Terlingua!* and other hit albums – were “pragmatic manifestations of a prolific climate of creativity and examples of the enduring influence of the Austin music scene in a trans-America cultural setting.”¹⁰ Livingston is currently writing a memoir, in which he spends ample time describing his experiences in the 1970s Austin music scene. His vivid storytelling perfectly encapsulates the many lives he has lived: from Lubbock, to Austin, to India and back.

The Lasting Legacy of the Lost Gonzo Band

The Lost Gonzo Band's production of collaborative and spontaneous musical recordings and engagement in organic forms of musical performance laid the foundation for Austin's development into the “Live Music Capital of the World.” Like the artists they played with, the Lost Gonzo Band emphasized the value of live performance and gained much of their fame from performing in front of audiences. Even in 2021, the band still charms the audience during their live performances – they tell stories, engage

¹⁰ Hillis, “The Austin Music Scene in the 1970s,” 39.

actively with the audience, and have an overall captivating stage presence.¹¹ When the Lost Gonzo Band recorded with Walker, the live recordings that were included on albums brought a level of excitement and realness to the songs, making the listener feel as if they were in the audience, singing along to “Up Against the Wall, Redneck Mother” with everyone else. This allowed for a feeling of communal bonding among progressive country audiences and strengthened social relations through the art of musical performance, which was also replicated to its fullest extent on recordings as well.

The Lost Gonzo Band’s traits of versatility and adaptability were also key in their musical performances. Walker didn’t call out songs on stage or create a set list before a show; rather, he played whatever he wanted to play, or whatever song the audience was asking for, and the band was prepared to follow wherever his impulses led. Because of their diverse backgrounds and extensive experience in different genres, the Lost Gonzo Band did this seamlessly. As the backing band for Austin’s biggest stars, their role in interpreting and embellishing compositions that singer-songwriters brought to the creative table was unmatched.¹² Throughout the 1970s, they remained the most desirable band in town as they were able to easily transition between genres, follow a band leader, and write their own songs.

In the wake of musical commercialization and mass consumption, the Gonzos maintained relevancy to Austin’s audiences who were seeking musical artists that were local, noncommercial, genuine representations of what it meant to be Texan. Their commitment to their local scene rather than a national scene made them relatable and

¹¹ The Lost Gonzo Band in concert, as observed by author, October 2021.

¹² Hillis, “The Austin Music Scene in the 1970s,” 166.

desirable to the young listeners in Austin who rejected what they perceived to be musical commodification and established authority. It was clear to these listeners that the Gonzos were focused on personal pleasure and the pursuit of happiness rather than national financial success. Their unconventional approach to music and their ideas about recording and performing allowed them to remain at the center of Austin’s progressive country music scene in the 1970s.

The Lost Gonzo Band also had an incredible ability to harmonize with one another. Audio tapes from 1972 rehearsals of Jerry Jeff Walker and the Lost Gonzo Band reveal that Bob Livingston and Gary P. Nunn take time to nail down the correct harmonies together between songs.¹³ As previously stated, this emphasis on harmonization was also evident at their rehearsals before their 2021 reunion show at Gruene Hall. From 1972 to 2021, it has remained a priority of the band to perfect specific harmonies and match pitches with each other. While both rehearsals were undoubtedly loose and easy-going, their attention to detail with these harmonies also exhibited their true musicianship which has persisted through the tests of time.¹⁴

While Gary P. Nunn, Bob Livingston, Craig Hillis, John Inmon, Freddie Krc – and even Michael Murphey and Jerry Jeff Walker – were not country artists, they laid the foundation for “progressive country music” and transformed the traditional definitions of “country” music in the process. These folk singer-songwriters and rock ‘n’ roll musicians effectively exhibited the “cosmic cowboy” image on the Austin music scene and were

¹³ Tape #004, “2B” (Dale Ashby and Father Mobile, Luckenbach, Texas), August 16, 1973, audio recording, Jerry Jeff Walker Collection, Wittliff Collections, Texas State University.

¹⁴ Lost Gonzo Band rehearsals, as observed by author, October 2021.

therefore seen as representations of genuine realness as times were changing. The traditional, conservative, polished traditions of country music were no longer relevant in Austin – the Lost Gonzo Band and the artists they played with reconstructed the way country music was perceived and performed.

In *Cosmic Cowboys and New Hicks*, Travis Stimeling contends that “musical analysis serves as an entry point to cultural understanding.”¹⁵ Understanding the Lost Gonzo Band and their lasting impact on the Austin music scene reveals broad cultural, social, and political change that was taking place in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Their adaptability, spontaneity, and collaborative approach to music, coupled with their steadfast devotion to the local Austin music scene, made the Lost Gonzo Band creative pioneers who broke new ground to shape Austin into the “Live Music Capital of the World.”

¹⁵ Travis Stimeling, *Cosmic Cowboys and New Hicks* ix.

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