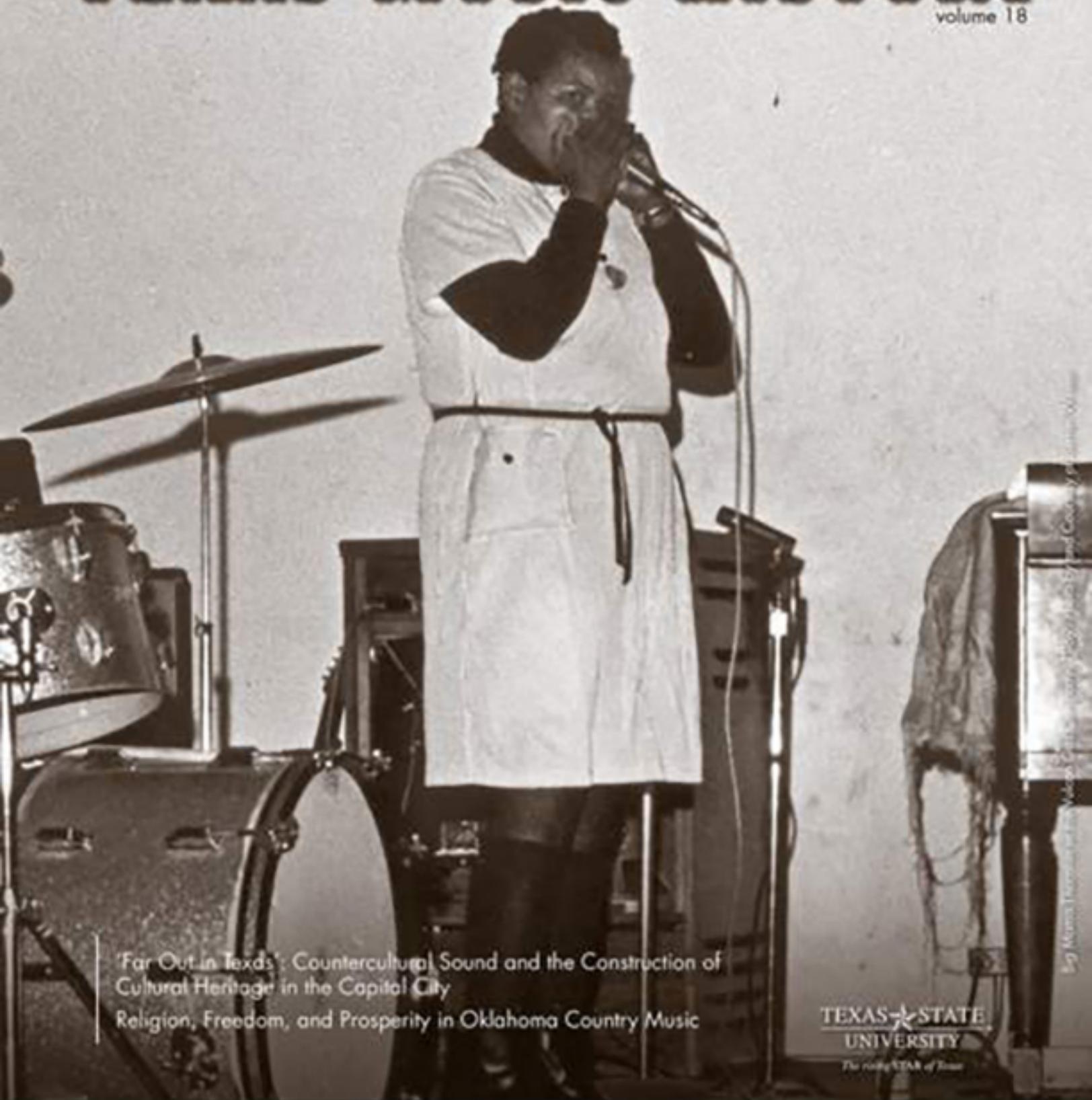


The Journal of

2018

TEXAS MUSIC HISTORY

volume 18



'Far Out in Texas': Countercultural Sound and the Construction of Cultural Heritage in the Capital City
Religion, Freedom, and Prosperity in Oklahoma Country Music

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Letter from the Director



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This issue also is an important milestone for me personally. After nearly a quarter century of teaching at Texas State University and nineteen years as Director of the Center for Texas Music History, I am retiring on September 1, 2018. I'm quite pleased to say that the Center and its many important educational programs will continue under the very capable leadership of Dr. Jason Mellard, who has served as Assistant Director of the Center for the past five years. Jason is an outstanding scholar, a gifted and popular teacher, and is ideally suited to lead the Center into the future. Please continue to support Jason as you have so generously supported and encouraged me, and be watching for some very exciting new projects on the horizon.

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The *Journal of Texas Music History* is published annually by the Center for Texas Music History at Texas State University. The contents of this journal do not necessarily represent the views of the university.

Subscription: There is no charge to receive the *Journal*. Simply contact the Center for Texas Music History to be placed on our mailing list.

Article Submissions:
Please submit manuscripts by email in Microsoft Word, Chicago Style, to jasonmellard@txstate.edu or mail to Journal of Texas Music History, Department of History, Texas State University, 601 University Drive, San Marcos, TX 78666.

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ISSN 1535-7104

The Journal of

TEXAS MUSIC HISTORY

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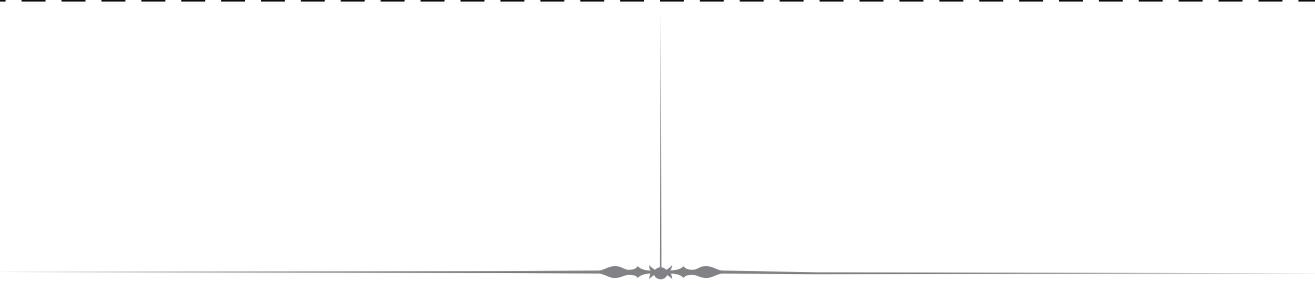
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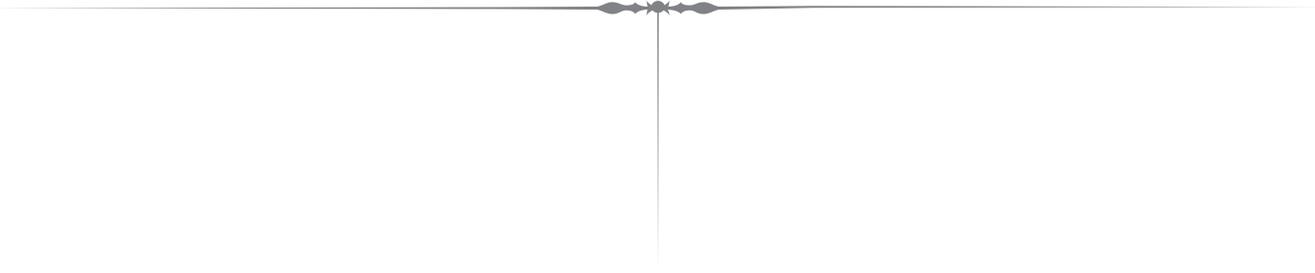
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'Far Out in Texas': Countercultural Sound and the Construction of Cultural Heritage in the Capital City

Jennifer Ruch





“There’s something happening here, but what it is ain’t exactly clear.”¹ Little did Dallas native Stephen Stills, of the late 1960s rock band Buffalo Springfield, know when he penned the evocative lyrics of “For What It’s Worth,” that the first line of the song would come to encapsulate a generation’s feelings of restlessness during this tumultuous time in America’s history. The cultural environment that came to characterize the 1960s and 1970s has become a present-day source of fascination for the creative imagination of popular culture. As music historian Brian Ward states, “[F]ew dispute that popular music was a powerful cultural, social, and economic force in the period,” but music also played an integral role in shaping how later generations would come to remember the era.² The impact of popular music on the public’s collective memory regarding the 1960s and 1970s frequently contributes to a romanticized, sometimes inaccurate, historical narrative.

This article is intended to highlight the ways in which collective public memory of 1960s-1970s counterculture forged contemporary applications of cultural heritage both in fact and in myth. Specifically, it explores the development of countercultural music scenes from the 1960s through the 1970s within the regional context of Austin, Texas. According to Dirk Spenneman, cultural heritage is the “result of human interaction with the environment and one another.” Since the value that groups and communities assign to both tangible and intangible forms of culture cannot be systematically predicted, cultural heritage is a human construct.³

In this study, the term “counterculture” is used to describe the collective cultural beliefs and expressions of a group or community whose ideals run counter to those of mainstream society. The term counterculture, especially when used in the context of the 1960s, typically refers to the emerging youth subculture of the period, which grew in large part out of the deep societal and generational tensions present in American society at that time. Over time, however, the public’s collective memory of “1960s counterculture” has come to be viewed by many in more of a nostalgic, even colorful light and is often used as part of a highly romanticized historical narrative of “hippies” and the hippie lifestyle.

This particular study in counterculture looks at the young people who participated in the psychedelic and progressive country music scenes in Austin during this era. Today, Austin markets itself as the “Live Music Capital of the World” in order to attract national and international attention as an

acknowledge music’s increasing role as a mass-produced (and mass-consumed) commodity at a time when twentieth-century American society was undergoing rapid technological and cultural transformations. The advent of radio and recorded music, along with the rapid evolution of the music industry in general throughout much of the early twentieth century, brought about a steadily increasing demand for music as a marketable commodity within mainstream culture. As a result, the public had an opportunity to choose from a remarkably diverse array of artists and musical styles. Demographic and regional limitations no longer dictated which forms of music the public could access.

During the post-World War II economic boom of the 1950s, Americans began to spend an unprecedented amount of their disposable income on new forms of leisure and entertainment. Mass production of music helped provide a new arena of consumption in which accessibility and affordability

10 The countercultural forces that developed in Austin from the 1960s through the 1970s helped shape new perceptions of regional identity and forge musical subcultures, such as the psychedelic rock and progressive country music scenes, which became integral to Austin’s subsequent cultural identity.

eclectic music hub and an incubator for creative expression.⁴ This article examines how and why the 1960s and 1970s served as an important transitional period in Austin’s musical history and helped lead to the formation of a romanticized collective public memory that persists to this day.

The countercultural forces that developed in Austin from the 1960s through the 1970s helped shape new perceptions of regional identity and forge musical subcultures, such as the psychedelic rock and progressive country music scenes, which became integral to Austin’s subsequent cultural identity. Barry Shank, a professor of comparative studies and popular music at Ohio State University, explains that Austin became a “center of cultural possibility” where young people could “live a bohemian, beatnik, proto-hippie life and mark their own difference from the Texan cultural mainstream.”⁵ Shank portrays the city as a mecca for young people who had grown disillusioned with a wide array of cultural, social, and political norms found elsewhere throughout the state.

To understand the relationship between youth culture and popular music during this period, it is necessary to

intersected. Before this, radio was the primary means for public distribution of music. Radio featured a broad range of both regional and national programming that included music, lectures, and weekly variety shows.⁶

Popular music quickly became part of that leisurely consumption and a unique American pastime of the twentieth century. Popular culture during the 1940s and 1950s changed dramatically. Television, music, and technology all became integral characteristics of mid-twentieth-century American life. Growing wages provided many families with discretionary income that allowed for rapid and widespread upward mobility. The increased purchase of automobiles and the new recreational opportunities they provided reflected the era’s general upswing in economic prosperity. The proliferation of fast food franchises occurred in large part as a result of this new-found mobility. Theme parks, resorts, and other tourist attractions grew in number and popularity during this time and are additional evidence of the country’s economic prosperity, increased mobility, and pursuit of leisure activities. Convenience, consumerism, and the budding concept of

immediate gratification were all important components of the rapidly evolving American cultural environment during the mid-twentieth century.

Leisure and recreation time, unavailable to most Americans of previous generations, allowed teenagers and young adults of the 1950s to construct their own subcultures, often rooted in popular music. Young people established an innovative sense of community and cultural cohesion through the simple act of listening to popular music with others of their age group. The cultural effects of music in twentieth-century America "seeped into the social lifeblood" of people and ideas.⁷ The music of the 1960s and 1970s was reflective of the specific cultural, political, and social elements present during the post-World War II period. Over time, however, music histories became generalized due to contemporary and changing perceptions of music, film, art, literature, and other forms of cultural expression.

David Glassberg, a professor of public history at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, identifies this pattern of generalization as the product of methodological tension between academic and public relationships with popular representations of history. People make connections to popular music that are "rooted in emotion and a firm sense of place," whereas academics, motivated by the pursuit of sterile objectivity, sometimes fall victim to musical analyses "bereft of personal voice and divorced from local geography."⁸

As the study of mid-twentieth-century popular music became more widely accepted as an academic endeavor by the 1980s, it also became necessary to contest more embroidered versions of this music's history. The "perils of over-generalizing" remind us that we need "to take seriously the sheer range of popular music that struck a chord with different audiences" and understand that there was no monolithic musical experience shared by Americans throughout this period.⁹

A pivotal decade for music, the 1960s marked one of the most turbulent and controversial eras in American history. Brian Ward points to an ongoing debate between those who "condemn the decade as the source of much that is wrong with contemporary America" as opposed to those who revere the 1960s as the "last time the nation made a concerted effort to realize its best ideals."¹⁰ Ward exposes a clearly flawed dichotomy of viewpoints often used to assess social change during this era. Some see radical revolutions of political order, feminism, music, drugs, and sexual liberation as key indicators of society's forward progress during the 1960s, while others consider all of this to mark the beginning of an unravelling of American society.

This simplistic interpretation of the 1960s (and 1970s) as being either all positive or all negative has, to a large extent, helped shape popular perceptions of the era and distorted

the public's collective memory. Consequently, it is crucial to acknowledge and examine the complex and multi-dimensional nature of these post-war decades in order to better understand this transformational period.

For many, events such as San Francisco's 1967 "Summer of Love" and the 1969 Woodstock music festival in upstate New York are archetypal representations of the national countercultural environment of the late 1960s.

Countercultural scenes such as Haight-Ashbury in San Francisco or Greenwich Village in New York City remain potent examples of nonconformist culture. Austin's bohemian heyday during the 1960s and 1970s represents, at least on a regional basis, the same type of impact that popular memory has had on larger national narratives regarding counterculture.

Popular memory has helped place hippie counterculture into a romanticized and often exaggerated role as the dominant cultural force of the 1960s. Contemporary cinema and music also have helped bolster the misperception that the 1960s were all about sex, drugs, rock and roll, and living a bohemian lifestyle. It is certainly crucial to understand the importance of the era's music and youth subcultures, but it is also necessary to keep in mind that the image many of us have today of the 1960s as a time when the counterculture dominated the lives of nearly all American youth is a distortion of historical fact. Simply put, most teenagers of the 1960s did not spend the majority of their time taking drugs, wearing hippie garb, and attending music festivals or anti-war protests. This mistaken notion of the 1960s as being a decade in which "free love" and "alternative lifestyles" prevailed is largely a product of the public's collective memory.

The most common historical narrative of Austin's musical culture focuses on the psychedelic and progressive country music scenes of the 1960s and 1970s, while largely ignoring the city's rich and vibrant musical history that began in the mid-1800s and evolved throughout the first half of the twentieth century, helping set the stage for the psychedelic and progressive country music scenes that emerged decades later.

In order to try and correct some of these misperceptions regarding Austin's musical history, especially those that suggest Austin's music scene began in the 1960s and 1970s with the emergence of psychedelic rock and progressive country, this article takes a more long-term view of the evolution of music in Austin from the mid-1800s to the mid-1900s and also considers the racial and ethnic diversity of cultural traditions that helped shape the city's musical landscape. This more inclusive approach helps dispel the common misperception that Austin music, and in particular the countercultural psychedelic and progressive scenes of the 1960s and 1970s, arose spontaneously. This more long-term examination of

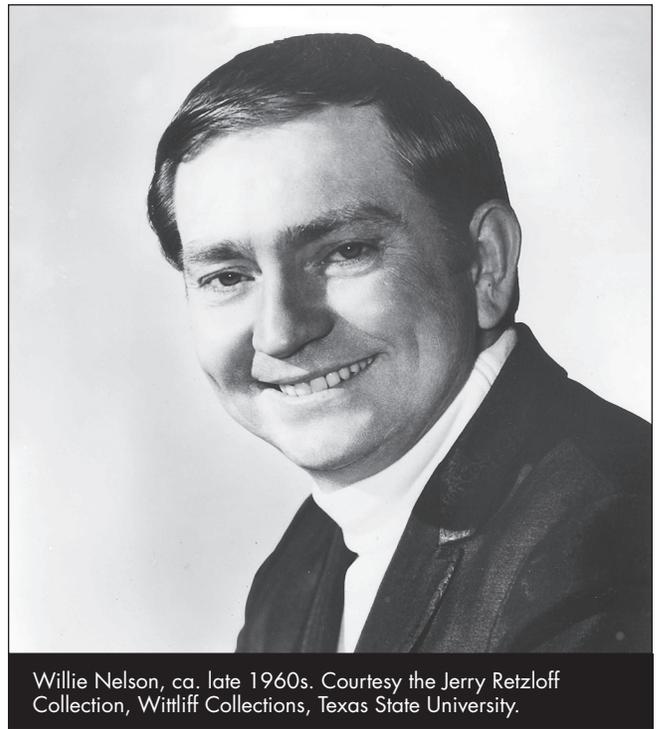
Austin's musical evolution also provides a more complete historical context, which helps us better understand how the collective public memory of the psychedelic and progressive country music scenes were retroactively selected, mobilized, and reconstructed to act as contemporary cultural heritage.¹¹

Like most of the rest of Texas, Austin's musical environment includes a diverse range of styles, sounds, and ethnic influences. The self-described "Live Music Capital of the World" is home to hundreds of live music venues and events, including the Austin City Limits Music Festival (established in 2002) and South by Southwest (established in 1987). SXSW now includes various events showcasing music, film, and technology, which draw hundreds of thousands of fans and industry professionals from around the world to Central Texas each year.

There is no doubt that Austin has grown into an important international center for musical creativity and the production and marketing of music. What is hotly debated is whether Austin's music scene is still "authentic," or whether it has become "overly commodified." Some older musicians and fans who helped shape the city's musical landscape decades ago often complain that Austin's current music scene is too commercial and not rooted in the organic traditions of the past. Of course, the notion of "authenticity" is highly subjective, whether one is considering music, art, literature, food, or any other form of cultural expression. In truth, the music of any era borrows from and builds upon many generations of music that have come before. So, rather than trying to define music according to the specific time in which it was at its peak of popularity, it is more helpful (and more historically accurate) to consider music as a sequence of interconnected musical eras, much like links in a chain, all tied together and each borrowing from preceding influences.¹²

In order to better understand how the musical history of Austin has contributed to creating a vibrant and enduring cultural heritage, it is helpful to arrange this narrative into four parts. The first section, "Now Dig This: A Brief History of Capital City Sound," highlights the impact of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century European folk music, the emergence of folklore as a field of academic study and the related resurgence of folk music, African-American music styles, and the combined influence of these forms on the development of the psychedelic and progressive country music scenes.

This section evaluates the impact of Austin's racial dynamics from the early to mid-twentieth century on the music of the area. The city's music history clearly reflects shifting racial boundaries and how musicians and fans were beginning to challenge segregationist policies of the 1940s and 1950s by embracing music from across the racial and ethnic spectrum. For example, groups of white university students,



Willie Nelson, ca. late 1960s. Courtesy the Jerry Retzlaff Collection, Wittliff Collections, Texas State University.

most of whom were enamored with the folk revival of the late 1950s and early 1960s, not only started buying records by African-American artists, but also began to cross over from predominantly-white West Austin to predominantly-black East Austin in order to hear African-American musicians play at the Victory Grill, Ernie's Chicken Shack, and other popular "Chitlin' Circuit" venues. Covering the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, this section examines the complex interplay of unique social and cultural elements that facilitated the city's growth as a dynamic and diverse music center.

The second section, "You're Gonna Miss Me: Nostalgia, Regional Identity, and the Mediation of Countercultural Memory," utilizes memory studies methodology to look at how and why countercultural memory in Austin still resonates so strongly today. Other major Texas cities, such as Houston, Dallas, and San Antonio, all boast deeply-rooted music histories. However, while these urban centers have diverse and long-standing musical traditions tied to jazz, blues, conjunto, zydeco, and many other regional styles, they do not rely on music as a major marketing tool for heritage tourism or as a civic identity marker to the extent that Austin does. This segment will first identify the ways in which the music of Austin during the 1960s and 1970s allowed for a new assertion of regional identity and then will examine how the collective public memory of popular music helps encourage nostalgia for a supposedly more authentic time period in the Austin music narrative.

Just as memory of popular music in Austin has worked to construct new perceptions of regional identity and mark new definitions of musical authenticity, mediated narratives of the psychedelic and progressive country music experience created new forms of iconography. (In this article, iconography is loosely defined as the selected images and slogans that came to represent a collective experience.)

This leads us to the third part of the article, "Cosmic Totems and Countercultural Idols: Master Symbols and the Iconography of Austin Music," which analyzes two of the most widely recognizable examples of the city's iconography. The image and meaning of the armadillo as a countercultural symbol and the emblematic presence of Willie Nelson as a local icon and "international ambassador of Austin music"

cultural heritage has often been thought of as something completely detached from popular music. Some critics have even labeled popular culture and music as "commercial, inauthentic, and . . . unworthy" of official designation as significant elements of cultural heritage.¹⁴ In recent years, however, popular culture and music history are increasingly recognized as important topics of study by cultural historians and anthropologists. The earlier attitude among most academics that popular music does not belong in heritage discourse no longer adequately addresses emerging trends in local heritage application.

The construction of contemporary cultural heritage in reaction to Austin's countercultural music scenes is a relatively unexplored topic that will add depth to both the academic

Texas music today represents a remarkably complex and diverse "cultural mosaic" that borrows from a wide variety of ethnic communities, including African American, German, Czech, French, Polish, Native American, Tejano, Anglo, and others.

serve as powerful remnants of musical subculture and help explain the contemporary civic positioning of music in the Capital City.

The last section, "Reverberation: The Development and Designation of Popular Music as Cultural Heritage in the Capital City," uses both the history of Austin music and the mediation of memory and nostalgia to explore the city's present-day application of cultural heritage. This analysis traces how cultural heritage has conventionally been defined in the academic sphere, both ideologically and methodologically. While it is necessary to point out that there is no one definition for cultural heritage, it is also important to think of the practice of heritage as one that raises important questions about the "mediation of the past" in the present.¹³ The construction of cultural heritage helps define tangible and intangible connections to local history and informs historians of the ways in which communities establish a collective sense of place and historical familiarity in relation to national narratives.

There is a large body of scholarship focusing on Austin's countercultural narrative, but there is a need for more analysis of the city's countercultural music scenes with an emphasis on memory and cultural heritage application in order to explain the current state of Austin's cultural environment. In the past,

and public understanding of memory's role in popular music heritage practices. Exploring how Austin retroactively utilized its countercultural sound to construct a particular cultural heritage highlights the multiplicity of roles that music has played within twentieth-century American culture.

Now Dig This: A Brief History of Capital City Sound

Texas music is a vibrant amalgamation of many ethnic and musical influences. Every corner of the state boasts a particular "sound" that is distinct yet also interconnected to the diverse musical traditions found elsewhere throughout the Southwest. Texas music today represents a remarkably complex and diverse "cultural mosaic" that borrows from a wide variety of ethnic communities, including African American, German, Czech, French, Polish, Native American, Tejano, Anglo, and others.¹⁵ Although this article focuses mainly on Austin's countercultural music scene of the 1960s and 1970s, it is important to keep in mind that the musical environment that gave birth to that scene already had been evolving for well over a century.

There are at least five major factors that contributed to the development of Austin's current reputation as a music

mecca. One of the earliest of these developments was the large influx of German immigrants and their culture into Central Texas beginning in the mid-1800s and continuing well into the early twentieth century. Germans were one of the largest immigrant groups to arrive in Central Texas during the nineteenth century, and they established a deeply rooted musical subculture that continues to this day. To be clear, it was not simply the volume of German immigrants that created such a distinct and enduring cultural imprint on the area. It was also the fact that many Germans arrived in family units (or at least partial family units), which allowed them to better preserve and continue the community traditions they had practiced back home in Europe. In several cases, Germans arrived together in Texas as “pre-formed” groups who quickly established their own German settlements apart from other immigrant groups as a way to preserve their language, culture, and identity as ethnic Germans.¹⁶

A vital part of preserving their heritage involved establishing a variety of German-language institutions and social organizations, including schools, libraries, newspapers, churches, literary societies, singing clubs, and large community centers where German immigrants could gather for weddings, dances, drinking, and other social activities. In Austin, where other immigrant groups already were well established, most Germans did not try to set up their own separate enclaves, but they did establish their own organizations and facilities designed to help preserve and celebrate German culture. Among the most important of these were the community centers, which typically included a large hall for public gatherings, smaller rooms for political meetings or educational activities, an outdoor beer garden, and sometimes a small bowling alley or shooting range for competitive events.¹⁷

The oldest such German establishment in Austin is Scholz Garten, opened by August Scholz as a beer garden and restaurant in 1866.¹⁸ A Scholz Garten advertisement in the 1881 Austin City Directory guaranteed a “place where you can go, at all times, and enjoy a quiet retreat with your friends.”¹⁹ In 1908, the Austin Sängerrunde (a German-Texas singing society) bought the building and expanded it to include a dance-performance hall and a small bowling alley.²⁰ Scholz Garten and the Austin Sängerrunde remain active today, hosting events for both the general public, as well as for Texans of German descent.

Other German beer gardens and restaurants in the area included Jacoby’s, Pressler’s, Turner Hall, and Bulian’s. Unlike bars and saloons of the time that “skated outside the periphery of respectability,” these establishments were tightly woven into the social fabric of Austin’s German community and welcomed the entire family. Beer gardens represent paradigms of German

musical subculture where patrons celebrated heritage and preserved traditional German folk music.²¹

These establishments sought to provide a sense of ethnic cohesion and also served as educational links, giving the community the opportunity to actively engage with German folklore and classical music. The majority of German immigrants were literate, and they diligently used this literacy to preserve their own culture and traditions through “German schools, newspapers, sports clubs, agricultural cooperatives, and literary and arts organizations.”²²

Even though German singing societies had a tendency to adhere to more traditional representations of their music where classical, folk, and opera were often celebrated, evidence of southwestern cultural transfusion took root in Texas German communities. By the early twentieth century, German folk music sometimes exhibited characteristics often associated with cowboy culture. References to “shotguns, horse-drawn wagons,” and other elements of life on the “frontier prairie” infiltrated the repertoire of German folk music.²³

The second key development in Austin’s music history is the establishment and emergence of folklore as a reputable area of academic study. Folkloric studies at local universities and other institutions bolstered the area’s already thriving appreciation and preservation of traditional American folk music. University of Texas scholars Leonidas Payne and John Lomax established the Texas Folklore Society in 1909.²⁴ By 1933, Lomax became an honorary curator for the Archive of American Folksong at the Library of Congress, due to his lifelong pursuit of American music preservation. While he maintained a strong connection to Austin and to Texas folklore studies, his recognition at the regional and national levels highlights the increasing academic and public interest and support for preserving folk culture at this time.

While it is true that most folklorists try to preserve what they believe to be uniquely authentic American music, they do not always do so in an objective manner. In some ways, the emergence of folklore as an academic study during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries reflects biased and mediated perceptions of “white” and “black” music. Much of the music scholarship from the last two centuries argues that “every aspect of popular music that is today regarded as American in character has sprung from imported traditions.”²⁵ European, African, and Latin streams of music tradition all played an integral role in developing the cultural amalgam of American music. While it is certainly true that American music has borrowed extensively from outside influences, it also has developed its own unique characteristics over the years as the distinct internal dynamics of American society have reshaped these older traditions in new and exciting ways.²⁶

The “selective blending” of musical traditions, or “syncretism,” derives from combining African and European streams of music during the slave trade. While the genesis of African-American music grew primarily from the slavery experience, the process of syncretism occurred by simple means of cultural exposure to the music of other immigrant groups who came to the United States by choice. Whether on purpose or by happenstance, no “streams of musical influence existed in isolation” from each other. However, the cultural environment of the Jim Crow South facilitated rigid racial, class, and ethnic divisions in musical tradition and, later, folklorists perpetuated these divisions by promoting a “black-white binary” into which they separated most music. This helped create an oversimplified and artificial division of American music into genres marked by race and ethnicity.²⁷

By the mid-twentieth century, radio, TV, and most record companies identified blues as strictly an African-American music and country as Anglo ‘hillbilly’ music. This was the case

musicians. The development of the “folkloric paradigm” in the Austin area created a distinction between the personal and idealized construct of authentic music (supposedly unadulterated, isolated, and pure) in contrast to the profit-driven commodified products of the music industry.²⁹

The third key development in the Austin music story underscores the role that race played in Texas music. The rise and fall of the East Austin blues scene provides a unique physical and ideological intersection of segregation, race relations, and white exposure to black music during the 1950s and 1960s. In 1928, the city developed a “Negro District” just east of East Avenue (the present-day location of Interstate 35), separated by several blocks from the central business district situated along Congress Avenue.³⁰

The establishment of a segregated district specifically for African Americans is probably one of the most blatant examples of institutionalized racism in the city’s history. Despite being denied access to the resources and amenities

The rise and fall of the East Austin blues scene provides a unique physical and ideological intersection of segregation, race relations, and white exposure to black music during the 1950s and 1960s.

in Texas, too, except that the large Latino population, along with the significant presence of many other ethnic groups, added more layers of complexity to the racial categorization of music.²⁸

Folklorists in the early twentieth century continued to mediate regional music tradition through assigning standards of musical authenticity and ethnic purity within Southern and Southwestern music. John Lomax, one of the most notable folklorists of the twentieth century, sought out what he believed to be authentic folk music as a means to preserve American culture. His work, along with others, contributed a wealth of recorded music and scholarship to the field of folklore on both local and national levels during the early twentieth century.

These scholars tended to collect obscure, rural folk music that they believed was untouched by commercial trends and relatively unchanged by time. Lomax carefully selected which songs and styles to include in his collection. In doing so, he and other folklorists throughout the country created an incomplete narrative of American music that failed to exhibit the full range of ethnic influences. Just as folklorists mediated musical authenticity over time, so did listeners and

present in the central business district, blacks in East Austin developed a flourishing community complete with educational and cultural institutions, black-owned businesses, and other commercial establishments. At one time, East Austin had “two colleges, lots of churches, barber shops, theatres, hotels,” and many other businesses that showcased the robust nature of a “functioning community” within segregated Austin.³¹

At the heart of East Austin’s musical evolution was its connection to the Chitlin’ Circuit. The Chitlin’ Circuit was a “network of African-American juke joints that stretched across the segregated South and into the Midwest” during the Jim Crow era.³² Most of these black venues were located in and around the East 11th Street area. Such nightclubs as Charlie’s Playhouse, Ernie’s Chicken Shack, and the Victory Grill emerged as music hubs for Austin’s African-American community after World War II. Some of the biggest names in blues, including B.B. King, Ray Charles, Chuck Berry, and Bobby “Blue” Bland, performed in these East Austin juke joints.

By the late 1950s and early 1960s, mostly white students from the University of Texas began venturing into East Austin to seek out black music. Their curiosity was piqued in large part by the folk music resurgence among young people

across the nation. In part a reaction against the growing commercialization of pop music, many white teenagers clamored to hear what they considered to be the authentic “roots” music of African-American performers (such as Huddie “Lead Belly” Ledbetter, Lightnin’ Hopkins, and Big Mama Thornton).

Although these white college students seemed to be sincere in their admiration for African-American music, this large influx of white patrons into traditionally black clubs led to overcrowding of these venues, resulting in regular customers who were black being turned away. As Austin blues musician Henry “Bluesboy” Hubbard recalled, if “you went to Charlie’s Playhouse on a Friday or Saturday night, the place was completely white.” As a result, a sort of racial displacement in black music venues on the East Side unfolded in which whites called ahead and reserved seating in black clubs, leaving African Americans who frequented the clubs without a seat and without a say in the matter. White patrons were usually welcomed into East Austin blues venues, but most black musicians and fans did not receive the same warm reception if they ventured into Central or West Austin.³³

The fourth key development in the city’s music history is the emergence of a new generation of folk musicians throughout the country during the early 1960s. Younger folksingers, such as Bob Dylan, Odetta, and Joan Baez, built upon the traditions of earlier folk artists to help folk music reach new heights in popularity and to become an important part of the “soundtrack” of the Civil Rights and anti-Vietnam War movements. The field recordings made by Texas folklorist John Lomax and his son Alan during the 1930s and 1940s played a vital role in preserving the music of older artists who may have otherwise fallen into obscurity. Because of their diligent work in archiving and collecting folk culture throughout Texas and the rest of the South, the Lomaxes introduced “roots” music to a younger generation of listeners, thereby helping inspire the national folk music revival of the 1960s.³⁴

Austin already had a nascent live music scene by the early 1960s, which included coffee houses, honky tonks, dance halls, and other places where musicians from various genres gathered to perform for eager audiences. One of the best-known and most influential of these venues was Threadgill’s Tavern. In December 1933, Kenneth Threadgill opened his service station on North Lamar Boulevard in Austin and began selling gas, snacks, and beer. Threadgill was an amateur country singer who performed more traditional country music, including that of Jimmie Rodgers and Hank Williams. Threadgill held weekly hootenannies (informal gatherings in which musicians and the audiences often sang together),

which helped make his gas station quite a popular hangout for local musicians, music fans, and students, faculty, and staff from the University of Texas.

As the folk music revival of the 1960s gathered momentum in Texas and across the nation, a growing number of younger folksingers and folk music aficionados began mingling with the more traditional country music crowd at Threadgill’s. Although some of the older attendees were unhappy with this influx of younger “folkies,” Threadgill was receptive to almost any type of music. He made everyone feel welcome and encouraged musicians of all generations and genres to interact freely and enjoy each other’s music.³⁵

Threadgill’s became the local hangout for young folk music fans looking for a cold beer and a place to socialize and perhaps even perform. One of these regulars was a University of Texas student from Port Arthur, Texas, named Janis Joplin. Joplin had long been interested in singing blues, folk, and other roots music but did not have much of a chance to do so until Threadgill took her under his wing and encouraged her to perform at his venue. Years later, after she moved to California and became arguably the best-known female singer of the late 1960s psychedelic-rock era, Joplin acknowledged Threadgill for helping her gain the confidence early on to be able to perform in public.

Although others were playing and listening to a variety of musical styles elsewhere around town, Threadgill’s established itself as one of the first and most popular venues where folk, country, roots music, blues, and rock and roll blended together to help lay a foundation for Austin’s countercultural music scene of the early 1960s. Some of the students and young people who frequented Threadgill’s later helped pioneer the psychedelic music scene in Austin. Because of his crucial role in encouraging this eclectic multi-genre and multi-generational approach to blending musical styles, Kenneth Threadgill became recognized as a “unifier of Austin’s past and present.”³⁶ In a 1973 article, Jan Reid and Don Roth credit Threadgill for the city’s “easy-going mix of musical styles.” By the mid-1960s, however, rock and roll had come to the Capital City. Austin’s folk patriarch welcomed just about any type of music in his filling station, but the little bar could no longer “contain all the musical excitement that seized the country” as rock and roll dominated the landscape of American music.³⁷

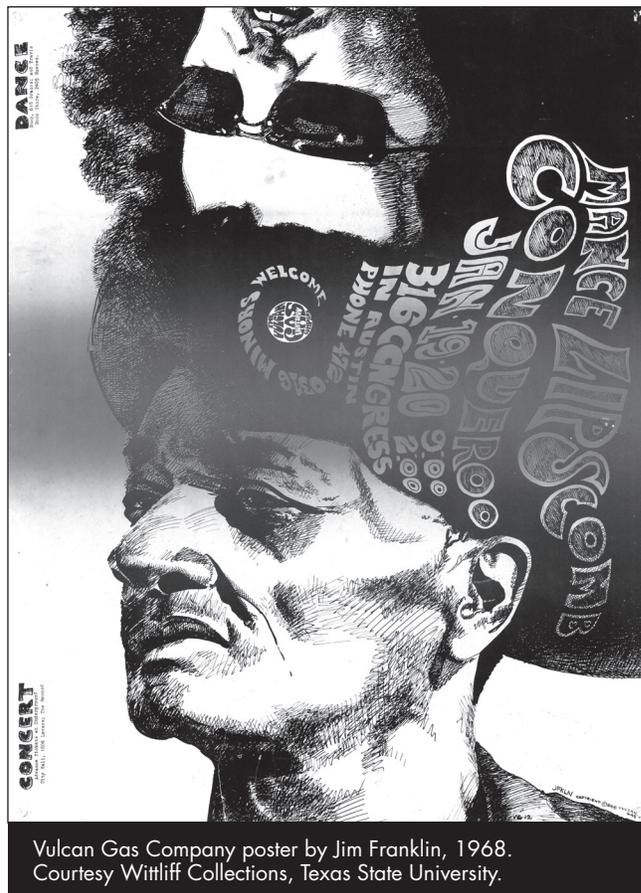
The fifth and final key development in Austin music that ultimately provided the city with its contemporary cultural heritage moniker is the emergence of both the psychedelic and progressive country music scenes. The psychedelic counterculture that thrived in San Francisco and New York City in the late 1960s continues to serve as a popular

embodiment of non-conformist subculture. Rockers in the Lone Star State were definitely influenced by the British Invasion of rock and roll that swept the country during the mid-1960s,³⁸ but they still “reflected the distinct ethnic influences of the Southwest” in their interpretation of psychedelic music by donning “blue jeans, sweat shirts, and cowboy boots.”³⁹ Compared to the better-known East and West Coast scenes, Austin’s psychedelic rock community forged a unique Texas identity for its participants. This element of Texas psychedelic music adds richness to the distinct geographical context of Austin counterculture.

The general public often romanticizes the counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s as a time of free love, peace, and mind-altering drugs. Historians and other scholars of the period tend to present a less embroidered illustration of the counterculture narrative. In *Scars of Sweet Paradise: The Life and Times of Janis Joplin*, Alice Echols challenges the often overly-romanticized images of the counterculture. A professor of history at the University of Southern California, Echols paints a more realistic portrait of the Austin that Janis Joplin experienced while she was a student at the University of Texas during the early 1960s. While a number of young people did participate in psychedelic culture and music, they were very much a minority of Austin’s youth. By taking a more objective look at Austin during this time period, Echols questions the common misperception that the city was a “party in perpetual progress.”⁴⁰

Another challenge to the widespread myth that the 1960s was a time of “peace, love, and social harmony” is the fact that the psychedelic counterculture had somewhat of a dark side. The popularity of psychedelic music relied heavily on the combined influence of hallucinogenic and psychotropic drugs. LSD was not available in the Central Texas area until 1964, and it would be made illegal in 1968. Consequently, because LSD could be difficult or even dangerous to acquire in Central Texas, it was not uncommon for Austinites who wished to partake in psychedelic experiences to purchase peyote plants from local nurseries or to harvest psilocybin mushrooms that grew naturally in nearby cow pastures.⁴¹ Drugs within psychedelic counterculture were seen by many as a “path to self-examination and spirituality,” and the belief that psychotropic drugs could open up the mind to new ideas and dimensions fueled the psychedelic music scene of Austin during the late 1960s.⁴²

Retired Austin police officer Harvey Gann recalled his experiences with the emergence of psychedelic drug culture in Travis County. Gann was accustomed to hardened criminals who used stronger drugs, such as morphine and heroin, but the introduction of psychedelics into the city of Austin overwhelmed the police force. Gann remembered dealing

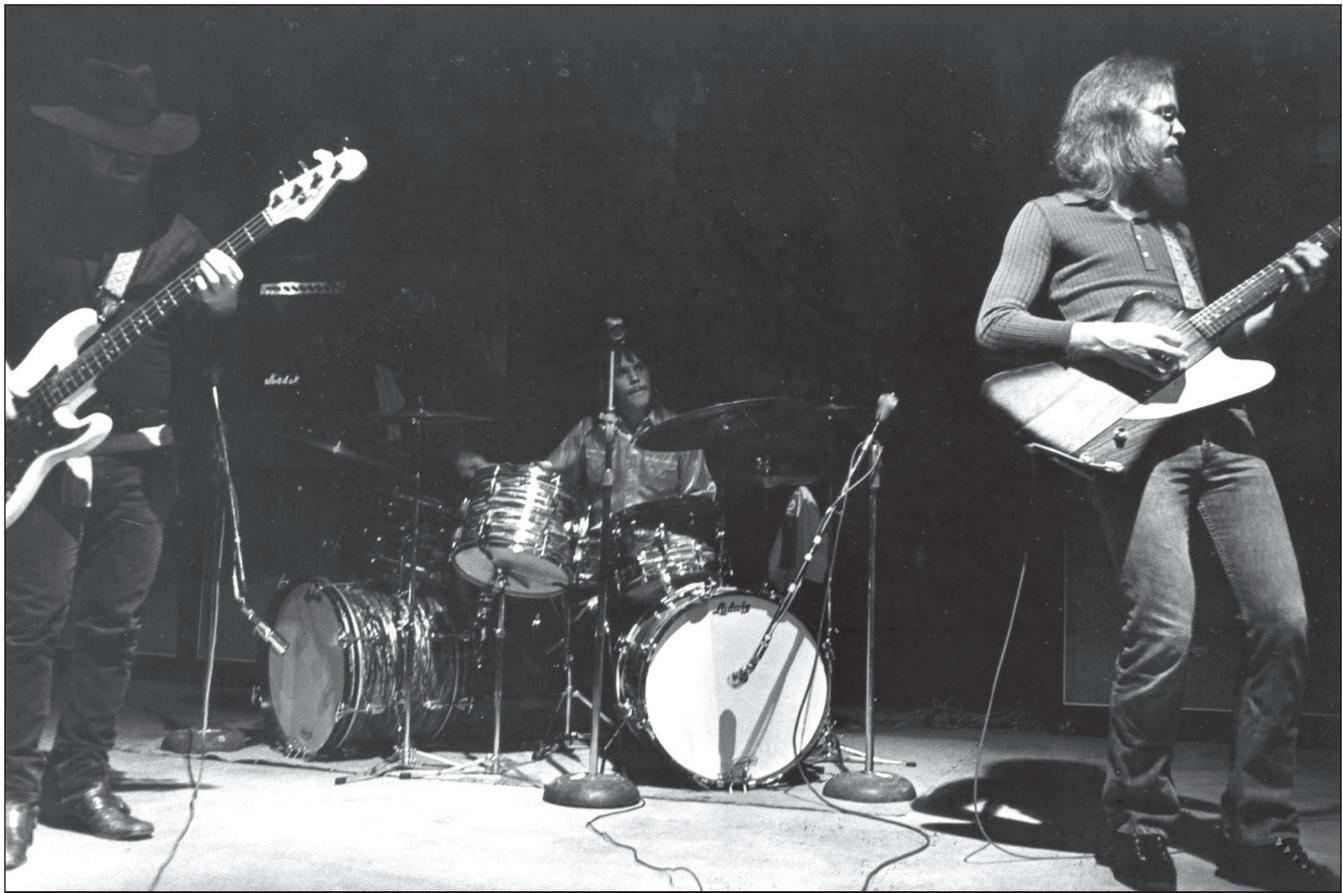


Vulcan Gas Company poster by Jim Franklin, 1968.
Courtesy Wittliff Collections, Texas State University.

with young people on bad trips telling him that “snakes were coming out of the walls,” and that they were seeing “chewing gum men.” Unlike the sentences for possession given to those with existing criminal records, Gann believed that the “courts were sympathetic to the young people” engaging in psychedelic drug use, since they were usually college students.⁴³

For a brief time, the Vulcan Gas Company (nightclub) was the epicenter of the psychedelic music scene in Austin. The Vulcan Gas Company opened as a performance venue in 1967 and hosted musicians such as Muddy Waters, Johnny Winter, the 13th Floor Elevators, Shiva’s Headband, and Big Mama Thornton. In addition to its role as a concert space, the Vulcan became a popular hangout for participants in the psychedelic music scene. The goal of the Vulcan Gas Company, according to co-founder Don Hyde, was to bring the ideas and trends of San Francisco to Austin.⁴⁴

The Vulcan mimicked the aesthetic of other psychedelic music venues, such as San Francisco’s Avalon Ballroom and New York City’s Fillmore East. Psychedelic music, bright colors, and light shows became regular fixtures at the venue. Psychedelic poster artist Gilbert Shelton designed the 8’ X 12’ logo on the outside of the building. He created the design in



ZZ Top at the Armadillo World Headquarters, 1970. Photo by and courtesy of Burton Wilson.

a style similar to what he had seen at the Fillmore East and the Avalon, although he wanted to make sure it was “larger, because this was Texas.”⁴⁵ Having never obtained a beer license, the Vulcan’s only revenue came from charging patrons at the door for admission.⁴⁶ However, entry fee collection was sometimes inconsistent due to the widespread practice of not charging friends. To further complicate matters, the frequent (and sometimes open) use of drugs in and around the club drew both the attention and ire of local law enforcement. The Vulcan closed in 1970 due to financial hardship, and along with it the psychedelic era of Austin music began to fade.

During the early 1970s, Austin’s burgeoning progressive country music scene came to dominate the city’s cultural landscape. In *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*, Jan Reid discusses the birth of the hippie cowboy within Texas counterculture.⁴⁷ By hippie cowboy, Reid is referring to a countercultural demographic that still embraced elements of the earlier psychedelic music scene but expanded that with an eclectic mix of musical genres, including blues, Western swing, folk, honky tonk, boogie woogie, R&B, Tex-Mex, jazz, and others. This so-called “progressive country” scene of the 1970s

blended the earlier hippie aesthetic of long hair, drug use, and progressive social and political ideology with more traditional (albeit stereotypical) Texas behavior, such as wearing cowboy hats and boots, drinking beer, eating BBQ, and other highly symbolic means of marking this hybridized hippie-cowboy counterculture as “uniquely Texan.”

In certain ways, the progressive country music scene emerging from Austin represented a melding of the hippie aesthetic that had spread nationally during the 1960s with the mythology, symbolism, and cultural traditions that had been associated with Texas for the previous two centuries. Progressive country music itself certainly represented a revolt against the “mainstream country music” popularized by Nashville studios since the 1950s. The so-called “Nashville sound” of this era tended to feature professional studio players performing pop-oriented music that was slickly produced (often including lavish string arrangements) and intended for commercial airplay.

By contrast, progressive country musicians in Austin, such as Asleep at the Wheel and Freda and the Firedogs, preferred performing in a loose, impromptu style that celebrated

spontaneity and innovation. The popularity of progressive country initially baffled many Nashville industry professionals who were reluctant to "accept the talented outsiders who were forging new country sounds."⁴⁸ In Austin, performers and audiences recognized and accepted country music as a form of Texas heritage but also incorporated elements of counterculture into local identity to establish a music subculture highly specific to a sense of place. Participants in the progressive country scene created a new local identity by combining earlier countercultural ideology with a more traditional southwestern identity. Nashville music executives quickly warmed up to this new practice of expanding and redefining country music after they witnessed the commercial potential of progressive country. In fact, Nashville record labels coined the term "Outlaw Country" as a way to re-brand and market this new sound. Ironically, many pioneers of Nashville's Outlaw Country scene were transplanted Texans, including Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, and Kris Kristofferson.⁴⁹

Within the progressive country music scene, the Armadillo World Headquarters remains one of the most notable concert venues. Opened in 1970, the Armadillo played host to a wide variety of local and national music acts, including Bruce Springsteen, the Pointer Sisters, Frank Zappa, Ravi Shankar, Freddie King, Willie Nelson, Asleep at the Wheel, Freda and

country music trends interweave with the earlier traditions of Texas-German music, a regional and national resurgence in appreciation of American folk culture, and the growing interest among young, white Texans for African-American music. While some of the city's earlier musical narratives may have faded into partial obscurity, they all blended together over time to help create the current perception of Austin as "The Live Music Capital of the World." Austin continues to mobilize particular music memories of its past to selectively re-work definitions of local nostalgia and re-invent regional identity. The next section analyzes the role of nostalgia and memory mediation associated with popular music. Specifically, it will identify the ways in which people use memory and music to reconstruct perceptions about history.

"You're Gonna Miss Me": Nostalgia, Regional Identity, and the Mediation of Countercultural Memory

Janis Joplin, Led Zeppelin, the Beatles, and the Rolling Stones are just a few of the names immortalized in 1960s and 1970s popular music. A contemporary survey of the best-selling records in the United States during this period would undoubtedly include the aforementioned artists, along with

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Participants in the progressive country scene created a new local identity by combining earlier countercultural ideology with a more traditional southwestern identity.

the Firedogs, and Greezy Wheels.⁵⁰ The Armadillo, along with other Austin clubs, such as Soap Creek Saloon and Antone's, provided a welcoming environment for musical experimentation and the blending of a wide range of musical genres. This not only helped launch progressive country, but also the larger live music scene for which Austin would become famous. The Armadillo operated on a "shoestring budget" and with a mainly volunteer staff, so when real estate costs in the area dramatically increased by the late 1970s, the cavernous music hall ended its run on New Year's Eve of 1980. Not long after the venue closed, the building that housed the Armadillo was demolished to make way for a high rise office building.⁵¹

The history of Austin's countercultural sound remains one of the most influential sources for the city's current eclectic mythos. The key developments in Austin's music history that facilitated the emergence of the psychedelic and progressive

Aretha Franklin, Bob Dylan, Creedence Clearwater Revival, the Supremes, and many others. These are some of the names and musical brands that have become emblematic of the era.

In reality, however, the majority of best-selling albums during the 1960s were soundtracks for cinema box office hits, such as *Mary Poppins*, *West Side Story*, and *The Sound of Music*. This fact should challenge us to question how and why we choose to remember the role of popular music in ways that are not always accurate.⁵² In many ways, contemporary film further serves to distort our collective memory of 1960s and 1970s popular music. Movies such as *Almost Famous*, *Pirate Radio*, and *Forrest Gump* all carry time period-specific themes and storylines which, accompanied by carefully compiled soundtrack selections, shroud music history in contemporary perceptions of countercultural nostalgia.⁵³

There is a significant disparity between what truly was the most popular music of the period and what our collective perception would have us believe. Although this discrepancy might seem a bit jarring at first, it can help us better understand the ways in which popular culture helps to reshape shared memories of music in each decade of twentieth-century American society. The way that people remember a time period or a specific event is affected by the music they associate with those experiences. The countercultural music scenes that developed in Austin are no exception. The subcultures that emerged in Central Texas from the late 1960s through the 1970s not only earned Austin national notoriety, but they also changed the way Austinites chose to remember themselves.

This section focuses on the role that memory plays in the history of Austin's countercultural music scenes. It also examines how both the collective and individual memories of the music were employed to develop new definitions of musical nostalgia, establish regional identity, and, ultimately, mold powerful examples of local music iconography. Situating Austin's countercultural music scenes within a memory studies framework permits a closer examination of the ways in which communities utilize popular music and associated subcultures to reconstruct memories, local identity, and meanings of the past.

Themes of an "imagined past" are found throughout nearly all types of music. The nostalgic longing for a supposedly better time and place than the present are universal archetypes used by humans when constructing collective memory and historical narratives to suit their cultural needs. Throughout history new groups with new ideas have reconstituted meanings in music in order to transform or manipulate collective identity.

Nostalgia is a common theme within popular music, deployed within songs themselves and as a relationship between the listener and the perceived past. With new musical trends and with every passing decade, the human construct of nostalgia is usually present. In the scope of this research, nostalgia refers to listeners and musicians using themes of an imagined past to re-work perceptions of history in order to serve cultural needs of the present. The participants in Austin's countercultural music scene of the 1960s and 1970s certainly did this, as they formed relationships with the music, the people, and the environment in which the music scenes thrived.⁵⁴

The foundation of memory processes lies in the physiological and neurological response to music. Several recent scientific studies have helped illuminate the neurological response to music within the human brain.⁵⁵ Specifically, many of these studies focus on the powerful connection between music and memory. According to the

majority of this research, we hear and process music differently than we do the spoken word. In fact, more parts of the brain are stimulated by music than any other type of auditory input. Therefore, we attach ourselves to music and internalize it in such a way that it has the power to elicit highly personal modes of memory. Understanding the relationship between the human brain and music provides a foundation by which historians and other social scientists can understand why and how people use music to strengthen cultural bonds.

In popular music scholarship, assigning historical significance to any music trend or movement relies heavily on the value placed upon it by human experience, memory, and nostalgia. People are able to select which memories to utilize and which memories to discard or forget. Without the mobilization of tradition and memory within music, historians would not be able to extract cultural context. Tradition in music provides a cultural "process of diffusion" that reuses ideas and memories from a particular time to rework and reconstruct systems of belief.⁵⁶ Viewing memory as a stagnant mode of historical narrative is outdated. Instead, memories and traditions are mobilized and reassembled over and over again to give new meaning to music and to the cultural context with which it is associated.

The countercultural music scenes of Austin during the 1960s and 1970s are excellent examples of the public mediating memory and mobilizing tradition. Part of this is due to the fact that during the mid-twentieth century many younger people experienced an unprecedented interest in traditional American folk music. Many believed that this early folk music was somehow more culturally authentic. In reality, however, this "authentic" folk music canon already had been mediated and constructed by earlier folklorists and musicians, all of whom had helped determine which forms of music they considered to be of value and which would be excluded from the nation's collective repertoire. By manipulating and selecting which folk music to preserve (and which to discard), folklorists, musicians, and others from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries very subjectively determined what the general public would come to consider genuine American music decades later.

During the 1930s and 1940s the Library of Congress employed folklorists to conduct field recordings throughout the southern and western United States in order to preserve the music of African Americans, Mexican Americans, cowboys and other groups whose music stood little chance of otherwise being preserved for future posterity. As a result, these folklorists brought blues, folk, and other types of music to a new generation of listeners during the 1960s.⁵⁷ This younger generation would assign new meaning to American folk music

by reinterpreting earlier traditions and memories in the music in order to make it more relevant to the “modern” world in which they lived.

Each generation, whether consciously or subconsciously, reconstructs tradition and memory to suit its own needs. The countercultural music scene in Austin did just that. Participants in the scene had a reverence for older artists, such as Mance Lipscomb, an African-American guitarist and singer who lived near Navasota, Texas. Lipscomb, whose father had been a slave, played a wide range of musical styles, including gospel, ballads, and blues, and performed mostly in his local community when he was “discovered” by folklorists in 1960.⁵⁸ For many young people caught up in the folk music renaissance of the time, Lipscomb represented the embodiment of authentic roots music, unspoiled by the commercialization that dominated so much of American music. Tary Owens, a musician, folklorist, and graduate student at the University of Texas, thought of Lipscomb not only as a revered musical icon but also as a father figure.⁵⁹ Musicians, fans, and folklorists of Austin’s counterculture scene sincerely admired Lipscomb and other veteran roots musicians, but, in certain ways, they also appropriated the traditions of these older artists in order to help legitimize their own music by linking the counterculture of their generation with traditions of the past.

This process, one that takes particular forms of popular culture (music in this case) and mediates the memories associated with it to create new perceptions of history, is related to memory frameworks posed by historians Pierre Nora and Alison Landsberg. Nora, an early pioneer of memory studies, regards memory as a mode of historical interpretation that “informs and is informed by lived experience.”⁶⁰ However, Nora asserts that there is an “irrevocable break” which occurs between history and memory processes. By break, Nora means that history practices should aim to be more critical, detached from emotion, and analytical. However, he laments a “vanished form of relation to the past” in the face of modern mass culture in which people no longer have the luxury of remaining “unconscious” to memory’s “successive deformations.” Nora may claim historical objectivity, but he reveals his own propensity toward nostalgia.⁶¹

Alison Landsberg, a memory studies scholar at George Mason University, presents a somewhat similar framework to Nora’s in that she agrees that the process of memory aids historical interpretation. Landsberg’s framework, however, does not insist that historical interpretation of memory should strive for complete objectivity. She does not see mass culture and media as modern inventions designed to ruin the historical value of memory but, instead, as technological

conduits through which new forms of memory are created. Perhaps even more notable, Landsberg proposes that, through means of technological media, people are able to “experience an event or a past without having actually lived through it.” She calls this idea prosthetic memory. The primary evidence she uses is cinema, specifically films that are adaptations of historical events. Through the production of contemporary historical film, viewers are able to “inhabit” or “take on” other people’s memories regardless of the viewer’s actual lived experience.⁶²

Several well-known movies, cited earlier, are good examples of Landsberg’s theory in action. All three of the films, *Almost Famous*, *Pirate Radio*, and *Forrest Gump*, share overlapping themes related to the 1960s, the 1970s, popular music, and popular culture. While none of these claim authentic ownership over any single historical narrative, each reinforces a time period’s perceived cultural environment through means of language, fashion trends, and most important to this scholarship, the carefully curated musical soundtrack.

Landsberg’s technique works to extract the cultural context of history by means of film and memory. However, her framework is also applicable to the relationship between popular music and memory, specifically in regard to the countercultural sound of Austin during the 1960s and 1970s. Landsberg uses modern film as a key form of popular media in order to understand memory reconstruction, but her concept is also widely applicable to the constantly changing terrain of American popular music. The countercultural music scene of Austin borrowed from earlier genres and trends in order to create new perceptions and new definitions of musical nostalgia and authenticity.

The rise of the “new” folk scene during the early 1960s among university students in Austin helped bring together musicians and fans interested in the resurgence of traditional American music. Powell St. John, a regular at Threadgill’s and part of the folk group the Waller Creek Boys (which included for a time Janis Joplin), recalls that his interest in American folk stemmed from pure personal enjoyment. Unlike the beat generation before them, St. John claims that they “played guitars and banjos for their own amusement,” and that the music was just a “way to pass the time.”⁶³ The “folkies” of the early 1960s had just missed the beat movement, but they still yearned for what they considered to be authentic American folk music.

Thanks to John Lomax and other folklorists who recorded cowboy ballads and traditional African-American folk music, the folkies of 1960s Austin drew from the traditional material recorded by John Lomax and other folklorists of the 1930s-1950s in order to establish a new standard of

cultural nostalgia, as it related to popular music. Just as Allison Landsberg argues that contemporary film provides viewers a lens through which perceptions of un-lived historical experience are formed, the participants in the 1960s Austin scene used the un-lived experiences associated with traditional folk music to carry out the same sort of cultural mobilization. By 1964 and 1965, these young folkies began organizing formal concerts in the University of Texas Student Union showcasing the artists they had come to revere as “true [roots] musicians,” including Mance Lipscomb, Robert Shaw, Grey Ghost, and even Kenneth Threadgill himself.⁶⁴

In many ways, teenagers of the 1960s represented a new breed of American youth. They grew up during one of the most economically prosperous eras in the nation’s history, which brought with it unprecedented opportunities for leisure activity, university educations, and ownership of automobiles, phonographs, records, and numerous other types of technology. The emergence of the teenager as a new demographic introduced a sociological tension in which young people had limited generational models in terms of memory and could not easily recycle the traditions and memories of their parents in order to contextualize the world around them. Whereas their parents’ generation had endured the difficulties of the Great Depression and World War II, these young people enjoyed unprecedented economic and social freedom. Many of them turned to music, movies, and other forms of entertainment to try and construct a historical memory that made sense within the context of their rapidly modernizing world.

Even as psychedelic rock gained popularity in the Austin area by the mid 1960s, elements of traditional folk music remained an important part of the evolving counterculture. In addition to the changing sound of the music itself, one of the most important differences between the earlier folk scene and the psychedelic scene was a shift in drug culture. Psychotropic and hallucinogenic drugs and rock and roll gained popularity among musicians and young people in the area by the mid-1960s, but some local psychedelic musicians, perhaps most notably a band called the 13th Floor Elevators, maintained connections with the earlier folk culture. The Elevators’ signature sound stemmed from the use of a jug, an instrument previously used primarily in folk music. Traditionally, this instrument is played by blowing into it to produce various notes, usually in a somewhat muffled tone.⁶⁵ The Elevators amplified the jug and pioneered a louder, more electronic sound. They also added drums, electric guitars, and vocals by a dynamic young frontman named Roky Erickson, whose singing style often included screaming song lyrics.⁶⁶

Although much of Austin’s music was shifting toward a harder-edged, electrified version of its folk predecessor,

the strong connection to roots and blues music continued throughout the rise of the psychedelic scene. The Vulcan Gas Company showcased many of the biggest names in blues, including Muddy Waters, Jimmy Reed, Freddie King, Fred McDowell, and Big Mama Thornton. The eagerness to include these earlier blues figures in the psychedelic scene of Austin is evidence of a nostalgia among younger fans who longed to connect with a musical past which they had not actually experienced.

Although the collective memory of late 1960s countercultural music scenes in Austin often presents a somewhat exaggerated and romanticized historical narrative, there is value in the cultural context because it reveals which idealized forms of historical memory people choose to employ. Regardless of whether it is always factually accurate, collective memory reflects the “history-making practices we have inherited from the past” and reveals how humans make sense of the world around them, both past and present.⁶⁷ Collective memory also serves as a general historical framework within which historians can situate other versions of countercultural perceptions (or misperceptions) in order to add dimension and complexity to what is often an over-simplified or mythologized past.

In certain ways, the psychedelic music scene that developed in Austin during the late 1960s challenges the common national narrative of “hippie” counterculture. The story of countercultural music in Central Texas provides a distinct perspective from which to examine the larger landscape of American music, but it also illustrates how unique these music scenes were. Personal accounts from those involved in Austin’s counterculture often describe the challenges of being a hippie in Texas at that time. Powell St. John remembers how most students at the university saw him and his friends as “proto-freaks” and “non-conformists.” Don Taylor, a sound engineer for the Vulcan who also worked at San Francisco’s Avalon Ballroom, explained the consequences for young men who chose to adopt the countercultural aesthetic: if you “grow your hair out twelve inches long, you find out what it means to be a second-class citizen.”⁶⁸

One of the best examples of this marginalization appears in the caption of a photograph in the 1963 University of Texas yearbook. Janis Joplin is pictured with the Waller Creek Boys, Powell St. John and Kirk Lanier, during an organized sing-along in the Student Union. In the photo, St. John has a harmonica while Lanier plays the guitar—a banjo leaning against the wall behind him. Holding her guitar in one hand and a cigarette in the other, and her face pointed upward in mid-song, Joplin looks rather disheveled. Her hair is messy and frizzy, and she wears pants and a dark baggy sweater. At

the bottom of the photo the caption reads, "These non-conformists are the Wednesday Night Folk Singers."⁶⁹ This description helps underscore the perception many students, faculty, and staff had of those whom they considered to be outside of the societal mainstream.

The progressive country music scene of the 1970s followed the same pattern of memory mediation using musical nostalgia. Fans of this music subculture still revered early American folk tradition but also had a strong interest in country music (as well as rock and roll, R&B, and other styles). Furthermore, they blended features of traditional cowboy culture with the 1960s hippie aesthetic, such as wearing long hair and beards while also donning cowboy hats, boots, and western shirts. The byproduct was the rise of a period in which bold assertions of regional identity began to make national waves in the music community. The return of Willie Nelson to

feel of those rural times still lingers there. In a way, they are a new breed of conservative who despair over big-city hype and 20th-century progress and romanticize "getting back to the land." However, they are inescapably children of the mid-20th century. They grew up with their fingers on radio dials and stereo headsets clamped over their ears. Their need for music is insatiable.⁷¹

This description perfectly aligns with Landsberg's concept of prosthetic memory while also highlighting the group's newly constructed assertion of regional identity. Patrons of progressive country used music to collectively reconstruct memory of non-lived historical experience and, in doing so, established a contemporary understanding of the past. Progressive country music served as the cultural medium

In Austin's countercultural music scenes, young people aspired to produce cultural cohesion and a sense of communal identity, but they also utilized this form of social interaction to make their own highly personalized connections with the past.

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Texas, the countercultural incubator of the Armadillo World Headquarters and other live music venues, and, eventually, the emergence of Austin as a nationally renowned center of musical creativity jolted new life into the Capital City sound.

Elements of countercultural fashion and marijuana tolerance were still embraced in the progressive country scene. While cowboy boots, gingham, and western dress became popular fashion choices within the scene, it was not uncommon to see "naked midribs" and "bare hippie feet" or to catch the passing of a marijuana cigarette at the Armadillo World Headquarters. What performers in this music scene managed was to "distill a blend of music that reflects the background, outlook, and needs of a unique Austin audience."⁷⁰

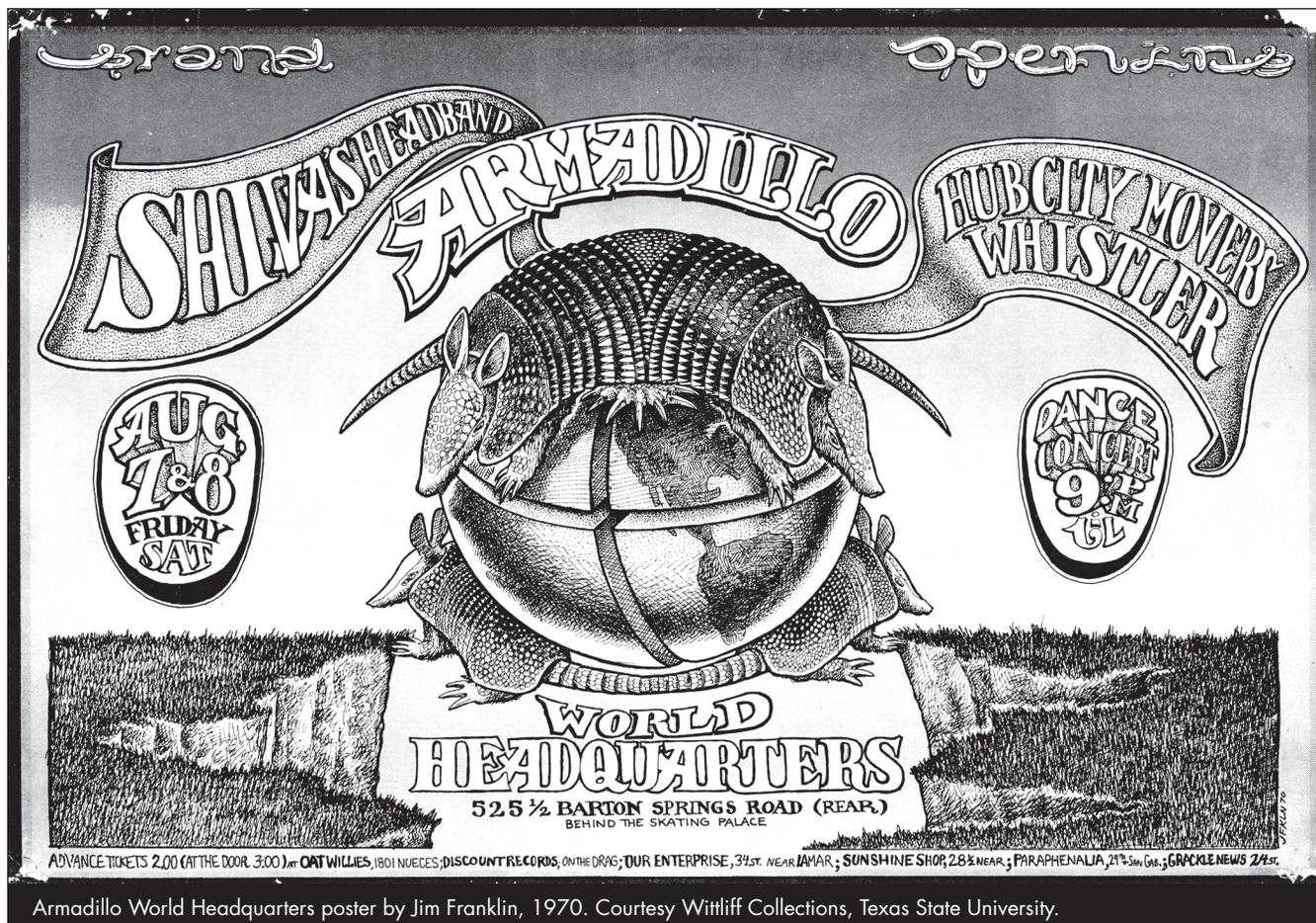
Young people within this scene addressed the ideological tension between coming of age in a Texas version of counterculture while, at the same time, yearning for an earlier, simpler time. For example, at a 1973 Willie Nelson concert at the Armadillo World Headquarters, onlookers Jan Reid and Don Roth comment on the youthful crowd:

The audience is largely comprised of middle class youth who hail from Texas cities yet are rarely more than two or three generations removed from more rural times; they came to Austin because the

through which people were able to "inhabit" or "take on" another's memories in order to experience a part of the past without actually living through it.⁷²

Participants within music subcultures, particularly the counterculture of 1960s Austin, used music to internally differentiate between the "psychological self and the self as a social entity."⁷³ In Austin's countercultural music scenes, young people aspired to produce cultural cohesion and a sense of communal identity, but they also utilized this form of social interaction to make their own highly personalized connections with the past.

The individual memories associated with Austin's countercultural music scenes also help historians identify narrative detractions that challenge both the regional and national collective memories of the 1960s and 1970s. While public memory is helpful to contextualize the larger ideas of a time period or group of people, individual memory serves as a reminder that recollection is not monolithic. Over time, the collective memory associated with popular music tends to create cultural scripts that have the potential to generalize or dilute historical narrative. Cultural scripts are the constructed and widely accepted versions of stories that groups use to shape personal memories to fit a largely recognized narrative.⁷⁴



Armadillo World Headquarters poster by Jim Franklin, 1970. Courtesy Wittliff Collections, Texas State University.

It is important to acknowledge those countercultural participants who do not look back on their younger days with a yearning to return to a supposed “golden age” of Austin music. For example, Stephen Harrigan, long-time writer at *Texas Monthly*, recalls his time in the Austin counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s without any twinge of starry-eyed longing. He admits that the city had “an offbeat pulse of energy that was intoxicating,” but describes the social environment of Austin as one that had “an insistence on its own laid-back wonder.”⁷⁵

Harrigan believes that the excitement of Austin’s countercultural music scenes helped facilitate his own personal stagnation. His individual memory reveals a point of view that others might have experienced, as well, but because of pre-constructed cultural scripts that propagate a more nostalgic narrative of Austin counterculture, Harrigan’s memories are overshadowed by contemporary historical perception.

The countercultural music scenes of Austin during the 1960s and 1970s are unique examples of popular music history and memory studies. Music scenes and the memories that people attach to them certainly reveal generational relevancy

and the fluid nature of popular music trends, but they also highlight human patterns of memory reconstruction and behavior. This is important to examine in order to better understand the ways in which people use popular music to rework definitions of nostalgia and create new perceptions of regional identity. While countercultural music scenes in Austin come and go, the memories of these particular subcultures serve as intangible cultural remnants upon which present-day cultural heritage is established.

As public memory re-shaped the historical recollection of popular music in Austin, new symbols of collective experience eventually began to emerge. The following section focuses on the dominant forms of iconography that grew out of the psychedelic and progressive country music scenes. From the emblematic image of the armadillo to the internationally recognizable profile of Willie Nelson’s braids and bandana, the iconography associated with Austin music serves as a remnant of mediated countercultural memory.

Cosmic Totems and Countercultural Idols: Master Symbols and the Iconography of Austin Music

The previous section examined the role of nostalgia, memory, and regional identity in the legacy of Austin's countercultural music scene. Out of that mediation grew widely recognizable and enduring images and icons. Cowboy boots, longhorn cattle, and other images of cowboy culture have long served as some of the most potent images of Texas iconography. Meant to be representative of particular cultural experiences, these symbols evolved as a type of shorthand to highlight selected historical memories. This section explores the development of iconography directly related to Austin

in 1970 and christened it the Armadillo World Headquarters that the humble creature truly became a countercultural icon. The Armadillo World Headquarters, located in a former National Guard armory, played host to a wide range of musical acts, but at its core, it served as the "nexus for the cosmic cowboy sound of Austin." Wilson admits that the selection of the armadillo as the namesake of the space "had no significance at first" and that the name "just came to him as he was walking in downtown Austin."⁷⁸

However, when Jim Franklin became the "resident artist" of the Armadillo World Headquarters, he used the building's namesake to create bold and colorful murals filled with armadillos throughout the interior and exterior of the space.⁷⁹ Franklin "took the image of the Texas rodent" and "made sure

The image of the armadillo soon appeared on album covers, clothing, and beer commercials, and by the late 1970s, had "spread like a virus" to express "that which is Texan."

music, specifically the armadillo as a countercultural totem of the 1960s and Willie Nelson as a local and national symbol of 1970s Austin music.

The analysis of music iconography reveals the ways in which people choose to "package" an era or subculture in highly symbolic ways in order to provide easily accessible recognition. The iconography of Austin music helps historians understand which memories and narratives are mobilized (brought forward) to the present to serve as enduring symbols or markers and which are not. This helps to highlight the socially constructed (and sometimes distorted) meanings ascribed to the city's countercultural mythology.

Years before the armadillo became an unofficial mascot for the state of Texas, the odd-looking, hard-shelled mammal became a countercultural icon in Austin. The armadillo did not arrive in Texas until the mid-nineteenth century and eventually migrated into the Hill Country region by the turn of the twentieth century. By the 1960s Austin poster artist Jim Franklin, later called the "Michelangelo of armadillo art," began using illustrations of the animal in his artwork.⁷⁶ Throughout the late 1960s Franklin drew armadillos on concert flyers and as a map marker for local points of interest in an Austin underground newspaper.⁷⁷

Franklin's illustrations gave the armadillo a ubiquitous presence around Central Texas, but it was when Eddie Wilson opened his now legendary South Austin music and arts venue

that the people of Austin knew what it stood for" by making the "familiar little mammal synonymous with this new place to hear music."⁸⁰ Whether Eddie Wilson and Jim Franklin knew it at the time, their version of the Texas nine-banded armadillo would soon take on new life as the countercultural mascot for progressive country music subculture throughout most of the 1970s.

The image of the armadillo soon appeared on album covers, clothing, and beer commercials, and by the late 1970s, had "spread like a virus" to express "that which is Texan."⁸¹ The use of the animal as a countercultural symbol of Austin music even managed to transcend the regional context of the Hill Country. One of the most interesting and surprising cases of this occurred in the form of the International Armadillo Confab and Exposition hosted by the city of Victoria from 1971 until 1976.

Victoria, a city one-fourth the size of Austin during the 1970s, is roughly a two-hour drive southeast of the Capital City towards the Gulf of Mexico. The South Texas town created the festival and used the armadillo motif to promote an eclectic array of themed activities from armadillo racing to crowning the Armadillo Queen.⁸² The schedule of events included everything from a body-painting contest to street dancing.⁸³ In addition to a plethora of souvenirs, such as T-shirts embellished with cartoon armadillos, the event also provided plenty of cold beer. Last but certainly not least, live

bands played a variety of musical styles, including country, rock, and German polkas.

By its third year, the Victoria Armadillo Confab and Exposition had gained some national attention. One man reported having to miss the 1973 festival after a family death forced him to move to upstate New York. Much to his surprise, however, a radio show in Binghamton, New York, carried a live broadcast of the festivities.⁸⁴ Seth Bovey, who later became a professor of English at Louisiana State University in Alexandria, recalls his expectations for attending the Confab and Exposition as a teenager in 1973 by explaining that he and his friends believed they were headed from Louisiana to the “Texas equivalent of Woodstock.”⁸⁵ While the Victoria festival certainly never achieved that same legendary status, its popularity and its widespread use of the armadillo and other countercultural elements associated with the Armadillo

armadillo as a countercultural icon reveals the fluid nature of iconographical designation.

Others suggest that the lowly armadillo is representative of loftier social and political agendas embedded within Austin’s counterculture. Seth Bovey argues that participants in the Texas counterculture made a conscious decision to imitate the inherent nature of the armadillo as a creature of passive, non-violent tendencies. His argument goes as far as to suggest that just as hippies “relied upon gathering power by amassing huge numbers of individuals who all held the same values,” armadillos represented strength in numbers and, because of their swift migration into North America, emulating the armadillo somehow paralleled “their hopes for a revolution of the masses.”⁸⁷

Bovey’s ideas about the armadillo as an icon, although perhaps far-fetched, add another layer of complexity to

Today, the armadillo has become an undeniable element of Texas culture, but its humble symbolic beginnings as a countercultural mascot exemplify the evolution and fluidity of cultural iconography.

World Headquarters is strong evidence that Austin’s thriving countercultural scene was having an impact well beyond the city limits.

Retrospective analyses of the armadillo as cultural icon provide clear parallels between counterculture and Austin music. Looking back on the music and social environment in Austin from the 1960s to the 1970s, the contemporary role of the armadillo as a symbol of nonconformist culture lends itself well to a carefully constructed narrative. In a later interview, Eddie Wilson proposes a rather colorful explanation for the seemingly natural connections between Austin’s counterculture and the armadillo:

Armadillos and hippies are somewhat alike, because they’re maligned and picked on. Armadillos like to sleep all day and roam all night. They share their homes with others. People think they’re smelly and ugly and they keep their noses in the grass. They’re paranoid. But they’ve got one characteristic that nobody can knock. They survive.⁸⁶

Although Wilson admits early on that his decision to use the armadillo as the namesake of his performance space was pure happenstance, his contemporary perception of the

the way people use historical generalizations to reconstruct perceptions of musical narratives. He takes the image of the armadillo and creates an analysis based on retrospective collective memory of the Austin countercultural music experience. Today, the armadillo has become an undeniable element of Texas culture, but its humble symbolic beginnings as a countercultural mascot exemplify the evolution and fluidity of cultural iconography.

When progressive country music took Austin by storm in the early 1970s, one figure in country music came to dominate the local scene and the national media. Willie Nelson, already a well-known singer and songwriter before first performing at the Armadillo, is probably the most widely recognizable Austin music icon. Today, Willie Nelson’s name calls forth visions of long braids accompanied by a neatly folded bandana tied around his forehead. His laid-back attitude, carefree demeanor, and, particularly, his open use of marijuana are all characteristics now synonymous with the “Red Headed Stranger.” When Nelson began his songwriting career in the early 1960s, however, his appearance was a far cry from the countercultural music icon that Austinites and the rest of the country came to embrace by the end of the 1970s.

Born in Abbott, Texas, in 1933, Nelson began his songwriting career at the tender age of six, jotting down lyrics in his

composition books.⁸⁸ He played with a polka band as a boy and, later, with a Western swing band before joining the Air Force. There, he had ample time to refine his mastery of songwriting. It was not until the early 1960s, however, that Nelson settled in Nashville and started gaining national attention with such hits as "Night Life," "Hello Walls," and "Crazy."⁸⁹

Despite his success as a songwriter, Nelson grew frustrated with what he considered to be Nashville's limits on his artistic creativity. Although he wanted to write jazz and blues-inspired country and play it before live audiences, he (like most professional songwriters in Nashville at the time) was expected to simply crank out hits for established stars, such as Patsy Cline and Faron Young, to perform. For Nelson and many others, the country music that came out of Nashville during the early 1960s had an "assembly line" feel to it.⁹⁰ Given Nelson's unconventional sound and appearance, the task of achieving commercial success as a recording artist and performer in the Nashville music machine was not an easy one.

Because there were few opportunities around Nashville for Nelson to play live, he began traveling back home to Texas several times a year to perform in the dance hall circuit he knew from his earlier days. In 1970, Nelson's house in Tennessee burned down, so he relocated to Bandera, Texas, (north of San Antonio) to wait for his home to be rebuilt. He soon became busy playing in dance halls across the Lone Star State and decided not to return to Nashville. Instead, in 1972 Nelson moved to Austin, where progressive country was just taking off. Upon surveying the cultural and musical terrain of the city, he remarked that "something is going on down here." That something was a reference to the emerging countercultural movement driven mainly by a younger generation of music fans. He acknowledged that this new audience was "a little younger" and "a little crazier about drugs than he was," but Nelson wanted to "tap into" their youthful energy and innovative spirit in order to create a unique musical experience within the Texas counterculture.⁹¹

In 1972, Nelson first performed at the Armadillo and soon became the "talk of the town" as the "new hot act" at the popular venue. With Nelson at the forefront of the progressive country scene, Austin began to gain regional and national attention. He joined forces with a local Austin radio station, KOKE-FM, to get progressive country on the radio alongside the nationally recognized rock music of the day. Through his music, Nelson also promoted Lone Star beer. Although he did not receive direct payment for the endorsement, Lone Star agreed to promote Nelson's performances through concert posters and ads.⁹² Even though he already drank Lone Star off stage, Nelson understood that by promoting the beer in his songs and during concerts he could potentially eliminate

the lingering stigma that Lone Star was the beer of an older, more rural generation. By establishing relationships with local industries for promotion and exposure, Nelson helped define the cultural elements that accompanied participation in the progressive country scene in Austin.⁹³

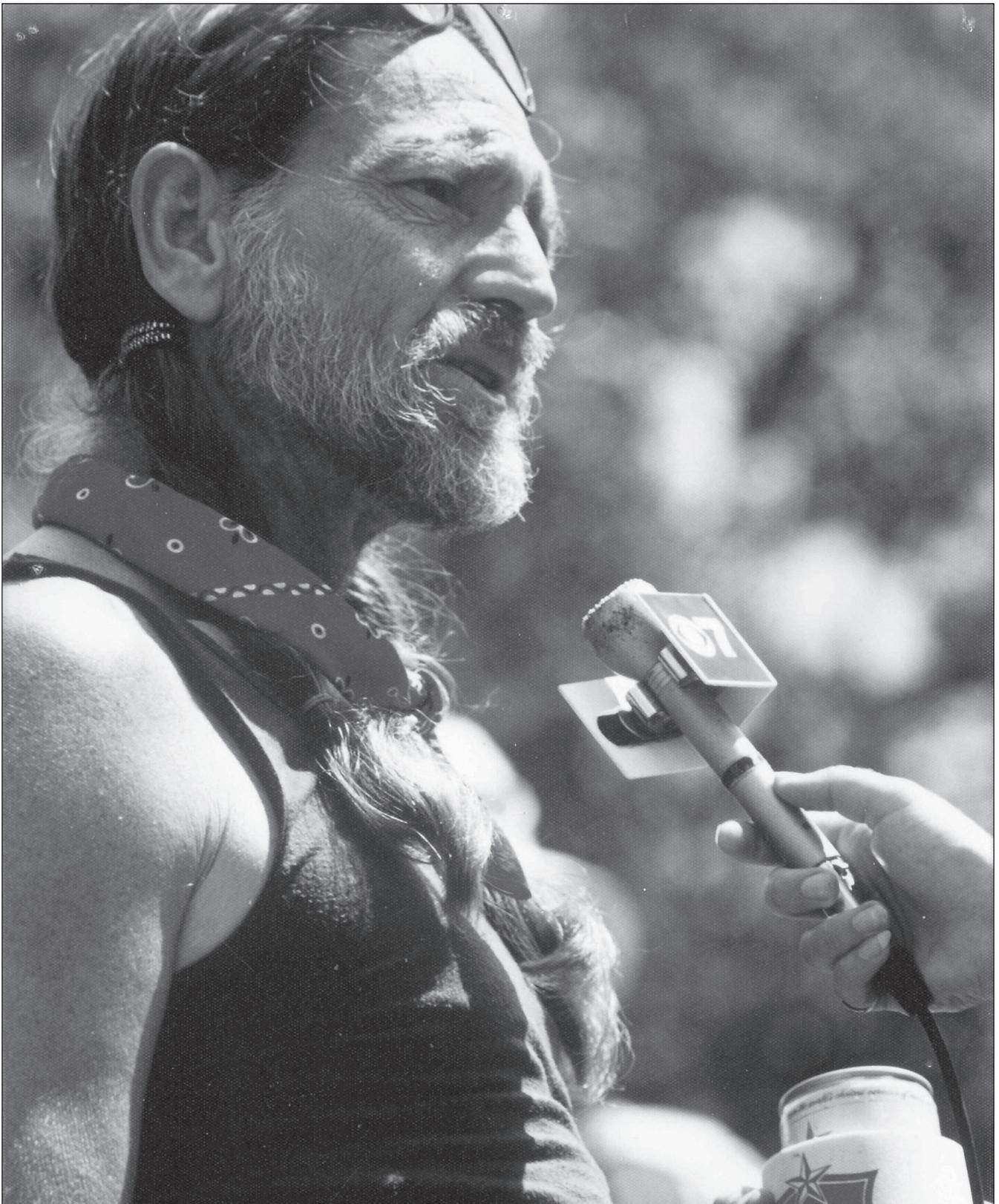
Willie Nelson transcended the artistic sphere in Austin to create enduring business connections, which ultimately reinforced perceptions of regional identity, countercultural memory, and Texas culture. He came to represent a particular experience in Austin, and his image is still one of the most recognizable forms of iconography within the city's music history. However, it is important to point out that there is a specific version of Nelson that became iconic. This includes long braided hair, a beard, a bandana tied around his head, a T-shirt, blue jeans, and tennis shoes—all emblematic of the youthful, non-conformist attitude embraced by Nelson and so many others in the progressive music scene of the 1970s.

During a 1973 performance at Austin's (now defunct) Aqua Festival, Willie Nelson appeared clean-shaven and relatively shorthaired, sporting a cowboy hat and a burnt orange University of Texas T-shirt.⁹⁴ Despite his growing presence in the Austin music scene and emerging role as a spokesman for progressive country, Nelson does not begin to exhibit elements of his more recognizable "hippie cowboy" style until around 1975 when he started to wear a bandana around his increasingly long hair. In fact, his now trademark braided hair does not appear until almost 1980.

Even though the Armadillo World Headquarters shut down in 1980 and the progressive country scene began to fade from prominence, the iconic vision of Willie Nelson had just begun taking shape. Although his style evolved over the course of a decade, the way that Austin chooses to visualize Nelson reveals how a community engages in retrospective memory mediation to construct a particular form of iconography that is both widely recognizable and accessible beyond its original geographical context.

Today, Willie Nelson's facial profile is internationally recognizable. His braids alone have become their own form of thematic representation often used to embody the spirit of 1970s country music. Symbolically, Nelson represents a combination of both Texas tradition and hippie counterculture. This selective blending of old and new cultural elements has helped create a unique brand of country music specific to a certain time period and geographic location. In some ways, Nelson's current role as a cultural icon transcends traditional confines to represent a selectively constructed symbol of all that is "decidedly American."⁹⁵

Imagine the irony when New York fashion designer Mara Hoffman used Willie Nelson's braid aesthetic as a theme



Willie Nelson, ca. 1980. Courtesy the Jerry Retzliff Collection, Wittliff Collections, Texas State University.

for her Spring 2016 clothing line. Dressing runway models in 30-inch braided extensions accessorized by tied bandanas across their foreheads with "1970s Americana" as the designer's creative inspiration presents an odd juxtaposition in contemporary culture.⁹⁶ In this case, Nelson's image shifts from one synonymous with a particular musical experience in the specific regional context of Texas to one that becomes representative of American cultural heritage and folklore in a national (and perhaps international) context. In 1983, Waylon Jennings received Nelson's snipped braids, still red at the time, as a gift from Johnny Cash and June Carter to celebrate Jennings's sobriety. While iconic enough in 1983 to cut and give as a celebratory gift to a fellow musician, those same braids sold at Jennings's estate auction in 2014 to an anonymous bidder for an astonishing \$37,000.⁹⁷

As a performer who has long represented rural, working-class country music embellished with a twist of hippie heritage, Nelson's present-day identifier as a commercial entity adds complexity to his contemporary cultural status. From T-shirts to Halloween costumes, his now iconic look is a distinguishable element of twentieth-century American popular culture. From the moment that visitors arrive at Austin-Bergstrom International Airport, Willie Nelson merchandise is widely available for purchase throughout the souvenir shops. The Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum in Austin dedicates a section of its gift shop to the "Red Headed Stranger."

The iconography associated with popular music reveals a number of intricate facets of regionally and nationally recognized subcultures. The ways in which groups choose to retrospectively brand or package an experience demonstrates a process that interweaves historical narrative and modern day cultural perceptions of those narratives. The images and symbols that come to represent music scenes are the selected products of interconnected historiography and memory mediation. The armadillo and Willie Nelson are only a few of the city's most identifiable examples of Austin music iconography, but these are carefully curated forms of visual representation that inform and continually reinforce a community's contemporary sense of place.

Ultimately, the establishment of iconography plays an integral role in the construction of cultural heritage. The next section draws upon the tangible and intangible remnants of Austin's countercultural music history to understand the development and application of cultural heritage in the Capital City. It also highlights the interconnected and dependent nature of musical nostalgia, memory mediation, the emergence of selected iconography, and the subsequent construction of cultural heritage.

Reverberation: The Development and Designation of Popular Music as Cultural Heritage in the Capital City

The contemporary cultural landscape of Austin reveals the ways in which popular music history and memory often are manipulated in order to define both regional identity and an established sense of heritage rooted in the city's countercultural sound. So far, this study has sought to connect the general popular music historiography of Austin with memory, identity, and iconographical processes. While each section of this article examines those roles individually, the construction of cultural heritage based on countercultural music is the culmination of these methodological relationships. Today, Austin is an international hub for music that markets itself as a cultural mosaic rooted in countercultural sound. This segment is a contemporary analysis of Austin's popular music history as cultural heritage.

In the introduction of this article, I loosely categorized heritage as a practice wherein the present day "mediation of the past" poses important questions about why and how localities preserve any one particular historical experience and use it to employ a regional or collective sense of tradition.⁹⁸ It is important to note, however, that as practitioners of public history continue to grant vocal agency and historical inclusivity to a wider audience, heritage discourse in the twenty-first century cultural landscape increasingly becomes a pluralistic entity that "all but defies definition."⁹⁹ This developing reality within heritage discourse creates challenges for the ways historians and the public choose to identify, "represent, curate, or package" popular music history as an emerging form of cultural heritage.¹⁰⁰

Preservation Austin (formerly known as the Heritage Society of Austin) is a non-profit that supports city preservation efforts. This organization attempts to save "the good stuff" in Austin's architectural, social, and cultural history by means of historic preservation. It helps designate historic homes and local historic districts, and it offers self-guided historic tours of the city. Preservation Austin is focused primarily on the preservation of the built (or "tangible") environment.¹⁰¹

However, in order to understand the preservation challenges associated with something more abstract, such as popular music as part of Austin's cultural heritage, it is necessary to examine the ways in which the concept of heritage evolved methodologically and how its discourse impacts the concept of popular music and culture as a valid form of heritage. There are several heritage experts whose research molded the conceptual frameworks for heritage discussion. For the purposes of this article, the work of David Lowenthal, Raphael Samuel, and Dirk Spennemann represents the wide range of

scholarly discourse and helps explain some of the long-standing definitions of cultural heritage within the academic sphere.

David Lowenthal, a heritage historian and geographer at University College London, spent the majority of his career exploring the relationship among popular forms of heritage, nostalgia, and the academic processes of traditional history. Lowenthal argues that heritage is the tool by which humans create personal connections with the past and shape their collective identity. He draws a distinct line between heritage and history, in which the academic practice of historical methods is superior to that of popular heritage. Lowenthal considers the popularization of heritage to be a kind of cultural fetish, its value incalculable by scholarly standards and “gauged not by critical tests but by current potency.”¹⁰² While Lowenthal views popular culture as heritage as a trend, he points out that this particular form of heritage possesses a collective sense of contemporary relevancy. History and its practitioners thrive on primary evidence and consistency, yet heritage is no more than the human need to contextualize and personalize history. Lowenthal envisions a distinct separation between heritage and history, but the usefulness of his theory is based on identifying the subjective nature of popular heritage as a result of social pressure and commercial popularity.

Lowenthal’s perception of the relationship between traditional historical practice and the emergence of popular music heritage is rather negative, but his theoretical views reveal how earlier heritage discourse viewed forms of popular culture, including popular music, as reputable cultural heritage. Raphael Samuel, a historian of heritage and memory, sees the fluid nature of heritage application in a more positive light. He focuses on bottom-up history and seeks to “re-discover the lives of millions overlooked by historians of big names and big events.”¹⁰³ To Samuel, “heritage is a nomadic term, which travels easily, and puts down roots” in “seemingly uncompromising terrain”¹⁰⁴ He celebrates the pluralistic nature of heritage application and applauds its growing social inclusivity.

Dirk Spennemann, a cultural heritage scholar in Australia, proposes a different framework for cultural heritage scholarship. Spennemann specializes in the study of future heritage. This emerging subfield of heritage addresses the issues surrounding conceptual contextualization of current and emerging forms of cultural heritage in order to predict future trends. Compared to Lowenthal and Samuel, Spennemann’s definition of heritage does not intrude upon the traditional process of history making but is simply the “result of human interaction with the environment and one another.”¹⁰⁵

Spennemann’s strength is twofold. He acknowledges that cultural heritage is a human construct, but he also introduces the idea that heritage practices are not for future generations.

Spennemann emphasizes that historians should be careful regarding this assertion in the name of preservation, and instead, practitioners of history should view heritage preservation as evidence of current historical relevancy and cultural potency.

Lowenthal, Samuel, and Spennemann provide strong theoretical foundations in their argument for the place of cultural heritage in historical practice and preservation. However, these scholars do not examine the role of heritage in direct relation to popular music subculture. Their importance for our purposes lies in confirmation that humans construct cultural heritage by selecting elements that they deem valuable or symbolic of the past, “expressive of desire rather than necessary continuity,” and relate them to contemporary culture and society.¹⁰⁶

There are four major methodological paradigms within cultural heritage scholarship that have impeded the conceptualization of popular music as a legitimate form of cultural heritage. First is the notion that heritage is treated as something completely detached from popular culture. Popular culture and music are excluded from the heritage categories because they are somehow constructed in opposition to the traditional definitions of cultural heritage and labeled as “commercial, inauthentic, and so unworthy” of official designation as significant aspects of cultural heritage.¹⁰⁷

A second major point of contention within heritage discourse is that of shared authority. Discussions of heritage and the authority to designate cultural value trace a hierarchy ranging from institutionalized consensus-driven versions of historical narrative to what is categorized as the “multi-vocal nature of subaltern and dissenting heritage” within localities.¹⁰⁸ This hierarchy underscores the juxtaposition of standardized, institutionalized versions of heritage discourse and the regional counterpart that relies on the expression of individual and unofficial heritage designation.

Thirdly, heritage is often researched in terms of duality. For example, localism versus globalism, regional versus national, and resident versus tourist are all versions of heritage discourse that accentuate how the “positionality of their agency” plays an integral role in shaping, reconstructing, and reproducing heritage practices.¹⁰⁹ Popular music as cultural heritage requires abandoning this dualistic approach and, instead, accentuating the value of local and national narrative interplay. The larger collective memory of popular music history serves as a frame of reference and context in which general aspects of popular music—such as genre, place, and widespread music trends—inform a larger aesthetic framework. At the local level, music subcultures incorporate elements of the broader framework to provide a nurturing

creative environment that breeds "home-grown talent" in which both individualized and collective popular memories are reconstructed and reworked to foster a distinct sense of regional identity.¹¹⁰ To conceptualize both formal and informal realms of popular music heritage, it is vital to think of heritage as a "reflection of a chain of popular memory."¹¹¹

The fourth and final major challenge to the inclusion of popular music as heritage in conventional academic discourse is the requirement of materiality. Materiality of heritage refers to the tangibility of the cultural heritage in question. Conventional heritage discourse tends to designate structures, objects, and other physical embodiments associated with the cultural terrain as legitimate forms of heritage. Tangible cultural heritage, in the case of Austin music, becomes the human relationship with both the built environment and the material objects associated with the countercultural music scenes.

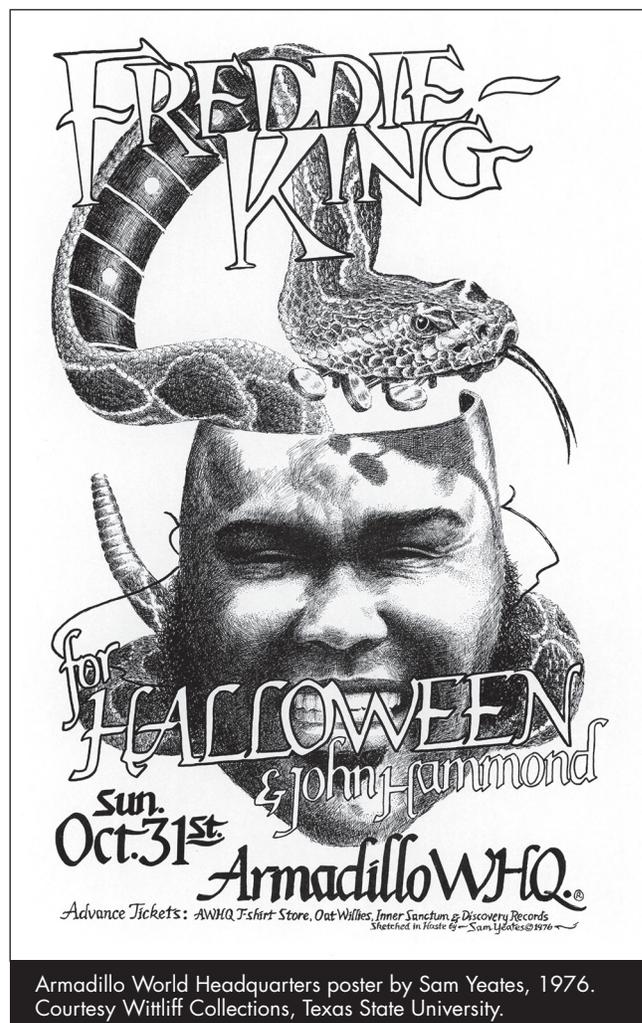
Unfortunately, many of the physical remnants in the built environment related to the psychedelic and progressive country music scenes either no longer exist or have been repurposed. The Vulcan Gas Company closed in 1970. Today the former nightclub is a clothing store, but the cultural value of its music history is difficult to physically preserve or commemorate without access to its original context. The building in which the Armadillo World Headquarters operated was demolished soon after the venue closed and has been replaced by a high-rise office building. The only indicator of the site's history is a small commemorative plaque where the iconic venue once stood, dedicated by the City of Austin in 2006. Just over a decade after the plaque was installed, it is faded and yellowed from exposure to the elements.¹¹²

Structural designation of music heritage, particularly performance spaces, is a difficult task simply because of the fluidity typical of music trends and the changing use of urban structures over time. Even for performance spaces in Austin that still operate today, officially designating a site as cultural heritage is a complex process. For example, the Victory Grill in East Austin is still operational. The site, which serves as one of the last remaining physical remnants of the Chitlin' Circuit in Central Texas, holds both a national and state heritage designation.

The National Register of Historic Places listed the Victory Grill in 1998, and the Texas Historical Commission dedicated a subject marker to the performance space in 2009.¹¹³ The primary reason that the venue has a subject marker is to avoid maintenance obligations that come with the state protection of a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark. Under this legal protection, any alteration or renovation made to a structure that might compromise its structural or historical integrity must be reported to the Texas Historical Commission within

ninety days or risk the loss of designation.¹¹⁴ This condition reveals the current tension between legally designating performance spaces related to Austin's popular music history and the changing demands of operating a commercial establishment, which also happens to be a historical site.

The heritage of popular music in Austin is mostly intangible, however. The concept of intangible cultural heritage "can be a difficult one to pin down" because it is a "recognition of the innate heritage value of the culture that people practice as a part of their daily lives."¹¹⁵ Intangible music heritage usually refers to a set of traditions or cultural legacies employed by the mediated memory of music history. Re-capturing the cultural power of Austin's countercultural sound and consciously employing it as a "vibrant, intangible expression of contemporary culture" poses challenges for a complex process of delineating this kind of musical heritage.¹¹⁶ Conventional heritage discourse that focuses on the materiality of heritage is not applicable to the analysis of popular music as heritage.



The previous section identified two of the city's most popular examples of music iconography and analyzed their creation based on a select set of historical narratives and the mediation of that collective musical memory. Similarly, there are examples of intangible cultural heritage in Austin that, while an indirect extension of countercultural music, are products of "strategic creative agency."¹¹⁷ The "Keep Austin Weird" slogan is a prime example of contemporary civic positioning that also works to reinforce collective regional identity and a distinct sense of place based on the popular music history of Austin during the 1960s and 1970s.¹¹⁸

The slogan reportedly originated with Red Wassenich, a longtime resident and Austin Community College professor, as a "call to arms" in defiance of the rapid growth of big business and urban sprawl in twenty-first-century Austin. In 2000, Wassenich called into one of his favorite local radio shows and made a donation because he believed that this

"Keep Austin Weird" is not directly linked to the history of psychedelic and progressive country music subcultures, but the propagation of the slogan as a form of contemporary cultural localism is only possible by calling on the city's countercultural past. Therefore, this form of civic positioning selectively utilizes a particular version of its popular music history to invoke a new form of intangible cultural heritage. The slogan is an example of the way Austin mediates its past in order to facilitate constructed nostalgia as a reaction to present day concerns over the condition of regional and cultural identity.

Austin's present-day cultural identity regularly calls upon well-known and generalized forms of countercultural language to demonstrate, wittingly or unwittingly, a form of intangible cultural heritage. For example, a sign on the historic downtown Austin Motel reads, "So close, yet so far out." A nod to the eclectic cultural environment of the city today, the use of this language is also an exhibition of intangible

The "Keep Austin Weird" slogan is a prime example of contemporary civic positioning that also works to reinforce collective regional identity and a distinct sense of place based on the popular music history of Austin during the 1960s and 1970s.

would help Austin preserve an important part of its history. He saw the growth of Austin as inevitable decay of local tradition and "watched unhappily as Austin, his funky, once affordable hometown, had been transformed into a high-tech boomtown." Wassenich and his wife printed bumper stickers with the slogan "Keep Austin Weird" and, soon, the phrase was a popular staple of Austin culture. A few years later, however, a local apparel company applied for the trademark rights to the slogan and a lawsuit ensued. Wassenich called the situation a "perfect illustration of everything that's un-weird about Austin."¹¹⁹

Later, the Austin Independent Business Alliance adopted the slogan to promote support for local and small businesses in the area and even used the armadillo symbol on the organization's logo.¹²⁰ The image and meaning of the armadillo are doubly constructed as a form of iconography and, yet again, its imagery is re-appropriated to convey a connection to the countercultural past of the city. The use of the slogan and the image of the armadillo as the logo of the organization also implies a sense of immediate cultural familiarity, one that reinforces a sense of safety in spite of its modern role a contemporary form of commercialization and commodification.

cultural heritage. It makes use of widely recognizable and decade-specific verbal cues to point to and facilitate the area's complex appointment of countercultural history as a contemporary cultural root.

The concept of music as heritage poses challenges for conventional processes of tangible and intangible categorization. Because popular music history encompasses assigned cultural value, reconstruction of memory, and the establishment of regional identities, its heritage is a culmination of intangible and tangible elements. In its simplest form, "music is intangible, as indeed are people's musical memories. But, neither music nor memory exists in an ontological vacuum." As discussed in the previous sections, the popular music history of Austin is a powerful source of memory recollection and mediation that has produced highly personalized historical narratives and carefully crafted examples of regional iconography. The idea that intangible music heritage exists in complete "isolation from the tangible and material makes little sense."¹²¹

Popular music trends are fluid, and along with that perpetual fluidity comes the reality that its physicality or permanence in national or regional contexts is temporary. To accurately preserve a music history and, at the same time, provide a

distinct sense of place is a difficult process. The city's music heritage is spatially dispersed with no definitive boundaries to where and how Austin's music and its history live. Because many of the structural remnants of Austin's psychedelic and progressive country scenes no longer exist, the history's legacy or memory is "enacted and practiced in material environments" and, ultimately, becomes a tangible form of cultural heritage.¹²²

Some of the best examples of intangible music heritage in tangible form are Austin's many wall murals and other forms of urban graffiti. These art forms are tangible expressions of an intangible musical legacy that either directly address the music history of Austin or make use of generalized forms of countercultural imagery and language to invoke the city's musical past. A bold and direct assertion of international music dominance, the mural on 6th Street near San Jacinto Street proudly displays the city's self-designated title as "Live Music Capital of the World."¹²³ Above that wording are portraits of musicians Stevie Ray Vaughan, Willie Nelson, Janis Joplin, Townes Van Zandt, and Roky Erickson. It is also worth noting that Nelson is depicted as his iconographic self, complete with long braids and bandana. The mural is a tangible expression of musical ownership that attempts to reinforce Austin's place in contemporary popular culture by employing the intangible legacies of notable musicians who, at one time, called the city home.

Another example of purposeful reconfiguration in Austin's music heritage is a different mural on the wall of an underpass near Lamar Boulevard. This mural depicts Texas native, long-time Austin resident, and Oscar-winning actor Matthew McConaughey in his role as the character Wooderson in the 1993 film *Dazed and Confused*. This cult classic was filmed in and around Austin and follows a group of Texas teenagers during their last day of high school in the mid-1970s.¹²⁴

The words "Keep ATX Weird" ("Keep Austin, Texas Weird") appear at the bottom of the mural. Above McConaughey's head, inside a word bubble, is the phrase, "It'd be cooler if you did," a now iconic line from the film. At first glance, this mural seems to pay tribute to the actor and also works to link him to Austin. However, the illustration also works as an indirect nod to the city's countercultural past by the use of McConaughey's character in a film that reconstructs and packages cultural and musical experiences of youth culture in 1970s Texas in order to propagate a selected contemporary cultural identity.

The concept of popular music as cultural heritage is complex, but as the cultural terrain of historical value widens, its inclusion in heritage discourse is absolutely vital, if historians are to understand the full range of processes that construct it. Austin's music history is multi-layered and nuanced, but the

analysis of this cultural heritage marker in the Capital City reveals the ways in which people in certain locales choose to selectively remember themselves and curate cultural legacies. As time passes, popular music history becomes shrouded in nostalgia and reconstructed to bolster present-day ideas and belief systems. However, music's application as heritage highlights the role that people play in the mediation of history and serves as a potent reminder that "the past is growing around us like ivy. . . . The more dead the past becomes, the more we wish to enshrine its relics" in new forms that reinforce a sense of collective identity and contemporary historical relevancy.¹²⁵

Conclusion

Austin's present-day cultural environment showcases the growing importance and relevance of popular music history as a form of heritage. The history of the Capital City sound spans more than a century and encompasses a wide variety of styles. However, the process of heritage designation reveals the ways in which people reconfigure historical narrative to consciously propagate a particular musical experience as contemporary regional heritage. The countercultural music scenes of Austin are remarkable examples of regional youth subculture in "relation to a broader musical landscape, in which various styles, audiences, and institutions interact in complex ways."¹²⁶

As a regional case study, the countercultural history of Austin music reinforces the idea that the American musical terrain "is not static" but instead is "always in motion, always evolving."¹²⁷ The concept of fluidity in American popular music is not solely applicable to genre trends or patterns of commercial consumption. Fluidity in popular music also reveals distinct representations of social and cultural conditions throughout twentieth-century American history. Similarly, Austin's psychedelic and progressive country music scenes, which maintained a strong presence in the local musical landscape throughout the 1960s and 1970s, demonstrate a subculture's need to draw upon "popular expression to mark contemporary social collision and convergence" within a regional and national context.¹²⁸

These are the connections that popular music history scholars seek to identify and build upon. The field of popular music history gained traction as a professionalized form by the 1970s and has continued to work its way into the widening repertoire of American historical methodology. With popular music at the center of cultural analysis, historians are able to "write the history of ordinary anonymous people rather than the rich and the famous."¹²⁹ Through the

lens of popular music, scholars can examine patterns of social interaction, consumer behavior, and creative expression in order to contextualize the cultural conditions of a period. A highly valuable tool with which to reconfigure traditional understanding of twentieth-century American history, popular music scholarship, nevertheless, has its methodological limits if it is studied in isolation from contemporary collective consciousness.

There is great potential to distort what many consider the ordinary or most popular throughout the history of recorded and mass-produced music. Musicians who sold the most records in any particular era are not necessarily representative of many larger, culturally complex ideas. By the same token, the most obscure music of the twentieth century is not always an accurate representation of the wider cultural terrain of popular music. This approach to popular music history poses a form of methodological dichotomy

produce distinct forms of collective and local identity. By beginning with the examination of the larger context of a locale's music history, it is easier to identify which versions of memory and historical narrative are brought forward and which are subsequently discarded. As time passes, the evolution of popular music as regional heritage acts as a highly mediated cultural filter in which particular musical experiences retain contemporary potency based on the manipulation of popular memory and the establishment of widely recognizable iconography.

Austin's music history contains a diverse range of styles and ethnic backgrounds, but based on the analysis of popular music as the city's primary form of cultural heritage, the psychedelic and progressive country music scenes of the 1960s and 1970s are the designated musical narratives upon which contemporary perceptions of heritage are based. Regardless of the area's multi-ethnic history of popular music, the

Austin's music history is complex and deeply diverse, but the analysis of this predominant cultural heritage marker in the capital city reveals the way in which localities choose to selectively remember themselves and how they curate cultural legacies.

in which cultural value and context might be unintentionally slighted. To avoid this, scholars must utilize the study of nostalgia, memory, iconography, and heritage practice in order to fully grasp and analyze the relationship between music and society.

Nostalgia, memory, iconography, and heritage, all subtopics within the field of public history, add complexity and depth to the analysis of American cultural history through the lens of popular music. These subtopics are interconnected points of examination by which an understanding of human mediation and cultural relevancy is produced within popular music scholarship. The process wherein groups ascribe nostalgia to earlier forms of music or particular musical experiences reveals a retrospective mediation that constructs new, contemporary perceptions of musical narrative. As musical nostalgia is reconfigured and reassigned over time, collective and regional memory are informed by previous re-manipulations of musical experience. Finally, nostalgia and the memory of twentieth-century popular music history narratives become the basis for contemporary cultural heritage construction.

Using Austin's countercultural music history as the focus of this essay allows for an in-depth analysis of the ways in which music imbeds itself within cultural environments to

narrative of countercultural music is pulled forward as a regional identity marker. This designation is due to present-day perceptions of musical nostalgia and public discourse of collective memory.

Throughout this article, the broader history of Austin music is the starting point from which the relationships among nostalgia, public memory, and iconography are analyzed. These concepts then become markers in the larger process of popular music heritage construction as the wider narrative of Austin's music history is filtered, reworked, and reconstituted over the course of the twentieth century. Although this is a regional case study, popular music history continues to emerge as a form of cultural heritage nationally and internationally. In order to adequately understand and contextualize the value of this history as heritage, mapping popular music's cultural heritage with an emphasis on nostalgia, collective popular memory, and iconography will add profound strength to its growing relevance within the field of American history. ★

Notes

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- 18 Eyerman and Jamison, *Music and Social Movements*, 35.
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- 26 See Filene's *Romancing the Folk* for a discussion of how folklorists' understanding of the "uniqueness" of American music changed over time. For example, early folklorists, such as Francis James Child, argued that American folk music was almost entirely derivative of European folk music. By contrast, later folklorists, including John Lomax, believed that, although American folk music certainly was rooted in European traditions, it took on a new identity of its own over time because of the distinct ethnic and social forces re-shaping North American cultural practices.
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- 42 *Dirt Road to Psychedelia*.
- 43 *Ibid.*
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- 49 See Hartman, *History of Texas Music*, for a brief discussion of progressive country music and how it helped give rise to outlaw country, 165-178.
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Religion, Freedom, and Prosperity in Oklahoma Country Music

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Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys performing on an ABC radio broadcast, 1946. Courtesy Johnny CuvIELLO.



Some years ago, I received a call for papers from the organizers of a conference on “Religion, Freedom and Prosperity in Oklahoma,” organized by East Central University in Ada, Oklahoma. At that time, I did not know very much about Oklahoma. I had heard of *The Grapes of Wrath*, the Dust Bowl, the Sooners, and the Cowboys, as well as the famous Broadway musical, but the economics and politics of the Sooner State were as foreign to me as California was to the first “Okie” migrants during the Great Depression.

However, as I began to consider the state’s musical history, I quickly realized how many well-known musicians either came from or were closely associated with Oklahoma. For example, Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys drifted north from Forth Worth to Tulsa in the early 1930s, after a falling out with influential radio host and future Texas Governor W. Lee “Pappy” O’Daniel. Gene Autry, also from the Lone Star State, achieved national fame in Hollywood as “Oklahoma’s Singing Cowboy.” Merle Haggard, the proud “Okie from Muskogee,” was born in California not long after his parents fled Oklahoma during the Dust Bowl years. Along with these “transplants,” there are many modern-day country musicians who hail from Oklahoma, including Garth Brooks, Reba McEntire, and Vince Gill.

As my research expanded beyond my personal music collection, the list of popular country musicians with significant connections to Oklahoma kept growing. If one includes those who sang about Oklahoma or spent a substantial amount of time there, the list becomes rather long.

Garth Brooks	The Tractors
Reba McEntire	Merle Travis
Vince Gill	Bryan White
Gene Autry	Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys
Junior Brown	Jimmy Revard and His Oklahoma Playboys
Roy Clark	Otto Gray’s Oklahoma Cowboys
Tommy Collins	Hoyt Axton
Joe Diffie	Spade Cooley
Stoney Edwards	Smokey Wood and His Chips
Wade Hayes	The Modern Mountaineers
Toby Keith	Brooks and Dunn
Roger Miller	Billy Joe Shaver
Hank Thompson	Merle Haggard

Table 1. Some Country Singers Associated with Oklahoma

“Okie from Muskogee”	“You are My Sunshine”
“Take Me Back to Tulsa”	“Mama Tried”
“South of the Border”	“San Antonio Rose”
“Mexicali Rose”	“Faded Love”
“Back in the Saddle Again”	“Friends in Low Places”
“Here Comes Santa Claus”	“The Dance”
“Peter Cottontail”	“Much Too Young (to Feel This Damn Old)”
“Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer”	“King of the Road”
“The Tennessee Waltz”	“Joy to the World”
“Frosty the Snowman”	“Oklahoma Wind”
“Blueberry Hill”	

Table 2. Some Songs Associated with Oklahoma

In fact, Oklahoma places fourth among the 50 states in the number of musicians who have appeared on *Billboard* magazine’s country charts.²

Oklahoma also has had a significant influence on a number of different artists and musical genres beyond country. These include barbershop quartets (the Society for the Preservation and Encouragement of Barbershop Quarter Singing in America, SPEBSQSA, was founded in Tulsa in 1938), folk singer Tom Paxton, rockabilly pioneer Wanda Jackson, jazz trumpeter Chet Baker, legendary American folk songwriter Woody Guthrie, and the “Bakersfield Sound,” which was originated in California during the 1960s by Okie transplant Merle Haggard and others (including Texas-born Buck Owens).

So, I thought I could do something with this; I attended the conference in Ada with great enthusiasm. Now I can honestly say that “I’ve never been to heaven, but I’ve been to Oklahoma.”³ Although a few years passed before I got around to writing a paper, due to my primary responsibilities as a teacher and scholar in political economy, I remained eager to explore how and why Oklahoma produced so many musicians, to what extent they were influenced by their time in the state, and how many of them had performed or recorded songs about Oklahoma.⁴

Traditional country music (as opposed to more pop or rock-influenced country) certainly is rich with the themes of religion, freedom, and prosperity. One need only look at the allegedly “perfect country and western song,” Steve Goodman’s parody “You Never Even Called Me by My Name,” with its pinnacle verse:

Well, I was drunk the day my mom got out of prison
 And I went to pick her up in the rain
 But before I could get to the station in my pickup truck
 She got run over by a damned old train.⁵

All the elements are there—religion, if backhandedly; the freedom of trains and pickup trucks; the lack of freedom of jail; and the lack of prosperity that contributes to drunkenness. (Or, is it the drunkenness that contributes to lack of prosperity?) Religion, freedom, and prosperity are ubiquitous themes in Oklahoma country music, making this study a useful one rather than merely a fun stretch of the imagination. The three are intertwined in the state’s music, as they are in real life.

Many Oklahomans have a rich southern background of Protestantism; the state’s constitutional convention begins with delegates singing the hymn “Nearer, My God, to Thee.” Religious expression in country music has changed over the years. As Richard Peterson and Melton A. McLaurin observe, “In the early days of commercial country music the good and the bad side of [life] were expressed in separate sacred and secular musical traditions. . . . It was not until the coming of honky-tonk songs in the late 1930s . . . that [both] became joined in a single song.”⁶ And the relationship was not always friendly. “Early commercial country music was shot through with fundamentalist Protestant imagery, even though ministers condemned it as part of Satan’s music—music which drove people to dance, drink, and forget themselves.”⁷ Perhaps as a gesture of goodwill to such preachers, but also as a reflection of the widespread religious sentiment among many fans, “[c]ountry bands regularly played gospel hymns, and it became a common practice to end a show with one or more rousing gospel songs to cast a glow of sanctity on what had been an evening of secular music.”⁸

If Oklahomans are a religious people, they also tend to be the free, individualist descendants of frontiersmen. We thus see, in Oklahoma’s country music, as in the state itself, a very Protestant respect for God and the Bible, mixed with a profound suspicion of authority and institutions.⁹ Themes of religion are also evident in the strong belief placed in the afterlife. In country

music, we see “a fatalistic state in which people bemoan their fate, yet accept it.” When economic hardship is mentioned in country music, it is often “paired with the idea of having been saved into the church of God, [where] poverty [is] seen as just a temporary trial for the faithful.”¹⁰

Likewise, many Sooners share a deep-seated belief in personal independence, going back to the early days of homesteading, in which daily hardships engendered “a desire for freedom, and a fear of control.”¹¹ Freedom is another recurring theme throughout Oklahoma’s country music, and it can take several forms. We see links between freedom and religion, in the wariness about external constraints, be they religious or secular (“both big government and big religion often are portrayed negatively in country music lyrics”).¹² Another common theme appears in the links between freedom and prosperity, such as a desire for freedom from want, or the ironically juxtaposed desire for freedom from work. Fortunately, there is solace to be found in the arms of “honky-tonk angels,” beer, or the freedom of the open road. All of these elements are clearly on display in Oklahoma country superstar Garth Brooks’s song about a lonely rodeo cowboy who laments that “a worn-out tape of Chris LeDoux / Lonely women and bad booze / Seem to be the only friends I’ve left at all.”¹³

Finally, many Oklahoma country songs mention prosperity—or a lack thereof—as being intertwined with themes of religion and freedom. The music of Oklahoma, with its pioneer roots, is shot through with “the great themes of American idealism, hard work and individualism.”¹⁴ If an Oklahoman wants prosperity, he will work for it, not seek it from anybody else.

However, when the enthusiastic and idealistic Oklahomans fall, they fall hard. We then see a “resentment at the society that had allowed them to believe and to try to practice [the] inflated

myths” of prosperity through freedom and hard work that surrounded early statehood.¹⁵ Enter country music, which “not only depicts the promise-and-denial tragedy, [but] also provides several means of rationalizing failure short of questioning the American dream itself.”¹⁶ In his essay on country music and populist ideology, Jock Mackay explains that country musicians then proceed to “(1) verbalize the problems in hopes of thus transcending them; (2) identify a malevolent force such as big business or big government; (3) underline a fatalism which declares ‘what will be, will be’; (4) promote escapist quests toward the freedom of a frontier or ‘the road’; (5) and boast a perseverance and pride in getting by.”¹⁷

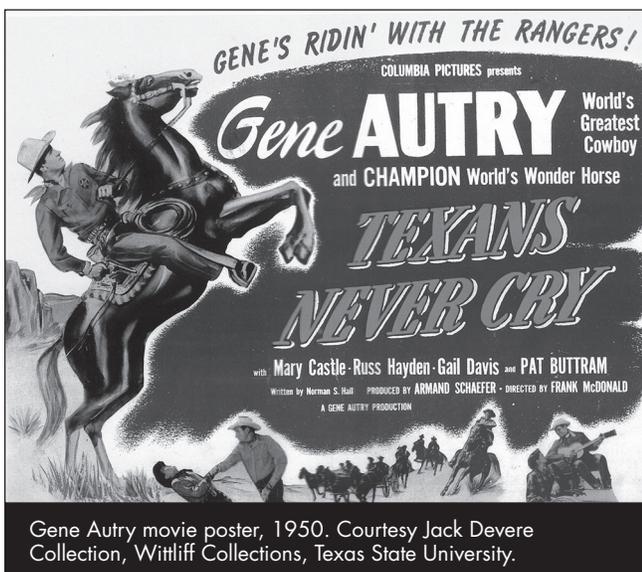
This article offers a snapshot of religion, freedom, and prosperity as reflected in Oklahoma country music spanning the past 100 years or so, from Bob Wills to Garth Brooks. This study is divided into four periods—early commercialization of country music until World War II; World War II to 1959; 1959 to the 1980s; and the 1980s to the present. This will help illustrate the ways in which the evolution of Oklahoma country music parallels the development of the state’s history throughout this same time period.¹⁸

41

The Early Years Through World War II

Oklahoma and country music came of age at the same time, at the dawn of the twentieth century. This was the era of statehood optimism, oil booms, and early country music recordings. The general public attitude was positive and forward-looking, at times even innocent. Gene Autry, America’s first nationally famous singing cowboy, is a fitting ambassador for an era “when things were a little easier and a little less complicated.”¹⁹ This innocence is reflected in Autry’s *Cowboy Code*, which seems perhaps hopelessly romantic today.²⁰

1. The Cowboy must never shoot first, hit a smaller man, or take unfair advantage.
2. He must never go back on his word, or a trust confided in him.
3. He must always tell the truth.
4. He must be gentle with children, the elderly, and animals.
5. He must not advocate or possess racially or religiously intolerant ideas.
6. He must help people in distress.
7. He must be a good worker.
8. He must keep himself clean in thought, speech, action, and personal habits.
9. He must respect women, parents, and his nation’s laws.
10. The Cowboy is a patriot.



Gene Autry movie poster, 1950. Courtesy Jack Devere Collection, Wittliff Collections, Texas State University.

Although born in Texas, Autry's family moved to Oklahoma when he was in his teens. His personal story parallels the general optimism of pioneers forming their state. Convinced by Sooner humorist Will Rogers that he should try singing professionally, Autry made his way to New York and looked up fellow Oklahomans Johnny and Frankie Marvin, who were in the music business.²¹ According to Douglas Green, "If he had nothing else, Autry did have innocent confidence. He walked up to the Marvins and introduced himself with a big smile, saying that he was Gene Autry, a fellow Oklahoman, and that he, too, wanted to make records."²²

Gene Autry's music, while optimistic, expresses themes of hardship, albeit in a quiet, confident manner:

There's a gold mine in the sky, far away
We will find it, you and I, some sweet day
When we strike that claim
And we'll sit up there and watch the world roll by
When we find that gold mine in the sky.²³

42 A quiet sense of freedom is also present in the romanticized lyrics of his popular cowboy-themed song, "Back in the Saddle Again":

Back in the saddle again
Out where a friend is a friend
Where you sleep out every night
And the only law is right
I'm back in the saddle again.²⁴

Autry sings of prosperity, but in a humble, simple manner. He perhaps foresaw the hectic nature of the industrial age, singing of the joys of honest work followed by rest:

When evening chores are over
And all I've got to do is lay around
I saddle up my pony and ride down the trail
To watch the desert sun go down.²⁵

A slightly less innocent voice comes from Bob Wills, another Texas transplant and the leader of the legendary Western swing band Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys. Western swing is also infused with the energetic optimism of early statehood. Although Wills rose to regional fame working in collaboration with businessman, radio personality, and future politician Wilbert Lee "Pappy" O'Daniel, the two parted ways in 1933.²⁶ Frustrated with O'Daniel's efforts to restrict his ability to

perform throughout Texas, Wills and his band relocated to the relative freedom of Oklahoma. In 1934, the Texas Playboys made Tulsa their home and could be heard on the airwaves of local station KVOO.²⁷ It is perhaps the ensuing prosperity that led the Texas Playboys to sing of "Roly Poly," a boy who enjoys well-deserved food after his work is done:

Roly Poly, scrambled eggs for breakfast, bread 'n' jelly
twenty times a day
Roly Poly eats a hardy dinner, it takes lots of strength to
run and play
Pulls up weeds and does the chores
And he runs both ways to all the stores
He works up an appetite that way
Roly Poly, daddy's little fatty, bet he's gonna be a man
someday.²⁸

According to H. Wayne Morgan and Anne Hodges Morgan, "The main theme of freedom in Western swing is freedom from care, a reflection of the times. As the temporary prosperity and unity of the [World War I era] receded, Oklahoma entered a period of turbulence that rivaled that of territorial days. Oklahomans joined the rest of the country in voting for 'normalcy' in 1920, out of weariness with moralistic reform [and] governmental wartime regimentation."²⁹ It was time to party and "dance all night, dance a little longer."³⁰ The honky-tonks were in full swing. "The girls around Big Creek . . . jump on a man like a dog on a bone."³¹ In another popular dance song, the Texas Playboys sing, "Oklahoma Gals, ain't ya comin' out tonight / Comin' out tonight, comin' out tonight? / Oklahoma gals, ain't ya comin' out tonight / And dance by the light of the moon?" The gals are "on your left and now your right / Treat 'em all alike / If it takes all night / We won't go home till broad daylight."³²

Because it was a lively dance-oriented music intended to help working men and women temporarily forget the hardships of the Great Depression, the exuberant mood of Western swing sometimes could border on silliness:

Sitting in the window, singing to my love
Slop bucket fell from the window up above
Mule and the grasshopper eatin' ice cream
Mule got sick so they laid him on the green
Stay all night, stay a little longer
Dance all night, dance a little longer.³³

However, as in the case of Gene Autry, there are quiet references to poverty and hard work—part of what drove

Western swing fans to seek out light-hearted entertainment in the first place. In a humorous but starkly revealing commentary on work, race relations, and economic inequality, the Texas Playboys sing:

Little bee sucks the blossom
The big bee gets the honey
Darky picks the cotton
White man gets the money.³⁴

The jury is still out on the implications of those lyrics. “Clearly there is exploitation there, but how was it understood by the millions that danced and sang along with the Bob Wills western swing band of the 1940s?” Since race is not a common theme in country music, were these lyrics “understood as racial exploitation equating the white man with the capitalist,

World War II to 1959

The post-World War II years—1945 through 1959—brought a number of changes to American society. These were the years of the baby boom, post-war economic prosperity, and the growth of industrialization and urbanization, all of which helped reshape Oklahoma society in many ways. The Dust Bowl and Depression years were finally over, but many Oklahomans were coming to realize for the first time that quite a few of their fellow Sooners “had never shared in the State’s fabled prosperity.”³⁸

The basic values of work, the frontier spirit of freedom, and the opportunity to achieve one’s own prosperity continued. As one Okie migrant put it, “We ain’t no paupers. We don’t want no relief. But what we do want is a chance to make an honest living like what we was raised.”³⁹ However, a new mentality was emerging. Oklahomans “sensed the social changes that inevitably accompanied such new kinds of economic growth. Learning to live in a complex, interdependent society was not

During the 1930s, country music in Oklahoma evolved in the shadow of the Great Depression, although, surprisingly, most of the state’s country music songs of this period do not address themes related to the difficulties of surviving the catastrophic Dust Bowl.

and, if so, is such race-as-class exploitation approved?” Or, “Alternatively, since many whites themselves picked cotton by hand in the 1940s, do listeners feel common cause with blacks against the exploiting owner?”³⁵ The resolution—universality of the working experience—may be found in a later change of lyrics, to the less controversial “Little man raises cotton / The beer joints get the money.” These lyrics are also more amusing if one considers that Oklahoma was a dry state at the time—at least in legal if not always practical terms.

During the 1930s, country music in Oklahoma evolved in the shadow of the Great Depression, although, surprisingly, most of the state’s country music songs of this period do not address themes related to the difficulties of surviving the catastrophic Dust Bowl. (Eventually, Woody Guthrie’s folk music single-handedly made up for that lacuna). One commentator speculates that country musicians were “discovering that a reasonably good living could be made in the midst of a nationwide Depression.”³⁶ So in certain ways, life was not as bad for them as it often was for their fans. “We always wear a great big smile and never do look sour / Travel all over the country / Playin’ by the hour,”³⁷ sang the happy Texas Playboys.

easy. Booster-ism and individual achievement characterized the first four decades of statehood. Oklahoma’s history was a series of confrontations that produced change.”⁴⁰

However, now the playing field was different. By the 1950s, Oklahoma was rapidly becoming more urbanized and industrialized. These profound changes and this tension between the old and the new manifested itself musically, as well. Despite the earlier success of Western swing, “traditional country music was forced underground in the mid-1950s as rebellious youth made their ambiguous statement through rock and roll.”⁴¹

Merle Travis, who was born in Kentucky but lived out the final years of his life in Oklahoma, often addressed social issues in his songs. In the tune “That’s All,” he makes what may seem to be self-contradictory comments about religious beliefs and practices. On the one hand, he expresses doubt regarding the concept of evolution. “Now man comes from monkeys / That’s what some people say / But you know that Good Book / It don’t tell it that way / If you believe that monkey tale like some people do / I’d rather be a monkey, brother, than you.” On the other hand, he also expresses skepticism about organized religion. “Some people go to school tryin’ to learn how to preach / If you

can't preach without going to school / You ain't no preacher / You's an educated fool."⁴² This attitude may well represent the feelings of many Oklahoma country music fans at the time—a strong belief in the Scriptures but perhaps a lesser degree of trust in those who interpret the Bible for their congregations.

In perhaps his best-known song, "Sixteen Tons," Merle Travis touches on several social issues, including religion, poverty, and mistreatment of working Americans. Here he contrasts the earthly burden of hard work for low wages with the spiritual freedom and rich rewards of eternal salvation:

You load sixteen tons, and what do you get?
Another day older, and deeper in debt
Saint Peter don't you call me, 'cause I can't go
I owe my soul to the company store.⁴³

This idea of work robbing a man of his freedom and his very soul appears in another Travis commentary on the difficulties faced by working-class Americans, especially the coal miners he witnessed first-hand during his youth. "There's many a man I've known in my day / Who lived just to labor his whole life away." Despite the dangers of the mine, a miner's life is extremely appealing. "Like a fiend with his dope / And a drunkard his wine / A man will have lust / For the lure of the mine."⁴⁴ If you don't work, you don't eat, but if you do work, you can't do much else, and you may lose your soul in the process.

Texas honky-tonk singer Hank Thompson is another popular musician from the post-World War II era who often addressed issues of religion, sexuality, and morality. In one of his biggest hits, "The Wild Side of Life," he laments the fact that his love interest has been lured to "where the wine and liquor flows / Where you wait to be anybody's baby / And forget the truest love you'll ever know." Thompson also seemingly draws a direct connection between the heavenly realm and earthly vice when he claims, "I didn't know God made honky-tonk angels."⁴⁵ Similarly, Roger Miller, born in Texas but raised in Oklahoma, recalls in the song "Chug-a-Lug" his "first taste of sin," complete with a "jukebox and a sawdust floor," topped off with "a big old sip" of moonshine.⁴⁶

In light of the powerful social changes re-shaping the nation in the post-World War II years, it is no wonder that this era helped produce a nostalgia for a more rustic, "simple" past. Hank Thompson wistfully sings an old Woody Guthrie tune about "those Oklahoma Hills where I was born." The hills share their bounty ("the black oil rolls and flows and the snow-white cotton grows"), but they are also an idyllic place "where the oak and blackjack trees kiss the playful prairie breeze." Similarly, Roger Miller's smash hit "King of the Road" offers a romanticized tale

of a hobo who has no money but enjoys freedom in abundance. In a way, Miller's wandering hobo is reminiscent of Gene Autry's free-roaming cowboys from decades earlier:

Two hours of pushin' broom
Buys an eight by twelve four-bit room
I'm a man of means by no means
King of the road.⁴⁷

The road, like the range, offers a free and friendly atmosphere. "I know every engineer on every train / And all of the children and all of their names." And, of course, the Sooner mistrust of big, anonymous entities is still there:

Old worn-out suit and shoes
Don't pay no union dues
I smoke old stogies I have found
Short but not too big around.

If these singers romanticized the difficulties of the past, they did not gloss over the hardships of the present. "I've been drinkin' all day long / Takin' in the town / I've done spent my whole paycheck / Just-a honky-tonkin' round," sings a dejected Hank Thompson. "I don't have enough to pay my rent / I ain't gonna worry, though / 'Cause I've got time for one more round / And a six-pack to go."⁴⁸ However, escaping one's responsibilities through drinking alcohol or hopping freight trains was not an option for everyone. Roger Miller's "Queen of the House" serves as a counterpoint to "King of the Road" by featuring a wife who complains that her husband "goes out with the boys and gets tight" while she is left at home with "four kids from one to four / Pretty soon there'll be one more . . . Four floors to wax and scrub / And there's a ring around the tub." She is left to dream that she'll "get a maid someday" and "wish that [she]'d picked a millionaire."⁴⁹

1959 to the 1980s

1959 marks an important year for Oklahoma—the end of prohibition in the state (a generation after the Twenty-First Amendment to the US Constitution). Although alcohol had been mentioned in Oklahoma country music many times before, it now seemed more prevalent. Merle Haggard, the California-born son of Okie Dust Bowl migrants, frequently sang about his struggles with alcohol. Apparently, he concluded that it was futile to resist the temptation of drinking, since "the reasons to quit don't outnumber all the reasons why."⁵⁰ The perennial Oklahoma theme of freedom surfaces again, as Haggard sings

of losing control. “I stood by and watched the bottle take control of me / The turn I made was not the one I planned / And I watched my social standing slip away from me / While I watched the bottle slowly take command.”⁵¹ It was a hope deferred that led to drinking in the first place:

Once I lived a life of wine and roses
I drank a lot back then for one concern
Success for me lay just around the corner
I thought my social friends would help me
make the turn.

But now I’m paying for the days of wine and roses
A victim of the drunken life I chose
Now all my social friends look down their noses
‘Cause I kept the wine and threw away the rose.⁵²

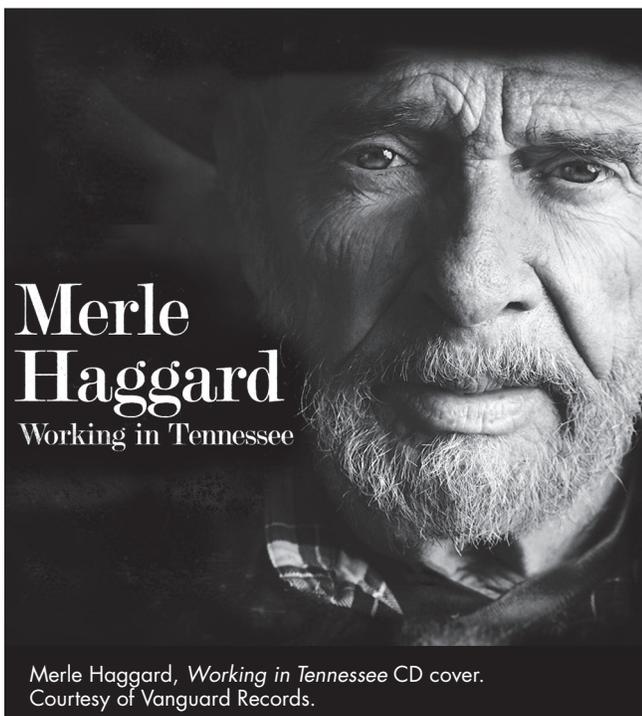
The end of prohibition in 1959 marks a year of change for Oklahoma in other ways, as well. Prohibition had reflected both conflict and a compromise of sorts between religion and freedom.⁵³ Oklahoma humorist Will Rogers once remarked that during the first five decades of statehood, “Okies would stagger to the polls and vote dry.”⁵⁴ All joking aside, “[T]he passing of Prohibition marked an end to a major phase of the state’s history. Socialism, the prominence of the Klan, and now Prohibition, passed into history. The old tensions and

aspirations that they represented yielded to new problems and responses.”⁵⁵ Oklahoma started to fully experience the upheavals of the decade after World War II, and the discomfort of “a large group of people who have been forced to make an overly hasty adjustment to a hostile urban environment.”⁵⁶

The era between 1959 and the mid-1980s was a period of both personal and professional distress for some of these musicians. Oklahoma-born Western swing bandleader Spade Cooley struggled to adapt to the changing times. Despite his fame and financial success, his alcoholism and misogyny helped lead to his tragic downfall:

Cooley’s investments in real estate meant that he was far from being a pauper when he decided to retire; however, the spare time just meant he drank more and had more time to develop an insane jealousy over his wife. Suspecting (wrongly as it turned out) that she was having an affair with Roy Rogers, he started abusing her, and in 1961 filed for divorce. Returning home one day considerably the worse for drink, he proceeded to kill his wife in front of their horrified 14-year-old daughter. Following a further heart attack, he stood trial and was found guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment. [He was allowed out in 1969 to perform a concert, but] after receiving a standing ovation for his performance, he collapsed and died backstage. A man who enjoyed a halcyon career in the mid-forties, Spade Cooley never adapted to the changing times and ultimately his life degenerated into darkest tragedy.⁵⁷

Merle Haggard’s music certainly reflected the tumultuous social changes taking place throughout the 1960s and 1970s, along with the difficulties he and others faced adjusting to changing gender roles, the rise of the youth counter-culture, and the struggles of working-class Americans to make a living in an increasingly automated and globalized economy. Haggard sang of longing for the days “when a man could still work and still would” and “a girl could still cook and still would.”⁵⁸ In another song (written by Dolly Parton about her impoverished Tennessee childhood), Haggard sings, “Anything at all was more than we had / In the good old days when times were bad.”⁵⁹ Such lyrics are almost reactionary and are clearly rooted in a nostalgic longing for a supposedly simpler past, prior to the 1960s anti-Vietnam War movement and the 1970s Watergate scandal. Haggard’s 1969 hit “Okie from Muskogee” became an anthem of sorts for social conservatives whose collective desire was to live in a small-town environment where they “still wave Old Glory down at the court house / And white lightning’s still



the biggest thrill of all.”⁶⁰ However, Haggard’s idyllic vision of a peaceful and orderly existence did not necessarily extend beyond one’s local community. In a rather sarcastic critique of the federal government and its attempts to provide a system of social welfare for the public at large, he also sang about an imaginary prosperous future when “We’ll all be drinkin’ that free Bubble-Up / And eatin’ that rainbow stew”:

When a President goes through the White House doors
And does what he says he’ll do
We’ll all be drinkin’ that free Bubble Up
And eatin’ that rainbow stew.⁶¹

After all, in the words of Billy Joe Shaver’s “Oklahoma Wind,” “the government ain’t something you can trust.” When presented with injustice, “Washington just turn[s] the other way.”⁶²

True to their pioneer roots, Oklahomans are not expecting a hand-out, but they do dream of better times. In a throwback to Gene Autry, Merle Haggard sings of the same “Goldmine in the Sky,” which has evolved into a more appropriately modern “mighty Super Service in the sky / Where a retired worker can

“Greenback Dollar,” Axton also expresses his skepticism about attaining prosperity through simple hard work:

And I don’t give a damn about a greenback dollar
Spend it fast as I can
For a wailin’ song, and a good guitar
The only things that I understand.⁶⁶

As with so many of his songs, Merle Haggard once again seems to equate personal freedom with being untethered to either a typical “day job” or government assistance in his 1981 hit “Big City”:

Turn me loose, set me free somewhere in the middle of
Montana
Gimme all I got comin’ to me
And keep your retirement and your so-called Social
Security
Big City, turn me loose and set me free.⁶⁷

Following the tumultuous changes of the 1950s-1960s Civil Rights era, Oklahoma entered another transitional period.

find happiness a-pumpin’ gas forever / For the angels in the sweet by and by.”⁶³

This theme of distrust in the government along with a desire to be self-reliant is further expressed in Haggard’s “Workin’ Man Blues,” where he proudly proclaims:

I ain’t never been on welfare
And that’s one place I won’t be
‘Cause I’ll be working
Long as my two hands are fit to use
I’ll drink my beer in a tavern
And sing a little bit of these working man blues.⁶⁴

Unfortunately, many Oklahomans seemed to fit the scenario described earlier by Merle Travis in his songs about coal miners—namely that even hard work does not guarantee prosperity. As singer Hoyt Axton asked, “Work your fingers to the bone, what do you get? / Bony fingers, bony fingers.”⁶⁵ In his first hit song,

A lack of faith in modernity surfaces in Merle Haggard’s complaint about the big business that “after twenty years” can anonymously and heartlessly “put [an employee] on the side.”⁶⁸ However, if Haggard doubted the virtues of modernity, faith in traditional Oklahoma values prevails. He articulates this rather plainly in “Okie from Muskogee,” where “we like livin’ right and bein’ free.”⁶⁹

Resistance to being “tied down” by a demoralizing, urban-industrial job was a common theme in Haggard’s lyrics, and it clearly resonated with many working-class Oklahomans. Likewise, Billy Joe Shaver sings, “Movin’s in my soul, I guess a gypsy got a hold of somebody in my family long ago . . . Life made dice out of my bones and it won’t leave me alone / ‘Til it warms me up and takes another roll.” The call of freedom is a strong one, and “that restless wind is calling me again / Her warmin’ hand is tuggin’ at my soul.”⁷⁰ At the same time, the misuse of freedom can lead to trouble. In one of his earliest songs, “Mama Tried,” Haggard accepts personal responsibility for his mistakes:

I turned twenty-one in prison, doing life without parole
 No one could steer me right but Mama tried, Mama tried
 Mama tried to raise me better, but her pleading I denied
 That leaves only me to blame, 'cause Mama tried.⁷¹

Although religion has long played an important role in the belief systems of many Oklahomans, Haggard points out how sin often prevails despite the best of intentions when he sings, “In spite of all my Sunday learning / Toward the bad I kept on turning.”⁷² The temptation is just too strong. “I raised a lot of Cain back in my younger days / While Mama used to pray my crops would fail.”⁷³

By contrast, prayer could also be an effective source of comfort, as in the poignant song Haggard sings about a mother who reads about the death of her son in battle. Instead of blaming God, she “knelt down by her bedside / And she prayed Lord above hear my plea / Please protect all the boys who are fighting tonight / And dear God keep America free.”⁷⁴ Religion can also serve as an opportunity to give thanks for the simple pleasures of life:

Let me sing a song for Jesus everyday
 For he's the one who guides me every step of the way
 He's my soul's inspiration and the one who guides my pen
 So let the last song be for him.⁷⁵

Hoyt Axton warns listeners that one can enjoy a life rich in material wealth, but that offers little comfort or security in the afterlife:

I know a man, rich as a king
 Still he just won't give his neighbors a thing
 He'll get up to heaven someday I bet
 He'll get up to heaven and here's what he'll get
 A rusty old halo, skinny white cloud, second hand wings
 full of patches
 A rusty old halo, skinny white cloud, a robe that's so
 woolly it scratches.⁷⁶

Mid-1980s to the present

Following the tumultuous changes of the 1950s-1960s Civil Rights era, Oklahoma entered another transitional period. “By the early 1970s the state population began to grow slowly. For the first time since the end of the oil boom, people from other parts of the country came in some numbers, and young Sooners elected to stay.”⁷⁷ Some attributed the state's nascent economic rebound in no small part to a long-heralded “pioneer work ethic.”

As the owner of one high-tech firm remarked, “[T]hese folks don't want welfare. All they want is the chance to do a job.”⁷⁸ By the mid-1980s, as the nation emerged from the global energy crisis, Oklahoma's economy experienced even stronger growth.

If things got better for Oklahoma as a whole, though, they did not improve for everybody. Some musicians complained of being among “those who wait forever for ships that don't come in”⁷⁹ or feeling as if “everything we got is fallin' apart.”⁸⁰ Despite the state's general rise in prosperity, many continued to suffer and, as they had done for generations, many blamed the government:

I've had enough of bills and taxes
 I can't get ahead no matter what I do
 I've had enough of politicians
 You can't believe a word they say.⁸¹

Sometimes this anger found expression through more humorous means:

Why don't we take all the city-slicker bankers
 And put 'em on John Deere tractors in the summer sun
 And sit back and watch 'em sweat
 You can bet all the wheat in Oklahoma
 They'll get a different attitude when the plowing's done.⁸²



Reba McEntire, *For My Broken Heart* CD cover.
 Courtesy of MCA Records.

For others, the widespread skepticism toward Washington resurfaces. “Why don’t we take all the IRS boys / And watch ‘em try to make a living from the family store.”⁸³ This rural/urban, modern/traditional, affluent/poor conflict is apparent in another contemporary expression of dissatisfaction with city life and a lack of trust in the government. “I’m goin’ back to the country / ‘Cause I can’t pay my rent / I may not be completely broke / But brother I’m badly bent . . . I am just a country boy / Tryin’ to make some sense / But I’d like to ask the Congress / I’d like to ask the President / Can you tell me where all the money went? / We might not be broke / But we’re badly bent.”⁸⁴

The traditional element of freedom (and the corresponding tension with prosperity) is also still present in contemporary Oklahoma country music. In some cases, “freedom” is represented by one’s choice in mode of transportation. “You can set my truck on fire and roll it down a hill / And I still wouldn’t trade it for a Coupe De Ville.”⁸⁵ In a somewhat different vein, Oklahoma superstar Reba McEntire sings, “I’d like to fly to Hawaii / But honey if I had to choose / I’d rather ride around with you.”⁸⁶

The juxtaposition of prosperity and freedom, or in this case, the inherent conflict between work and fun, is expressed by Wade Hayes in his song about a hangover:

Monday morning I wake up with a hammer in my hand
The boss-man yelling something at me that I don’t understand
I don’t know how I got to work, but I sure know I’m there
I’m old enough to know better, but I’m still too young to care.⁸⁷

In his song “You Ain’t Much Fun (Since I Quit Drinkin’),” Oklahoma-born Toby Keith laments, “So much work is hard for your health / I could’ve died drinkin’ / Now I’m killing myself.”⁸⁸ Again, the singer takes responsibility for his actions. He drank too much and must now face work with a headache. In a nod to Merle Haggard, Keith admits that “mama raised me right / That just leaves me to blame.”⁸⁹ This acceptance of the consequences of one’s action is not always the case when greater forces come into play. “Longneck bottle, let go of my hand,” begs Tulsa native Garth Brooks. “I oughta waltz right out of them swingin’ doors / But that’s a step I just can’t learn.”⁹⁰ Similarly, “I’m a victim of life’s circumstances,” laments Vince Gill, yet another son of Oklahoma. “Well I was raised around bar rooms and Friday night dances / Singing them old country songs / And half the time endin’ up some place I didn’t belong.”⁹¹

The loss of control over one’s own life is a theme that can also be heard in the lament of a housewife who has followed the rules all her life, losing her freedom in the process. “Is there life out there?” Reba McEntire asks:

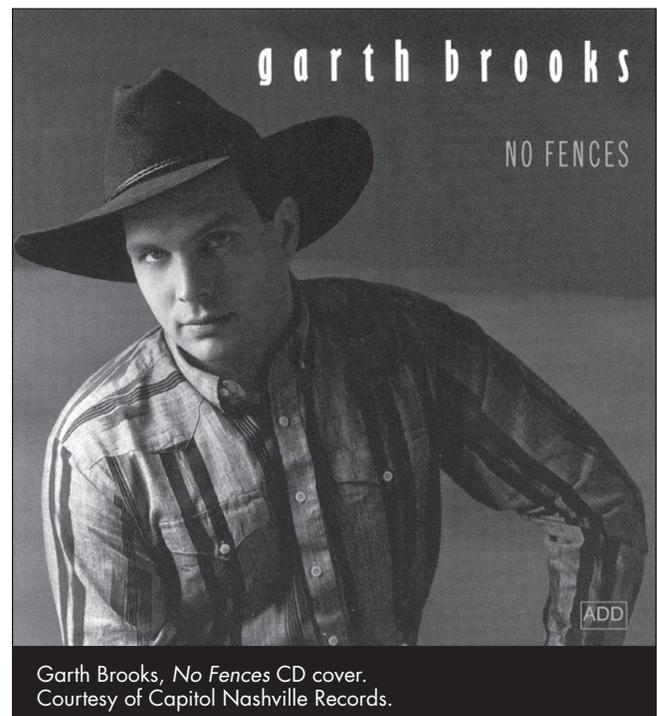
So much she hasn’t done
Is there life beyond her family and her home?
She’s done what she should, should she do what she dares?
She doesn’t want to leave
She’s just wonderin’, is there life out there?⁹²

According to Garth Brooks, there is, but you’ve got to fight to hold on to it:

Life is like a windshield, it ain’t no rearview mirror
The only way to get where you’re goin’ is find that higher gear
And keep it rollin’
Life’s gonna run you over if you don’t get goin’.⁹³

This theme is expressed somewhat differently in Toby Keith’s lament about modern life:

I should’ve been a cowboy.
I should’ve learned to rope and ride . . .
Stealin’ the young girls’ hearts
Just like Gene and Roy
Singing those campfire songs
I should’ve been a cowboy.⁹⁴



Garth Brooks, *No Fences* CD cover.
Courtesy of Capitol Nashville Records.

This same quest for freedom is heard in Garth Brooks's rendition of "Night Rider's Lament":

Why does he ride for his money?
And why does he rope for short pay?
He ain't gettin' nowhere
And he's losin' his share.⁹⁵

In the chorus, Brooks explains that this type of freedom is one that city dwellers will never understand:

Ah, but they've never seen the Northern Lights
They've never seen a hawk on the wing
They've never spent spring at the Great Divide
And they've never heard old Camp Cookie sing.⁹⁶

As the lyrics of this song suggest, it may be a lonely life out there on the range, but it is better than an urban existence with its façade of prosperity. In much the same way, Garth Brooks, singing from the perspective of a traveling rodeo cowboy, laments the loneliness of life on the road. "A worn-out tape of Chris LeDoux / Lonely women and bad booze / Seem to be the only friends I've left at all."⁹⁷ Fortunately, Brooks finds solace at the "American Honky-Tonk Bar Association,"⁹⁸ in the company of "friends in low places / Where the whiskey drowns and the beer chases [his] blues away."⁹⁹

Some sing of a lost way of life on the range, like Gene Autry longing for his "Gold Mine in the Sky."¹⁰⁰ For others, the Sooner faith in work and the Bible shines through, even if things are less than ideal. According to singer Joe Diffie, "I guess we can't complain / God made life a gamble / And we're still in the game."¹⁰¹ Another, more flippant expression of religion comes from Diffie's amusing take on poverty:

If the devil danced in empty pockets
He'd have a ball in mine
With a nine-foot grand
A ten-piece band
And a twelve-girl chorus line.¹⁰²

He concludes, "I'd sell my soul to get out of this hole / But there'd be hell to pay."¹⁰³

On a more serious note, the religious Oklahoma spirit once again shines through in country songs that appeal to a higher power. "I know I haven't been a saint," admits Bryan White, "and asking You for anything takes nerve."¹⁰⁴ Still, Garth Brooks enjoins us to

Remember when you're talking to the man upstairs
That just because He doesn't answer
Doesn't mean He don't care
'Cause some of God's greatest gifts
Are unanswered prayers.¹⁰⁵

Oklahoma country music is filled with themes of religion, freedom, and prosperity stretching back throughout the state's history. Garth Brooks combines all of these elements in his song "We Shall be Free":

When the last child cries for a crust of bread
When the last man dies for just words that he said
When there's shelter over the poorest head
We shall be free.¹⁰⁶

Select Discography*

Gene Autry. *Back in the Saddle Again – 25 Cowboy Classics*

Hoyt Axton. *Road Songs*

*Chet Baker. *West Coast Live*

Brooks & Dunn. *Brand New Man*

Garth Brooks. *No Fences*

Joe Diffie. *Greatest Hits*

Stoney Edwards. *Poor Folks Stick Together: The Best of Stoney Edwards*

Vince Gill. *The Key*

*Woody Guthrie. *This Land is Your Land: The Asch Recordings, Vol. 1*

Merle Haggard. *16 Biggest Hits*

Wade Hayes. *Old Enough to Know Better*

Toby Keith. *Blue Moon*

Reba McEntire. *For My Broken Heart*

Roger Miller. *King of the Road*

*Tom Paxton. *I Can't Help But Wonder Where I'm Bound: The Elektra Years*

Billy Joe Shaver. *Restless Wind – The Legendary Billie Joe Shaver, 1973-1987*

Hank Thompson. *Vintage*

The Tractors. *The Tractors*

Merle Travis. *The Merle Travis Story*

Bryan White. *Between Now and Forever*

Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys. *Classic Western Swing*

*Artists marked with an asterisk are not country musicians but nonetheless hail from Oklahoma. ★

Notes

- 1 Nikolai G. Wenzel, Research Fellow, University of Paris Law School (Center for Law & Economics), and Senior Fellow, Eleutheria Institute, nikolaiwenzel@hotmail.com. A special thank-you goes to my late grandfather, Orrin J. Wenzel, Jr., who performed his way through college in a swing band on a 1934 Gibson guitar he passed on to me, along with a love and appreciation for the music. Thanks also to Will Longwitz and the organizers and participants at the 2002 conference on “Religion, Freedom, and Prosperity in Oklahoma” (East Central Oklahoma University). For building my discography (and periodically imitating the Bob Wills holler), thanks to Ben Chang. For research assistance and administrative support, thanks to George Mount and Brandon Carmack.
- 2 Paul Fryer, “Local Styles and Country Music: An Introductory Essay,” in *All That Glitters: Country Music in America*, ed. George H. Lewis (Bowling Green: Popular Press, 1993), 68.
- 3 “Never Been to Spain,” written by Hoyt Axton.
- 4 For a non-scholarly but informative commentary on country music as a mirror for American society see “Country Music: Middle America’s Soul,” *The Economist*, December 19, 2006. For more scholarly studies, see Charles F. Gritzner, “Country Music: A Reflection of Popular Culture,” *The Journal of Popular Culture*, Volume XI, Issue 4, Spring 1978, 857-864; Bill C. Malone, *Country Music USA* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002) and *Singing Cowboys and Musical Mountaineers: Southern Culture and the Roots of Country Music* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993); and A. A. Fox, *Real Country: Music and Language in Working-Class Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); on race specifically, but country music as culture generally, see Charles L. Hughes, *Country Soul: Making Music and Making Race in the American South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); on country music and regional culture, see Billy D. White and Frederick A. Day, “Country Music Radio and American Culture Regions,” *Journal of Cultural Geography*, Volume 16, Issue 2, 1997; more generally, see Bill C. Malone, ed., *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, Volume 12: Music (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009) or Kenneth J. Bindas, ed., *America’s Popular Pulse: Popular Music in Twentieth-Century Society* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 1992); for case studies on Oklahoma country music and culture from Woody Guthrie to Merle Haggard, see Peter La Chapelle, *Proud to be an Okie: Cultural Politics, Country Music, and Migration to Southern California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007). On country music and politics, see Chris Willman, *Rednecks and Bluenecks: The Politics of Country Music* (New York: The New Press, 2007); for a look at early twentieth century country music and religion, see Ron Briley, “Woody Guthrie and the Christian Left: Jesus and ‘Commonism,’” *Journal of Texas Music History*, Volume 7 (2007) available at: http://gato-docs.its.txstate.edu/jcr:e61200af-2954-4e98-8f9d-91df7d8d36b2/Volume_7_Woody%20Guthrie%20and%20the%20Christian%20Left%20Jesus%20and%20Commonism.pdf; Michael Grimshaw, “Redneck Religion and Shitkickin’ Saviours?: Gram Parsons, Theology, and Country Music,” *Popular Music*, Volume 21, Issue 1, 2002, 93-105; or M. L. Grossman, “Jesus, Mama, and the Constraints on Salvific Love in Contemporary Country Music,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 70 (1), 2002, 83-115.
- 5 “You Never Even Call Me by My Name,” by Steve Goodman and John Prine.
- 6 Melton A. McLaurin and Richard A. Peterson, eds., *You Wrote My Life: Lyrical Themes in Country Music* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 12.
- 7 Richard A. Peterson, “Class Unconsciousness in Country Music,” in McLaurin and Peterson, *You Wrote My Life*, 52.
- 8 Ibid., 53. As late as the 1990s, Washington, D.C.’s daily bluegrass show (which ended in the early 2000s to lamentations of “O Bluegrass, Where Art Thou?”) closed every hour with ten minutes of “hymn time.”
- 9 Jimmie N. Rogers and Stephen A. Smith, “Country Music and Organized Religion,” in Lewis, *All That Glitters*, 276.
- 10 Peterson, “Class Unconsciousness in Country Music,” 60.
- 11 H. Wayne Morgan and Anne Hodges Morgan, *Oklahoma: A Bicentennial History*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1977), 70.
- 12 Rogers and Smith, “Country Music and Organized Religion,” 280.
- 13 “Much too Young (To Feel this Damn Old),” performed by Garth Brooks.
- 14 Morgan and Morgan, *Oklahoma*, 70.
- 15 Ibid., 57.
- 16 Paul Dimaggio, Richard A. Peterson, and Jack Esco, Jr., “Country Music: Ballad of the Silent Majority,” in *The Sounds of Social Change: Studies in Popular Culture*, eds. R. Serge Denisoff and Richard A. Peterson (Chicago: Rand Macnally, 1972), 51, quoted in Lewis, *All That Glitters*, 288.
- 17 Jock Mackay, “Populist Ideology and Country Music,” in Lewis, *All That Glitters*, 288.
- 18 Melton A. McLaurin, “Songs of the South: The Changing Image of the South in Country Music,” in McLaurin and Peterson, *You Wrote My Life*, 18.
- 19 www.brightok.net/chickasaw/ardmore/country/autry.html
- 20 <http://courses.cs.vt.edu/~cs3604/lib/WorldCodes/Cowboy.Code.html>
- 21 Gene Autry, like several of the singers discussed in this article, was not born in Oklahoma, but he built much of his early musical career there and often was billed as “Oklahoma’s singing cowboy.”
- 22 Douglas B. Green, “The Singing Cowboy: An American Dream,” in *The Country Reader: Twenty-Five Years of the Journal of Country Music*, ed. Paul Kingsbury (Nashville: The Country Music Foundation Press, 1996), 29.
- 23 “Goldmine in the Sky,” performed by Gene Autry.
- 24 “Back in the Saddle Again,” performed by Gene Autry.
- 25 “Riding Down the Canyon,” performed by Gene Autry.
- 26 Gary Hartman, *The History of Texas Music* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 144-146.
- 27 Adam Komorowski, liner notes to *Doughboys, Playboys, and Cowboys—The Golden Years of Western Swing* (London: Proper Records, 2010), 9.
- 28 “Roly Poly,” performed by Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys.
- 29 Morgan and Morgan, *Oklahoma*, 102.
- 30 “Stay All Night,” performed by Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 “Oklahoma Girls,” performed by Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys.
- 33 “Stay All Night,” performed by Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys.
- 34 “Take Me Back to Tulsa,” performed by Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys.
- 35 Peterson, “Class Unconsciousness in Country Music,” 54.
- 36 www.eyeneer.com/America/Genre/Folk/bluegrass/Profiles/monroes.html
- 37 “Take Me Back to Tulsa,” performed by Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys.
- 38 Morgan and Morgan, *Oklahoma*, 169.
- 39 Ibid., 166.
- 40 Ibid., 137.
- 41 George H. Lewis, “Tension and Contradiction in Country Music,” in Lewis, *All That Glitters*, 77.
- 42 “That’s All,” performed by Merle Travis.
- 43 “Sixteen Tons,” performed by Merle Travis.
- 44 “Dark as a Dungeon,” performed by Merle Travis.
- 45 “The Wild Side of Life,” performed by Hank Thompson.
- 46 “Chug-a-Lug,” performed by Roger Miller.
- 47 “King of the Road,” performed by Roger Miller.
- 48 “Six-Pack to Go,” performed by Hank Thompson.
- 49 “Queen of the House,” performed by Roger Miller.
- 50 “Reasons to Quit,” performed by Merle Haggard.
- 51 “Life of Wine and Roses,” performed by Merle Haggard.
- 52 Ibid.
- 53 Morgan and Morgan, *Oklahoma*, 115.
- 54 Ibid., 116.
- 55 Ibid., 117.
- 56 James C. Cobb, “From Rocky Top to Detroit City: Country Music and the

- Economic Transformation of the South,” in McLaurin and Peterson, *You Wrote My Life*, 77.
- 57 Komorowski, liner notes to *Doughboys, Playboys, and Cowboys*, 27.
- 58 “Are the Good Times Really Over for Good?” performed by Merle Haggard.
- 59 “In the Good Old Days (When Times Were Bad),” performed by Merle Haggard.
- 60 “Okie from Muskogee,” performed by Merle Haggard.
- 61 “Rainbow Stew,” performed by Merle Haggard.
- 62 “Oklahoma Wind,” performed by Billy Joe Shaver.
- 63 “Harold’s Super Service,” performed by Merle Haggard.
- 64 “Workin’ Man Blues,” performed by Merle Haggard.
- 65 “Bony Fingers,” performed by Hoyt Axton.
- 66 “Greenback Dollar,” performed by Hoyt Axton.
- 67 “Big City,” performed by Merle Haggard.
- 68 “Under the Bridge,” performed by Merle Haggard.
- 69 “Okie from Muskogee,” performed by Merle Haggard.
- 70 “A Restless Wind,” performed by Billy Joe Shaver.
- 71 “Mama Tried,” performed by Merle Haggard.
- 72 Ibid.
- 73 “I’m a Lonesome Fugitive,” performed by Merle Haggard.
- 74 “Soldier’s Last Letter,” performed by Merle Haggard.
- 75 “When My Last Song is Sung,” performed by Merle Haggard.
- 76 “Rusty Old Halo,” performed by Hoyt Axton.
- 77 Morgan and Morgan, *Oklahoma*, 174.
- 78 Ibid.
- 79 “Ships That Don’t Come In,” performed by Joe Diffie.
- 80 “Fallin’ Apart,” performed by the Tractors.
- 81 “I’ve Had Enough,” performed by the Tractors.
- 82 “The Little Man,” performed by the Tractors.
- 83 Ibid.
- 84 “Badly Bent,” performed by the Tractors.
- 85 “Pickup Man,” performed by Joe Diffie.
- 86 “I’d Rather Ride Around with You,” performed by Reba McEntire.
- 87 “Old Enough to Know Better,” performed by Wade Hayes.
- 88 “You Ain’t Much Fun,” performed by Toby Keith.
- 89 “Old Enough to Know Better,” performed by Wade Hayes.
- 90 “Longneck Bottle,” performed by Garth Brooks.
- 91 “Victim of Life’s Circumstances,” performed by Vince Gill.
- 92 “Is There Life Out There?” performed by Reba McEntire.
- 93 “Rollin’,” performed by Garth Brooks.
- 94 “I Should Have Been a Cowboy,” performed by Toby Keith.
- 95 “Night Rider’s Lament,” performed by Garth Brooks.
- 96 Ibid.
- 97 “Much Too Young (To Feel This Damn Old),” performed by Garth Brooks.
- 98 “American Honky-Tonk Bar Association,” performed by Garth Brooks.
- 99 “Friends in Low Places,” performed by Garth Brooks.
- 100 “Somewhere Under the Rainbow,” performed by Joe Diffie.
- 101 “Ships That Don’t Come In,” performed by Joe Diffie.
- 102 “If the Devil Danced (In Empty Pockets),” performed by Joe Diffie.
- 103 Ibid.
- 104 “One Small Miracle,” performed by Bryan White.
- 105 “Unanswered Prayers,” performed by Garth Brooks.
- 106 “We Shall Be Free,” performed by Garth Brooks.



Armadillo World Headquarters: A Memoir

By Eddie Wilson with Jesse Sublett (Austin: TSSI Publishing/University of Texas Press, 2017).

The Armadillo World Headquarters, an enterprise that served as a music venue, art gallery, restaurant, and living space for Austin's counterculture from 1970 to 1980, has been frequently analyzed and documented by writers and academics. Jason Mellard's *Progressive Country: How the 1970s Transformed the Texan in Popular Culture* and Travis D. Stimeling's *Cosmic Cowboys and New Hicks: The Countercultural Sounds of Austin's Progressive Country Music Scene* both provide overviews of the venue's importance, while Jan Reid's *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock* is a journalistic view of a young man experiencing the Armadillo for the first time. Notably absent from the literature surrounding the Armadillo is a well-written, organized firsthand account from the front lines of the venue's operation. *Armadillo World Headquarters*, written by Eddie Wilson with Jesse Sublett, provides just that in a hefty volume complete with illustrations, photographs, and reproductions of music posters.

Armadillo World Headquarters does not aim to be an academic analysis of the countercultural movement that transformed Austin in the 1970s. Instead, it succeeds as a beautifully woven memoir of Eddie Wilson's life with the Armadillo at the center of the tapestry. Wilson shares his perspective as the self-proclaimed ringleader of the Armadillo World Headquarters, often casting himself as the straight-laced businessman in a room full of dreamy artists. The first few chapters detail Wilson's evolution from high school English teacher to owner of a rock club and art collective. As the memoir progresses, Wilson recalls the performances and characters that gave the Armadillo World Headquarters a place in music history. To tell his story, Wilson employs a host of primary accounts and sources, but most of the dialogue is remembered by Wilson himself. While there's no way to verify the accuracy of each account, Wilson's fantastical stories do not rely on guaranteed historical accuracy to remain relevant to researchers hoping to understand the Armadillo's place in twentieth-century Austin.



The memoir wavers between poignant, shocking, and hilarious as Wilson recalls the exploits of the counterculture community that called the Armadillo their home. Sad vignettes, like a description of the senseless murder of poster artist Ken Featherston in the Armadillo parking lot, intertwine with larger-than-life stories of rock stars, local characters, and political figures navigating a rapidly changing city. The 1970s were a defining decade for Austin's modern-day reputation as an artistic hub, and Wilson and Sublett do an excellent job of contextualizing the importance of the Armadillo World Headquarters in a previously straight-laced city. Wilson's focus on his own conservative upbringing, the upbringings of the artists that made up the Armadillo Art Squad, and Austin's conservative community gives the reader a sense of the enormous importance of a countercultural arts laboratory where like-minded people from a variety of backgrounds could congregate.

Those interested in the progressive country movement of the 1970s will find this memoir an interesting source of firsthand stories related to the genre. The Armadillo World Headquarters was undoubtedly an important figure in the development of progressive country; Willie Nelson's 1972 concert at the Armadillo became legendary as the show that catalyzed the popularity of progressive country in Austin. Wilson's take on this famous concert, along with his description of various personalities and events relating to country music, helps paint a picture of Austin's importance to the country music industry's shift toward a more Texas-influenced sound during the first half of the 1970s.

Wilson and Sublett make a special point to give fair due to the Armadillo Art Squad, the organization of poster artists who worked for the Armadillo and were instrumental in establishing a visual brand for Austin music. Wilson makes it clear that the members of the Art Squad were not just poster artists—they were bouncers, bartenders, musicians, and performers who formed the backbone of the Armadillo World Headquarters and helped give the venue its lofty place in Texas music history. An appendix of gig posters from the Armadillo provides a selection of rare artwork that illustrates the varied nature of both the art produced at the Armadillo and the musical artists who performed there. The large variety of artistic styles and musical acts rendered in the posters gives the reader a sense of the sheer volume of artwork and performances the Armadillo churned out during its ten-year run. The high-quality reproductions are a crucial component of Wilson's tale.

As a memoir, *Armadillo World Headquarters* is undeniably entertaining. Wilson's stories of artistic enlightenment, unbridled debauchery, and everyday drudgery provide an intimate portrait of Austin's well-loved seminal rock-and-roll hall. Wilson emphasizes his experience as one of the venue's founding fathers, but it is clear he does not see himself as the sole patron or savior of the Armadillo. *Armadillo World Headquarters* reads as a love story to a venue that should not have survived the first sweltering year, much less become the cornerstone of a city's transformation. Fans who experienced the Armadillo in its glory days will likely enjoy this memoir for its nostalgia and vivid behind-the-scenes descriptions. For all others, stories of countercultural underdogs, musical enlightenment, and artistic revolution make *Armadillo World Headquarters* a must-read.

Kelsey Riddle



Delbert McClinton: One of the Fortunate Few

By Diana Finlay Hendricks (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2017).

Diana Finlay Hendricks's engaging biographical narrative of Delbert McClinton's life and music career is the first biography of the highly acclaimed artist. The book is part of a growing list of literature produced about Texas music, and is the latest installment of the John and Robin Dickson Series in Texas Music, sponsored by the Center for Texas Music History at Texas State University.

From the onset, Hendricks brings the reader into McClinton's real world, one of not only music success, but also one of life's trials and tribulations. The book does not sugarcoat his celebrated career, but blends the career high and low points, antics, lessons learned, and natural talent of a genuine working musician. Delbert McClinton's legendary career has seen him play in roadhouses and renowned music halls around the globe. The story reveals that he was on the front lines of emerging music scenes and his music covers many styles: blues, country, rock and roll, Americana, and others. Moreover, his diversity has allowed him to continue working and growing in the music industry for over sixty years.

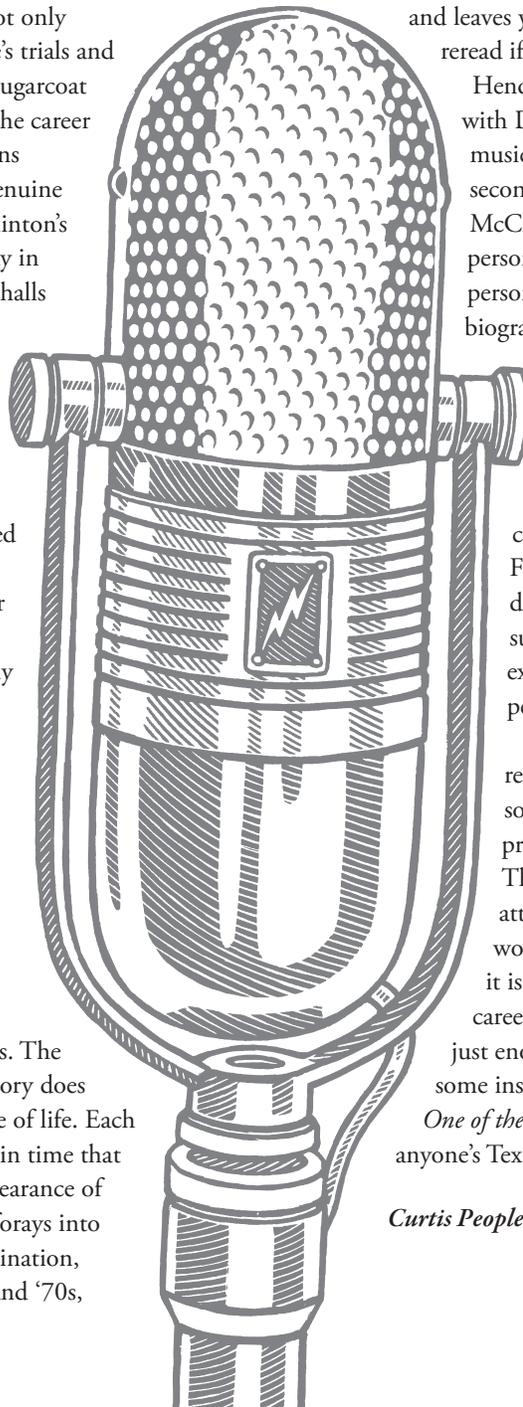
The book's structure is generally a chronological narrative of McClinton's life that weaves in the context of American culture and experience. In an interview with Hendricks and McClinton about the book, they compared it to the movie *Forrest Gump*, in that it tells the story of McClinton walking through American history in the midst of pivotal historic moments. The anecdotes are amusing, but the story does not shy away from the darker side of life. Each chapter is a vignette of moments in time that shaped McClinton, from the appearance of the Lubbock Lights, man's early forays into space, the John F. Kennedy assassination, the counterculture of the 1960s and '70s,

and the excess of the 1980s, to the career recognition, awards, and accolades that continue through today. The chapters are relatively short in length, averaging about ten pages. Hendricks begins each chapter with a quote from McClinton that provides a general tone for each section. For this reader, the prose of each chapter is analogous to a 45 rpm single. Within limited space and time, Hendricks immediately hooks you into Delbert's world, presents information in a concise fashion, and leaves you wanting more, but each passage is a quick reread if desired.

Hendricks relies primarily on personal interviews with Delbert McClinton, family members, musicians, music scholars and authors; some secondary materials; and his music. Furthermore, McClinton granted Hendricks access to his personal music archives; however, even with the personal access, the book is not an authorized biography. The book begins in McClinton's birthplace of Lubbock. The chapter provides some family history and presents the obligatory question—why do so many musicians come from Lubbock, Texas?—before moving into several substantive chapters that look at his formative years in Fort Worth, where McClinton founded and developed his musical talent. Hendricks then surveys the difficulties of his recording career, extensive touring, business ventures, and personal relationships.

The book's composition makes for an easy read. The color and black and white photos, some of which are previously unpublished, provide the reader with valuable visual context. There are some errors and editing that need attention, but the author is aware of them and working to rectify for a second printing. In sum, it is a laudable overview of Delbert McClinton's career through the lens of American culture, with just enough about the artist's personal life to provide some insight into the man himself. *Delbert McClinton: One of the Fortunate Few* is an essential addition to anyone's Texas and Americana music book collection.

Curtis Peoples



Our Contributors

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