

Space, Place, and Protest:  
Austin's Progressive Country Music Scene and the Negotiation of Texan Identities,  
1968-1978

Travis David Stimeling

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Doctor of Philosophy in the Department  
of Music.

Chapel Hill  
2007

Approved by:

Jocelyn R. Neal, Chair

Jon W. Finson

David García

Mark Katz

Philip Vandermeer

© 2007  
Travis David Stimeling  
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

## ABSTRACT

TRAVIS DAVID STIMELING: “Space, Place, and Protest: Austin’s Progressive Country Music Scene and the Negotiation of Texan Identities, 1968-1978”  
(Under the direction of Jocelyn R. Neal)

The progressive country music movement developed in Austin, Texas, during the early 1970s as a community of liberal young musicians and concertgoers with strong interests in Texan country music traditions and contemporary rock music converged on the city. Children of the Cold War and the post-World War II migration to the suburbs, these “cosmic cowboys” sought to get back in touch with their rural roots and to leave behind the socially conservative world their parents had created for them. As a hybrid of country music and rock, progressive country music both encapsulated the contradictions of the cosmic cowboys in song and helped to create a musical sanctuary in which these youths could articulate their difference from mainstream Texan culture.

Examining the work of the movement’s singer-songwriters (Michael Murphey, Guy Clark, Gary P. Nunn), western swing revivalists (Asleep at the Wheel, Alvin Crow and the Pleasant Valley Boys), and commercial country singers (Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings), this dissertation explores the proliferation of stock imagery, landscape painting, and Texan stereotypes in progressive country music and their role in the construction of Austin’s difference. These traits reveal fundamental challenges confronted by the cosmic cowboy generation: rapid urban-industrial growth that could be countered by escaping to the rural countryside, a hippie counterculture thought to be either in its last throes or, in contradictory interpretations, on the verge of its zenith, and a

mainstream culture whose ignorance or stubbornness stood in the way of a countercultural utopia.

Through analysis of source recordings, this dissertation also investigates the influence of commercial songwriting and recording practices on Austin's progressive country music and establishes the city's musical community in a larger network of commercial musicians in Nashville, Los Angeles, and New York. As such, progressive country music in Austin embodied the contradictions felt by the cosmic cowboys as they attempted to forge a place and identity for themselves in Texas in the 1970s.

For Lynn E. Westfall (1939-2003),  
who shared his thirst for knowledge and taught me the value of education and whose  
encouragement set me on this path.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Although only one author receives credit on the title page of this dissertation, this project could not have come to fruition without the careful assistance, gentle advice, and insightful criticisms of a very large and supportive community of individuals who have been willing to work with me throughout the conception and gestation of this project.

I would like first to thank the many people who have generously offered to share their personal recollections about their time in Austin during the 1970s and to open new pathways for my research. I am especially grateful to Ray Benson, Tommy Goldsmith, Ray Wylie Hubbard, Jan Reid, and Marcia Ball for agreeing to formal interviews and for offering invaluable background about the daily musical activities of Austin's musical community and for deconstructing their personal conceptions of progressive country music. I am also thankful for the many informal conversations and email communications I have had with Don Cusic, Chet Flippo, Joe Gracey, Martha Hume, Joe Kruppa, Archie Green, and Hazel Smith about their memories of Austin and Nashville during the 1960s and 1970s. Moreover, I wish to thank James Akenson and Ronnie Pugh for organizing a panel on the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Wanted!: The Outlaws* for the International Country Music Conference in May 2006.

Several people have been responsible for bringing new primary resources to my attention throughout this project. John Wheat of the Center for American History at the University of Texas made available several boxes of business papers and tapes of radio

advertisements from the Armadillo World Headquarters as well as his memories of performances he witnessed at the legendary venue. Steve Weiss of the Southern Folklife Collection at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill also made available several taped interviews with Guy Clark, Townes Van Zandt, Michael Murphey, and Kris Kristofferson from the Jack Bernhardt Papers and the copious newspaper clippings and fieldnotes housed in the Archie Green Papers. Aaron Smithers lent me copies of independent newspapers and out-of-print albums from his personal collection and offered insight that only a native Austinite can. Thanks to David Menconi, of the Raleigh (NC) *News & Observer*, for lending me a copy of his master's thesis on the Armadillo World Headquarters and for introducing me to Tommy Goldsmith. I would also like to thank the librarians and staff of the Music Library at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill for all of their assistance in obtaining books and recordings for this project.

I have also been blessed with a supportive academic community that has been interested in this project from its earliest stages through its completion. Their observations, criticism, and support have been invaluable to my work. Jocelyn Neal, my advisor, guided me through the difficult processes of researching this dissertation, shaping its narrative structure, and developing my own authorial voice. Jon Finson, David García, Mark Katz, and Phil Vandermeer were generous with their time and their insight throughout this project, and much of what follows was developed in response to their questions and comments. Sarah Weiss and Tim Marr suggested numerous useful readings and offered valuable constructive criticism of this project during the early stages of this project. Annett Richter, my writing partner, has been unfailing in her encouragement throughout this project. Thanks also to my graduate colleagues at the

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill—Kevin Bartig, Kimberly Francis, Andy Flory, Jason Gersh, Paul Harris, Ethan Lechner, Alicia Levin, Matt Meacham, and Carrie Stubblefield—for listening patiently as I rhapsodized about the beauties of country music and for sharing important insights from their own research.

Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank my wife, Melanie, who has been not only a careful reader of my work but a steadfast champion of it. Her kindness and patience, especially during times when I exhibited neither, have made the writing of this dissertation much easier, and, for that, I am eternally grateful.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.....	xi
INTRODUCTION .....	1
Theories and Foundations: Understanding Music Scenes .....	7
Austin as Music Scene .....	14
Outline and Goals .....	20
Chapter	
1. CREATING A SPACE FOR PROGRESSIVE COUNTRY MUSIC .....	24
Austin as Music Scene: People and Places .....	27
The Folksinging Community: 1960-1964.....	27
The Rock Scene: 1965-1971 .....	34
The Progressive Country Era: 1971-1975.....	44
Romantic Regionalism and the Articulation of Difference in Austin’s Music Scenes .....	58
Promoting Romantic Regionalism: The Rhetoric of Place.....	67
Conclusions.....	79
2. PROGRESSIVE COUNTRY SINGER-SONGWRITERS AND THE AMERICAN WEST.....	82
Constructing an Idealized American West .....	84
Resistance to the Cosmic Cowboy: Realism and Progressive Country Songwriting.....	112
Conclusions.....	150

3. “BOB WILLS IS STILL THE KING”: PROGRESSIVE COUNTRY MUSIC, WESTERN SWING, AND THE SEARCH FOR MUSICAL AUTHENTICITY .....	152
Defining Western Swing.....	154
Understanding Western Swing Revivalism in the 1970s.....	167
Bridging the Gap: Collaboration and Covers.....	175
Conclusions.....	192
4. <i>WANTED!: THE OUTLAWS</i> : AUSTIN, NASHVILLE, AND THE EXPORTATION OF PROGRESSIVE COUNTRY MUSIC.....	195
The Role of the Album in the Nashville Sound Era .....	198
The Album, the “Outlaw” Movement, and the Nationalization of Progressive Country.....	213
Waylon Jennings’s Texan Manifesto: <i>Honky Tonk Heroes</i> (1973) ...	217
Willie Nelson and the Concept Album .....	234
Solidifying the Texan Aesthetic: <i>Wanted! The Outlaws</i> (1976).....	255
Conclusions.....	271
5. CONCLUSION: “THE LIVE MUSIC CAPITAL OF THE WORLD”: LIVE PERFORMANCE AND PROGRESSIVE COUNTRY MUSIC .....	272
Music Festivals and the Distillation of the Austin Scene .....	274
Coda .....	300
APPENDIX 1: THE NEW HICKS: MELLOW, RIGHTEOUS, SINCERE.....	305
WORKS CITED .....	309

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

### Figure

1-1.	University of Texas at Austin Fall Enrollment Totals by Ethnic Background, 1972-1977.....	64
2-1.	Michael Murphey, “Cosmic Cowboy” (1973).....	89
2-2.	Guy Clark, “L.A. Freeway” (1971) .....	98
2-3.	Guy Clark, “L.A. Freeway” (1971), Verse 1 Melody.....	99
2-4.	Open chord voicings in introduction of Guy Clark’s “L.A. Freeway” (1971) .....	99
2-5.	Guy Clark, “L.A. Freeway” (1971), Chorus Melody .....	99
2-6.	Michael Murphey, “Alleys of Austin” (1973) .....	105
2-7.	The New Riders of the Purple Sage (John Dawson), “Instant Armadillo Blues” (1974).....	110
2-8.	John Clay, “Drifting through the Seventies” (1973), Stanzas 1-2 .....	116
2-9.	John Clay, “Drifting through the Seventies” (1973), Stanzas 3-7 .....	119
2-10.	John Clay, “Drifting through the Seventies” (1973), Stanzas 8-14 .....	121
2-11.	Merle Haggard/Roy Edward Burris, “Okie from Muskogee” (1969).....	128
2-12.	Ray Wylie Hubbard, “Up Against the Wall, Redneck Mother” (1972). As recorded on Jerry Jeff Walker, <i>Viva Terlingua!</i> (MCA 382).....	134
2-13.	Kinky Friedman, “They Ain’t Makin’ Jews Like Jesus Anymore” (1975) .....	141
2-14.	Gary P. Nunn, “London Homesick Blues” (1973) .....	142
3-1.	Collaborations between Western Swing Revivalists and Former Texas Playboys (1973-1977).....	176
3-2.	<i>Alvin Crow &amp; the Pleasant Valley Boys</i> (1976) Song Order .....	180
3-3.	Structural layout of “When I Stop Loving You” (Ashlock) .....	181

3-4.	Comparison of lyric structure of Bob Wills’s and Alvin Crow’s recordings of “Roly Poly” .....	189
3-5.	“Roly Poly,” Introductory Motive .....	190
3-6.	“Roly Poly,” Shared opening phrase of guitar solo .....	190
4-1.	Front cover of <i>Waylon Sings Ol’ Harlan</i> (1966; RCA LPM/S-3660) .....	202
4-2.	Cover of Willie Nelson, <i>Country Willie: His Own Songs</i> (1965; RCA LPM/S-3418).....	205
4-3.	Cover of Waylon Jennings, <i>Folk-Country</i> (1966; RCA LPM/S-3523) .....	208
4-4.	Songs recorded on Waylon Jennings, <i>Folk-Country</i> (1966; RCA LPM/S-3523).....	209
4-5.	<i>Old Five and Dimers Like Me</i> and <i>Honky Tonk Heroes</i> : Common Songs (asterisked).....	220
4-6.	Billy Joe Shaver, Rhetorical Questions (marked in bold) in “Honky Tonk Heroes” (1973).....	223
4-7.	Walking bass figure from strummed acoustic guitar, “Honky Tonk Heroes” (0:00-0:08) .....	225
4-8.	Instrumental arrangement of “Honky Tonk Heroes” (1973) (through 1:20) .....	225
4-9.	Telecaster introduction to second half of “Honky Tonk Heroes” (1:20-1:24) .....	226
4-10.	Cover of Waylon Jennings, <i>Honky Tonk Heroes</i> (RCA APL-0240; 1973) .....	227
4-11.	“Ride Me Down Easy,” overdubbing of vocal harmony (0:54-1:04) .....	232
4-12.	<i>Yesterday’s Wine</i> sessions, 3-4 May 1971 .....	236
4-13.	Dee Moeller, sleeve notes to <i>Yesterday’s Wine</i> .....	239
4-14.	Narrative and Musical Connections in “Medley: Where’s the Show/ Let Me Be a Man” .....	240
4-15.	Song pairings and narrative in <i>Yesterday’s Wine</i> .....	241

4-16.	Speakers and Narrative Action in <i>Phases and Stages</i> .....	242
4-17.	“(How Will I Know) I’m Falling in Love Again” (1974), Opening Phrase (0:15-0:25) .....	244
4-18.	Nelson as the Red Headed Stranger: Storyboard, Cell 1 .....	249
4-19.	Arrangement of “Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain” .....	251
4-20.	<i>Red Headed Stranger</i> : Songs and songwriters .....	253
4-21.	Cover photograph of Waylon Jennings's <i>Ladies Love Outlaws</i> (RCA APL1-1321, 1972).....	258
4-22.	Sources of previously-recorded material included on <i>Wanted!:</i> <i>The Outlaws</i> (1976) .....	262
4-23.	Arrangement of Waylon Jennings and Jessi Colter, “Suspicious Minds” .....	265
5-1.	Artists who performed at Willie Nelson’s 1974 Fourth of July Picnic, College Station, TX .....	298

## INTRODUCTION

In his 1974 book *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*, journalist Jan Reid depicts the progressive country music scene in Austin, Texas, as a bohemian collective focused on the production and enjoyment of music:

Folksingers strummed their guitars for nickels and dimes in the university area. Rock and rollers lived communally, tried to imitate their heroes' best licks in free concerts in the park, and paid their bills by playing rubber-stamp dance music for fraternities and sororities.... Country bands played in beer taverns as waitresses circled the room with tambourines in their hands, soliciting donations for the musicians.<sup>1</sup>

This climate, which music critic Rick Koster has characterized as “mellow to the third power,” supported an extensive network of clubs that regularly featured a community of local rock and roll bands, singer-songwriters, and folk singers as well as a substantial contingent of musicians with ties to the national music industry.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, the cosmic cowboy generation, a large youth population drawn to Austin primarily by the University of Texas, sought in their local musical environment not only higher education but also an opportunity to shed their largely middle-class suburban upbringings in favor of a more “authentic” Texan experience.

Progressive country music was developed in Austin, Texas, during the early 1970s as both a musical and a social practice. The progressive country movement

---

<sup>1</sup> Jan Reid, *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*, revised ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 4.

<sup>2</sup> Rick Koster, *Texas Music* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2000), 36.

featured a diverse array of musicians and musical styles: singers of Appalachian ballads, early blues, and Woody Guthrie compositions; fans of western swing and honky tonk music who wished to recreate those sounds in their own groups; pop songwriters who relocated to Austin to escape from the pressures of the commercial music industry; college rock groups, jazz combos, and show bands that performed for fraternity and sorority parties; and grassroots country bands performing the latest Nashville hits at countercultural gatherings. While Austin's progressive country musicians played in a wide variety of musical styles, they drew to varying degrees upon a common body of musical signifiers to create a relatively consistent "progressive country" sound. Austin's western swing and honky tonk musicians, for instance, prominently featured fiddles and lap steel guitars in their recorded and live performances as a way to recreate the sound they heard on source recordings from the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. On the other hand, many of the city's singer-songwriters incorporated these sounds in the middleground and background of their recordings to add a tinge of "Texan" or "rural" musical flavor to their music. As a musical practice, progressive country music featured an amalgamation of performance practices—the fiddles and steel guitars of traditional Texan country musics; the songwriting practices of the contemporaneous "mainstream" popular music created in Los Angeles, New York, and Nashville; and the recording practices of contemporary rock music—from which a wide range of loosely related musical styles emerged.

Yet, unlike similar country-rock hybrids created by California-based rock bands like The Byrds, whose *Sweetheart of the Rodeo* (1968) inspired many Austin musicians to begin playing country music, progressive country music was also, at least at its

inception, predicated upon the collective social experience of music.<sup>3</sup> Austin's progressive country music scene depended on live musical performance to unify the community. As audiences gathered in local clubs like the Armadillo World Headquarters, the Soap Creek Saloon, or the Split Rail Inn to enjoy a live musical experience, they bonded together and articulated powerful statements of their collective "Texan-ness." These social experiences were particularly important to participants in Austin's progressive country music scene, as many young people in Texas and in the United States, more broadly, began to interrogate their understandings of themselves in light of the contemporaneous social upheavals of the ongoing Civil Rights Movement, the Women's Liberation Movement, and the Vietnam War. For many native Anglo-Texans, especially, the burden of these social revolutions was great, as Texas became a symbol of racism, misogyny, and jingoism in the minds of many liberal protesters. Films like *Easy Rider* (1969) depicted Texas, especially small-town Texas, as a bastion of hatred and as a place for long-haired hippies to avoid. Moreover, the image of the white, masculine cowboy that stands at the center of Texan culture, both in the state's history and in popular representations of it, stood in direct opposition to these social movements. Finally, as many conservative Texans began to identify with the conservative "Silent Majority" in the early 1970s, participants in Austin's progressive country music scene became ambivalent about their collective "Texan-ness." Progressive country music, as a communal social experience, permitted opportunities for young, liberal Texans to mark their difference from this "conservative" Texas, to reconcile their ambivalence about their own "Texan-ness," and to posit alternative Texan identities that reflected the progressive

---

<sup>3</sup> Marcia Ball, "Re: Gator-Gram," 25 January 2007, personal email.



social engagement of many of Austin's musicians, entrepreneurs, and audience members.

The image of Austin as a center of creativity and musical and social independence emerged during the 1960s when a diverse group of musicians—including folk musicians Powell St. John and Janis Joplin, rock bands such as The 13<sup>th</sup> Floor Elevators and The Sir Douglas Quintet, and singer-songwriters like Steven Fromholz and Michael Murphey—began using the city's local music industry and the receptive ears of students at the University of Texas as tools in the development of their individual artistic voices.<sup>4</sup> After achieving local success, many of these musicians moved to San Francisco and Los Angeles in search of larger audiences and major-label record contracts, resulting in such well-known country-rock projects as Stephen Stills's *Manassas* and influential rock groups like Big Brother and the Holding Company.<sup>5</sup> In California, many of these musicians became spokespeople for a growing countercultural movement that supported the Civil Rights and Women's Liberation Movements and that was becoming increasingly concerned about the Vietnam War. Many musicians found the pressure of speaking for an entire generation while simultaneously making hit records for mainstream record labels to be too great to bear, and, by 1970, some of them retreated to Austin to seek shelter in the environment that fostered their initial creative growth.<sup>6</sup> Still

---

<sup>4</sup> Stephen R. Tucker, "Progressive Country Music, 1972-1976: Its Impact and Creative Highlights," *Southern Quarterly* 22, no. 3 (Spring 1984), 93; Hugh Cullen Sparks, "Stylistic Development and Compositional Processes of Selected Solo Singer/Songwriters in Austin, Texas," Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1984, 26-33; Alan Craig Turley, "The Social and Ecological Determinants of the Production of Original Rock Music in Austin, Texas," Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1997, 106-107. For one of the most complete accounts of the artists in the Austin scene during this time, see Jan Reid, *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*, new ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> Bill C. Malone, *Country Music, U.S.A.*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 394-395; Reid, 20-34, 44-50, 116.

<sup>6</sup> Marian Green, "The Songs of Willie Nelson: Voice of the Self in America's Age of Protest," *Popular Music Perspectives* 2 (1985), 229-230; Reid, 116.

other musicians, both from Texas and elsewhere, who had traveled to Nashville in the mid-1960s in search of the same lucrative contracts grew weary of the perceived facelessness of the country music industry and a lack of personal artistic control over their songs and their recordings.<sup>7</sup> These musicians, country superstars Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings among them, found in Austin an opportunity to escape the fast pace and artistic conformity of Nashville.<sup>8</sup> The progressive country music scene in Austin was, therefore, predicated upon the notion that Austin (and Texas, in general) was a liminal space, located beyond the influence of the national music industry.

As Texan musicians migrated to Austin during the late 1960s and early 1970s and brought new musicians into the fold, they, along with local fans, entrepreneurs, and journalists, began to market the image of Austin as a cradle of creative musical freedom. Because many of Austin's clubs, radio stations, record labels, and music festivals were locally owned and operated, Austin musicians appeared to flourish in an environment free from the pressures of mainstream success and major-label recording contracts and the mediating influence of "out-of-touch" corporate businessmen.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, annual festivals such as the Kerrville Folk Festival and Willie Nelson's Fourth of July picnics

---

<sup>7</sup> Waylon Jennings and Lenny Kaye, *Waylon: An Autobiography* (New York: Warner Books, 1996), 187-192. For more information on industrial practices during the Nashville Sound era, see: Joli Jensen, *The Nashville Sound: Authenticity, Commercialization, and Country Music* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> Willie Nelson and Bud Shrake, *Willie: An Autobiography* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 1988), 167-171.

<sup>9</sup> Jeffrey Farley, "Culture Industry and Cottage Industry: The Production of Musical Meaning in Austin, Texas," Ph.D. diss., University of Texas, Austin, 1996; *idem*, "For Love or Money? Austin Musicians' Discourse on the Idealist/Materialist Debate," in *Popular Music: Style and Identity*, eds. Will Straw, et al (Montreal: Centre for Research on Canadian Cultural Industries and Institutions, 1995): 79-82; Chet Flippo, "From the Bump-Bump Room to the Barricades: Waylon, Tompall, and the Outlaw Revolution," in *Country: The Music and the Musicians from the Beginnings to the '90s*, eds. Paul Kingsbury and Alan Axelrod (New York: Abbeville; Nashville: Country Music Foundation Press, 1994): 313-327.

perpetuated the countercultural yet inclusive spirit of Monterey (1967) and Woodstock (1969) but with a distinctly “Texan” flavor, while the nationally televised *Austin City Limits* exported Austin’s mystique to an eager national audience.

This freedom was, however, only a partial reality. Most of the artists who had achieved national success at the height of the Austin progressive country scene never fully extricated themselves from the mainstream music industry. Instead, they maintained their connections to the major-label recording studios, publicity machines, and distributorships in order to disseminate their music to a wider audience. This concatenation of local and national influences on the Austin progressive country scene yielded a widely varied repertory, from Waylon Jennings’s polished recordings of national pop hits by songwriters like Neil Diamond and Jimmy Webb to rough, locally-composed and performed honky-tonk songs like Ray Wylie Hubbard’s “Up Against the Wall Redneck Mothers” and Gary P. Nunn’s “London Homesick Blues.”

This dissertation characterizes Austin not just as a site of tensions between mainstream and quasi-independent country artists, but also as a place where Texans, both native-born and immigrant, could use music to articulate their ambivalence toward their collective “Texan-ness” and work to transform it into a powerful countercultural symbol. The central assumption underlying this dissertation maintains that perceptions of Austin as a unique countercultural place had a direct impact upon both the composition and reception of Austin’s progressive country music. The physical space of Austin provided the infrastructure within which the work of singer-songwriters, rock and roll bands, and Nashville recording artists could exist, but romantic visions of Austin’s “cosmic cowboys” provided metaphoric space within which important cultural and social issues

could be addressed.<sup>10</sup> An exploration of Austin’s physical, musical, and social spaces demonstrates that Austin was much more than a site for inveterate rebel cowboys to perpetuate derogatory Texan stereotypes in anti-commercial music. Instead, these stereotypes were used as tools to understand “Texan-ness,” to broadcast a new view of it to a national audience, and to reappropriate and reshape a larger musical tradition that resided outside of Texas.

### **Theories and Foundations: Understanding Music Scenes**

Recent studies of music scenes have generally followed in the footsteps of three sociologists: Howard Becker and his work on “art worlds,” Will Straw’s work on how individuals within music scenes define the scene, and Andy Bennett’s studies of how individual scenes interact with other scenes.

Sociologist Howard Becker’s conception of an “art world,” a world comprised of all of the people involved in the production, consumption, promotion, and criticism of a work of art, provides a useful starting point for any study of a music scene.<sup>11</sup> Becker argues that all art results from the coalescence of these various forces and the artist’s engagement with them.<sup>12</sup> Based upon how an artist interacts with the aesthetic and social values of the art world, Becker identifies four types of artists: 1) “integrated

---

<sup>10</sup> The term “cosmic cowboy” originated in Michael Murphey’s 1973 album *Cosmic Cowboy Souvenir* (A&M SP-3137).

<sup>11</sup> Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); *idem*, “Art Worlds and Social Types,” in *The Production of Culture*, ed. Richard A. Peterson (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1976), 41-42; *ibid*, “Jazz Places,” in *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal, and Virtual*, eds. Andy Bennett and Richard A. Peterson (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), 17-27.

<sup>12</sup> For a more recent study employing Becker’s theories, see: Ken Spring, “Behind the Rave: Structure and Agency in a Rave Scene,” in *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal, and Virtual*, eds. Andy Bennett and Richard A. Peterson (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004): 48-63.

professionals” who fully accept the art world’s values, 2) “mavericks” whose art challenges the primacy of the art world by manipulating its values or by creating new ones altogether, 3) “naïve artists” whose work conforms to the expectations of the art world but who are completely unaware of the importance and complexity of their work, and 4) “folk artists” who give little thought as to how their functional products could be perceived as art by another group.<sup>13</sup> Becker’s theory also accounts for artists who work within or between multiple art worlds and considers the impact of these multiple standards on the work of an artist. In his autobiographical study of Chicago jazz musicians of the 1950s, he observes that musicians regularly perform using different styles, instrumentations, and repertoires in order to maintain regular employment.<sup>14</sup> An artist’s professional status is, therefore, judged against the standards of multiple, stylistically homogeneous art worlds, permitting an artist who is subversive to one art world to simultaneously conform to the status quo of another.

Becker’s idea of multiple art worlds coexisting and interacting in close proximity to one another and with shared participants offers insight into the inner workings of and internal conflicts within the support systems that have fostered Austin music since the 1960s. Its development as a prominent local and national cultural force is rightfully attributed to the efforts of community enthusiasts who established a local industry capable of supporting new artistic endeavors. Local entrepreneurs established nightclubs for these young people to gather, listen to music, and consume alcoholic beverages. The first of these venues was established in 1933, when yodeler Kenneth Threadgill

---

<sup>13</sup> Becker, “Art Worlds and Social Types,” 43-45.

<sup>14</sup> Becker, “Jazz Places.”

purchased the first liquor license in Travis County, Texas (of which Austin is the county seat), and opened a bar in an abandoned filling station.<sup>15</sup> As the folk revival and British Invasion became exceptional cultural forces in the mid-1960s, more venues catering to the musical tastes and social practices of countercultural youths were launched. In addition to Threadgill's, which presented folk musicians such as Janis Joplin and Powell St. John on a weekly basis, the Chequered Flag and the Vulcan Gas Company opened in 1967 to support local rock and roll musicians, including The 13<sup>th</sup> Floor Elevators and Shiva's Head Band. Following the 1969 closure of the Vulcan Gas Company, Eddie Wilson, manager of The 13<sup>th</sup> Floor Elevators, opened the Armadillo World Headquarters in an abandoned National Guard armory in South Austin and began hosting concerts by local bands and nationally-known musicians as diverse as Willie Nelson, Frank Zappa, and Ravi Shankar.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, two radio stations programming a blend of local music and national hits, KRMH-FM and KOKE-FM, made their first broadcasts in 1971 and 1974, respectively.<sup>17</sup> As a result of the increasing number of venues available for local musicians, local support industries—booking agencies, sound and lighting engineers, record stores, printers, and independent record labels—also developed in a symbiotic relationship with Austin's performers.<sup>18</sup> The simultaneous establishment and interaction of the support industries, performance venues, and artists of increasingly commercial stature, taken together, define the scene in which progressive country music took root.

---

<sup>15</sup> Reid, 17; Bill C. Malone, "Myth, Media, and the Making of Texas Music," *Texas Humanist* 7, no. 6 (July-August 1985), 10; *idem*, *Country Music, U.S.A.*, 393.

<sup>16</sup> Reid, 6, 36, 40-41, 58-72; Malone, *Country Music, U.S.A.*, 394; Rick Koster, *Texas Music* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2000), 36.

<sup>17</sup> Reid, 76-78; Koster, 41.

<sup>18</sup> Reid, 73-74.

As a frame through which to examine the relationships between local support industries and the activities of each business, Becker's model of an "art world" provides great insight into the central aesthetic and social philosophies of any music scene.

While Becker's conception of the "art world" highlights how artists define themselves in relation to a set of external aesthetic and social values, it provides far less insight into how audiences engage with artists. Sociologist Will Straw has chosen to replace Becker's "art world" with the journalistic coinage "scene" in order to shift the analytical focus from production to consumption. He notes that "a musical scene... is that cultural space in which a range of musical practices coexist, interacting with each other within a variety of processes of differentiation, and according to widely varying trajectories of change and cross-fertilization."<sup>19</sup> For Straw, a musical scene develops not around a group of artists but around the enthusiasts who define their culture through "the building of musical alliances and the drawing of musical boundaries..."<sup>20</sup> A scene is defined, therefore, in terms of what it is not: a faceless "mainstream," the other musical communities existing within the same physical space, or other similar musical communities in other places.

The members of a music scene often consider themselves as outsiders to a perceived musical mainstream, but they also legitimize their music by employing some of the same hegemonic means as the dominant culture. Straw posits that "this distinction simply concretizes two countervailing pressures within spaces of musical activity: one towards the stabilization of local historical continuities, and another which works to

---

<sup>19</sup> Will Straw, "Communities and Scenes in Popular Music," in *The Subcultures Reader*, eds. Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 494.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

disrupt such continuities, to cosmopolitanize and relativize them.”<sup>21</sup> Members of a music scene thus attempt to portray their own local scene as one generated from local sensibilities and musical traditions, while simultaneously distinguishing their own local music from its predecessors. Straw argues that this conflict exposes a key component of scene definition: temporality. The music that is acceptable to a scene at one point in time may later be viewed as passé. That is, artists described as having “sold out” to corporate interests by their contemporary audiences may be celebrated by later generations of musicians in the same place as important pioneers of local music. These constantly changing values of a musical scene, Straw explains, are

grounded in the variable interaction between two social processes: (a) the struggles for prestige and status engaged in by professionals and others (such as disc jockeys) serving as “intellectuals” within a given musical terrain; and (b) the ongoing transformation of social and cultural relations—and of alliances between particular musical communities—occurring within the context of the contemporary Western city.<sup>22</sup>

For Straw, therefore, the shifting tastes of participants in a music scene highlight the conflicts between the ubiquitous music industry and the consumer’s idealism and desire to distinguish themselves from the crowd around them.

The negotiation of cultural conflict and reconstruction of a scene’s core values that Straw describes also belies the notion that music scenes are comprised of homogeneous groups who all ascribe the same values to the scene. More recent ethnographic studies of music scenes demonstrate that they are, in fact, dynamic cultures that confront as many internal struggles as external ones. For instance, in his study of the urban dance scene in Newcastle upon Tyne in 1994 and 1995, sociologist Andy Bennett

---

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 494-495.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 496.



argued that the notion of “subculture”—that is, groups within a dominant culture that exist in opposition to hegemonic structures<sup>23</sup>—cannot apply to participants in a music scene because those participants do not exist solely within the scene. Rather, he argues that the fluidity of “lifestyle,” or “the sensibilities employed by the individual in choosing commodities and patterns of consumption and in articulating these cultural resources as modes of personal expression,” demonstrates that structuralist conceptions of youth culture like those proposed by Dick Hebdige and other exponents of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University ignore the individual’s engagement with the world around them.<sup>24</sup> Building upon the notion of “neo-tribalism” forwarded by Italian sociologist Michel Maffesoli, Bennett argues instead that participation in a local music scene constitutes only one aspect of any participant’s everyday life.<sup>25</sup> This conception challenges notions of a fixed subcultural identity by recognizing that scenes are constructed and enacted by people with widely varied musical tastes, social values, and commitments to the scene itself. Music scenes, therefore, provide a sociomusical space in which participants can move fluidly from one temporally-bounded identity to another.<sup>26</sup>

Local scenes appear even more complex and difficult to label when one tries to

---

<sup>23</sup> Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979; reprint ed. London: Routledge, 1987).

<sup>24</sup> Andy Bennett, “Subcultures or Neo-Tribes? Rethinking the Relationship between Youth, Style, and Musical Taste,” *Sociology* 33, no. 3 (1999), 607; *idem*, and Richard A. Peterson, “Introducing Music Scenes,” in *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal and Virtual* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), 12.

<sup>25</sup> Bennett, “Subcultures or Neo-Tribes?,” 611: “‘Clubbing’ appears to be regarded less as a singularly definable activity and more as a series of fragmented, temporal experiences as they move between different dance floors and engage with different crowds.”

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 605.

delimit a music scene based solely upon its geographic location. The authors contributing to Bennett and Richard Peterson's 2004 collection *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal, and Virtual* have demonstrated that scenes are seldom discrete, thus making them contentious constructions when local scenes interact and overlap with one another. Bennett and Peterson posit the existence of three types of scenes, each of which is defined by its interaction with other music scenes: 1) "local" scenes in which Becker's production and Straw's consumption of music occur within a single circumscribed space; 2) "translocal" scenes, or formerly local scenes that have branched out to other regions; and 3) "virtual" scenes in which technology replaces interpersonal contact. As Straw reminds us, however, this taxonomy should not indicate that only one definition should be used to describe a scene. A translocal scene, for instance, is often characterized by local variations on the rituals and practices of the central body as well as those of other local scenes.<sup>27</sup> As values and practices are contested among the various local scenes that comprise a translocal scene, therefore, scenes may either decide upon a unified code or may continue to fragment and build other translocal or virtual networks. Any investigation of a local music scene must, therefore, carefully examine the scene's musical, social, industrial, and rhetorical connections to other music scenes to more fully apprehend the values that are at stake within the scene.

The sociological studies discussed above demonstrate that music scenes exist as social and industrial spaces, but through careful examination of progressive country music as both a social and a musical phenomenon, this study reveals the existence of a

---

<sup>27</sup> See, for instance: Kristen Schilt, "'Riot Grrrl Is...': The Contestation over Meaning in a Music Scene," in *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal, and Virtual*, eds. Andy Bennett and Richard A. Peterson (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), 115-130.

third, related space: a musical space. The models offered by Becker, Straw, and Bennett demonstrate that the rhetoric, fashion, and industrial models of local music scenes are developed in relation to other competing musical communities in the region, similar music scenes in other parts of the world, and a “mainstream” music industry. At the same time, these studies do not account for the relationship of the musical sounds created in a local music scene to that same network of musical communities. Building on these foundational studies of the industrial and social structures of music scenes, this dissertation seeks to demonstrate how the music composed, performed, and consumed in Austin’s progressive country music bears traces of the scene’s connections to other American music scenes and its opposition to “mainstream” country music and popular music.

### **Austin as Music Scene**

One of the conflicts that emerges in contemporary accounts of the Austin scene is the scene’s simultaneous isolation from and participation in the larger mainstream music industry. When a local music scene begins to garner regional and national attention, scene participants face the difficult task of agreeing on a suitable means to package the local aesthetic for export or even if the scene should be available for export at all. As Holly Kruse has explained in her study of late 1980s and early 1990s college rock, one of the key characteristics of a local music scene is that it defines itself in opposition to the dominant mainstream sound and the industry that produces and purveys it. Artists who sign major-label contracts in order to reach a broader audience are, therefore, often viewed as “sellouts” by local fans who cherish the “do-it-yourself” (DIY) aesthetic of

local music.<sup>28</sup> The messages these artists purvey are often perceived by the local scene as corrupted because of their contact with the mainstream industry, and their sounds are often described as homogenized not only because of major-label studio practices (and the generally increased quality of the recording studios provided by larger labels) but also because the national music industry challenges local ownership of the music by offering it to a wider audience. Such theories are confounded in Austin, where many of the scene's artists held mainstream contracts from the outset of the scene's development. How that contradiction was negotiated by the scene's participants is one of the most intriguing aspects of the progressive country movement.

Of course, when the popularity of local music scenes begins to grow, the perceived "interference" of the mainstream industry often develops from within the scene itself. As Barry Shank observes in his ethnography of the Austin punk scene during the 1980s, after local musicians and fans began to discover the potential of their own local music, many scene participants sought to exploit it for financial gain:

Some took the developmental lessons that come from performance in the mirror stage—the importance of believing in the value of your own work, the benefits of risk, the necessary pain of disillusionment—and applied them to other lives they began to develop. Some identified strongly with the promise of a life of representing the hidden and committed themselves to becoming artists. Others wanted more than anything else to keep experiencing that orgasmic moment of social communion produced with the music of their friends; they kept hanging out in clubs and going to parties. The more pragmatic of this latter group invented or discovered economic ways to sustain and reproduce this experience. They got jobs in local music businesses or they created music businesses of their own. Some became managers, some became promoters, some started trying to write about music for a living.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Kruse, 5-28.

<sup>29</sup> Barry Shank, "Identity, Community, and Postmodernity: The Rock 'n' Roll Scene in Austin, Texas," Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1991, 438-439.

By Shank's estimation, therefore, local enthusiasm for Austin music led to the creation of local industries that facilitated the profitable exportation of local music and the eventual dilution and homogenization of Austin music for the sake of capitalism.<sup>30</sup> From this perspective, local entrepreneurs—no matter how devoted to local music—immediately become destructive forces within the scene by introducing it to a broader audience and reducing the novelty of obscure local music.

Most commentators on the Austin scene do not agree with Shank, believing that local business people pose a relatively minor threat compared to the mainstream music industries of Nashville, Los Angeles, and New York. In fact, the local industry often provides the impetus for many observers to describe music scenes as creative bacchanal that exist without external controls. Ethnographer Jeffrey Farley, for instance, describes Austin as a “cottage industry,” arguing that the apparently free exchange of musical ideas there was one of the best examples of Jacques Attali's idea of “composition,” a state in which musicians are not involved in a competitive industry and are allowed to create their art without worrying about outside pressures.<sup>31</sup> He, too, acknowledges the existence of a local industry, but he argues that Austin's businesses are more honest than the major-label, multinational corporations that control the mainstream. Farley argues that, while live music in Austin is, in fact, mediated by booking agents and concert promoters, a thriving live music scene that exists outside of a major corporate network provides a

---

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 439.

<sup>31</sup> Farley, “Culture Industry as Cottage Industry,” 181, 191-192; Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi, *Theory and History of Literature* 16 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 133-136.

more open channel of communication between artists and audiences.<sup>32</sup> Unlike artists signed to major-label contracts, “non-corporate” artists lack the financial capital to mount a coast-to-coast tour of stadiums, amphitheatres, and arenas and to obtain sophisticated amplifiers, so they typically perform in smaller venues and less amplification, permitting artists to connect more personally to their audiences.<sup>33</sup>

The sense of freedom that Farley attributes to the Austin music scene is tied more broadly to the idea of Texas as a liberating space, one of the central tropes of Texan culture. This idea of Texan independence permeates all aspects of Texan culture, from elementary school field trips to the Alamo in San Antonio, where children are taught how the brave Anglo-Texan pioneers fought for their independence from the Mexicans, to the widespread popular acceptance of the cowboy as a symbol of Texas’s independence, morality, and masculinity. Moreover, the state’s wide-open spaces offer an unbounded physical space into which people can escape and redefine themselves. As historian Glen E. Lich has observed, this notion, too, has a long history: “Texas appeals to romantics. It seems always to have attracted more than its share of people looking back over their shoulders as they rode ahead into the future, sometimes refractory or recalcitrant, always ready to bolt the party and initiate an independent course.”<sup>34</sup>

Much of the fascination with Texas as a space in which people who felt cast aside by their own people—as was the case for many of the state’s English, German, French,

---

<sup>32</sup> Farley, “For Love or Money?” See also: Colin Escott, *Lost Highway: The True Story of Country Music* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2003), 137-145.

<sup>33</sup> Farley, “For Love or Money?,” 80.

<sup>34</sup> Glen E. Lich, “The Rural Scene in Texas: Half-Created/Half-Perceived,” in *Texas Country: The Changing Rural Scene*, eds. Glen E. Lich and Dona B. Reeves-Marquardt (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1986), 3.

and Spanish colonists<sup>35</sup>—may be attributed to the notion that *the landscape* of Texas offers boundless opportunities for freedom, renewal, and rebirth. As Lich goes on to explain, many media representations of Texas emphasize the rurality of the state, using Texas as a symbol of the unspoiled frontier and as an exotic hinterland within an otherwise familiar America.<sup>36</sup> Such a symbolic representation of Texas has also been adopted by native Texans, especially the descendants of the original Anglo settlers, as a way of visualizing a utopian future. Through such nostalgic remembrances of pre-industrial Texas, Lich argues, modern Texans invoke “a time when food, rather than house and clothing, was an important discriminator of status.... When life was picturesque and simple, though hard, and the land was the fixed point by which people knew their relationships to everyone and everything else.”<sup>37</sup>

Texas has long been the site of cross-cultural exchange and conflict between colonists and native peoples, between whites, blacks, and Hispanics, and between Mexicans and Americans, yet portraits of Texas as a liberating space typically ignore these conflicts and exchanges in favor of an idealized and racially monochromatic depiction. Descendants of the earliest Texan settlers, for instance, turned to folklore to construct an idealized portrait of the state in which conflict is nonexistent. As Lich observes: “The resurgence of... [rural] values [in Texas] points to some parts of the

---

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 8. Lich is particularly intrigued with how notions of Texas as a frontier land have persisted nearly a century after the frontiers were effectively closed and how such stereotypical portrayals of the state have ignored or erased the social, political, and cultural changes that took place in Texas during the twentieth century.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* Lich warns however, that no matter how promising such imagery may appear to modern Texans, “nostalgia and romance are not cures for physical, political, and ethical illnesses. Texans today must not remember things that their ancestors never knew.”

American self-portrait that people do not want to lose: a romanticizing of particularism, of the little man and small town, as more viable and more organic, warmer, than national culture.”<sup>38</sup> Similarly, journalist Bill Porterfield has noted the organicism of rural Texan culture in his study of Texan honky-tonks. He describes:

The accommodations were always tawdry, but hell, so were we and our dreams.... Honky-tonks were cheap places frequented by low-class (which is not a crime) customers. They were not particularly dangerous places, although some were.... You can take any class of people and find among them a slice of life and character which runs the gamut from good to bad, and certainly this was true, *is* true, for honky-tonk folk.<sup>39</sup>

In addition to the colorful, yet potentially threatening, characters of the local honky-tonk, the mythical Texas is also populated by mythical range-riding cowboys who, by living at the edge of society, pose a threat to the hegemony of mainstream society by resisting the forces of modernization.<sup>40</sup> Texas mythology thus creates the perfect setting for anyone who wishes to find freedom and return to a more “authentic” existence by taking on the persona of a Beckerian “maverick” artist and challenging the modern production techniques of the Nashville music industry.

Austin’s acceptance of DIY rhetoric in describing the production of music has worked in conjunction with Texas’s independent image to make the myth of Austin’s

---

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 12. See also: Francis Edward Abernethy, “Texas Folk and Modern Country Music,” in *Texas Country: The Changing Rural Scene*, eds. Glen E. Lich, Dona B. Reeves-Marquardt, and Joe B. Frantz (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1986), 137-169; David M. Wrobel, “Western Themes in Contemporary Rock Music, 1970-2000: A Lyric Analysis,” *American Music Research Center Journal* 10 (2000): 83-100.

<sup>39</sup> Bill Porterfield, *The Greatest Honky-Tonks in Texas* (Dallas: Taylor Publishing Co., 1983), 16-17.

<sup>40</sup> See, for instance: Peter Stanfield, *Horse Opera: The Strange History of the 1930s Singing Cowboy* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002); Cecilia Tichi, *High Lonesome: The American Culture of Country Music* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 103-130; Bill C. Malone, *Don’t Get Above Your Raisin’: Country Music and the Southern Working Class* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 117-148.



rebellion against the mainstream music industry all the more potent. Participants in the Austin progressive country scene often claimed to oppose the seemingly more homogenized sounds created in Nashville during the reign of producers Owen Bradley and Chet Atkins in the 1950s and 1960s, thus confirming Straw's assertion that scene participants often use negative definitions to construct their own uniqueness. Austin's countercultural experiments with country music were validated by the return to Austin of major-label country singer-songwriters who sought to escape the pressures and constraints of Nashville and Los Angeles. As *Rolling Stone* columnist Chet Flippo has described, the primary rebellion of the so-called "Outlaw" movement that began to emerge following Nelson's 1972 move to Austin was a rebellion against the business practices of the Nashville music industry.<sup>41</sup> After becoming aware of the success of innumerable self-produced rock albums in the late 1960s, artists like Jennings and Nelson, both of whom had worked under the stringent controls of Nashville producers and booking agents, began to wrest control of their music from Nashville businessmen.<sup>42</sup> Austin thus positioned itself as a place of refuge that seemed on the surface to be diametrically opposed to the "evils" of major-label control.

### **Outline and Goals**

In this dissertation, I deconstruct the antiestablishment and pro-Texan rhetoric of Austin's progressive country music scene in the critical context of the region's musical,

---

<sup>41</sup> Chet Flippo, "From the Bump-Bump Room to the Barricades: Waylon, Tompall, and the Outlaw Revolution," in *Country: The Music and the Musicians from the Beginnings to the '90s*, eds. Paul Kingsbury and Alan Axelrod (New York: Abbeville; Nashville: Country Music Foundation Press, 1994): 313-327.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 322; John Smith, "'I Ain't No Ordinary Dude': A Bio-Discography of Waylon Jennings," *The Journal of Country Music* 6, no. 2 (Summer 1975), 49.

social, and political histories. Through careful examination of the events, personal relationships, musical performances, and commercial recordings of Austin's progressive country movement, this dissertation seeks to clarify how the diverse musical styles of progressive country music offered a rallying point for an entire generation of Texans in search of "authentic" and "genuine" musical and social experiences. Chapter 1, "Creating a Space for Progressive Country Music," provides a brief history of Austin's development as a local music scene in the 1960s and the emergence of the progressive country music movement in the city the 1970s, drawing attention to the role of musical performance in allowing young people to articulate their differences from their peers and to develop positive self-images. It also addresses the formation of a translocal musical community that connected Austin's folk and rock musicians to the national music industry centers in California, New York, and Nashville. Chapter 2, "Progressive Country Songwriters and the Romanticizing of the American West," examines how Austin's singer-songwriter community—which included, among others, Michael Murphey, Guy Clark, Steven Fromholz, Kinky Friedman, and Ray Wylie Hubbard—developed a repertory of songs that cast the Lone Star capital, Texas, and the American West as idyllic and liberatory spaces. This chapter posits that these songwriters borrowed and internalized a standard vocabulary of lyrical and musical signifiers of the American West that romanticized its "wide open" spaces and reflected the deep-felt desire of many progressive country musicians and fans to escape "back to the land." Chapter 3 focuses on the music of two groups of young western swing and honky tonk musicians who settled in Austin in the early 1970s, Asleep at the Wheel and Alvin Crow and His Pleasant Valley Boys. These musicians collaborated with the pioneers of western swing

and honky tonk music, learned the nuances of these musical styles through careful study of the primary recordings, and “covered” the hits of Texan musicians like Bob Wills, Milton Brown, and Ernest Tubb. This chapter posits that this quest for Texan musical traditions situated Austin’s musicians in an idyllic, idealized, and more “authentic” Texan past, much as songwriters like Murphey and Clark used their songs to create a rural utopia in which the cosmic cowboy generation could thrive. Chapter 4, “The Progressive Country Concept Album,” examines the role of the concept album—a collection of songs unified through musical motives or textual narratives—in progressive country music, focusing especially on the work of Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings, two musicians who were active in Austin but closely affiliated with the Nashville country music industry. This chapter argues that their concept albums represent a reconciliation of the independent rhetoric of contemporaneous rock, the production practices of Music Row, and the rural gaze of progressive country and country-rock fans in Texas and elsewhere. Moreover, this chapter proposes that, in the hands of progressive country musicians, the concept album was employed to reveal and to reconcile the contradictions inherent in adopting self-consciously “Texan” identities following the social upheavals of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Chapter 5, “‘The Live Music Capital of the World’: Live Performance and Progressive Country Music,” considers the role that live recordings and festivals like Willie Nelson’s Fourth of July Picnics played in creating and reinforcing a reified portrait of the city as a libratory space built around the performance of a re-invented country music.

By deconstructing the independent and pro-Texan rhetoric of Austin’s progressive country music scene, by carefully tracing relationships between the progressive music

scene and the national music industry, and by treating the music composed, performed, and recorded in Austin as cultural texts, I provide new insight into the ways that music scenes and the music created in them may be used to articulate a newly formed community around social alienation, countercultural identity, and unifying mythologies. Moreover, by approaching progressive country music from the perspective of singer-songwriters, national recording artists, and local fans, I demonstrate that participation in a music scene integrates a person's understanding of the past, experience of the present, and projection of the future to offer participants the opportunity to explore new identities. Finally, I underscore the musical, social, and industrial connections between diverse types of American popular music, offering a case study for how music and musicians regularly transcend boundaries of formal, geographic, and stylistic categorization in their creative endeavors.

CHAPTER 1  
CREATING A SPACE FOR PROGRESSIVE COUNTRY MUSIC

I'm just gonna be a cosmic cowboy.  
I'm just gonna ride and rope and hoot.  
I just wanna be a cosmic cowboy—  
A supernatural country-rockin' galoot.

—Michael Murphey, “Cosmic Cowboy” (1973)<sup>1</sup>

In 1973, A&M Records released Michael Murphey’s “Cosmic Cowboy,” giving name to and galvanizing a movement that had begun to emerge in Austin in the late 1960s.<sup>2</sup> The label, as defined in Murphey’s song and used in local parlance, described a growing legion of young people who sought to escape their middle-class destinies by running away to the open spaces of Texas. Country music historian Bill C. Malone notes in *Country Music, U.S.A.* that the cosmic cowboy “conjures up visions of hippies in

---

<sup>1</sup> Michael Murphey, “Cosmic Cowboy,” *Cosmic Cowboy Souvenir* (A&M Records SP-4388).

<sup>2</sup> Georgia-born and California-based country-rock musician Gram Parsons was one of the first people to link the adjective “cosmic” to country music, describing the country-rock hybrids he created with the International Submarine Band, the Flying Burrito Brothers, and the Byrds as “cosmic American music” (Ben Fong-Torres, *Hickory Wind: The Life and Times of Gram Parsons*, revised and expanded ed. [New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1991], 78). Marcia Ball, lead singer and pianist in the popular Austin honky tonk band Freda and the Firedogs, recalled that “what started a lot of us thinking about playing country music at that time was the merger of Gram Parsons with the Byrds and the *Sweetheart of the Rodeo* album which was out in the late ‘60s [1968]” (Marcia Ball, “Re: Gator-Gram,” 25 January 2007, personal email).

Folklorist Archie Green has noted other later antecedents with less direct influence on the Austin community, including Steve Miller’s “Space Cowboy” (1969) and Sly and the Family Stone’s “Spaced Cowboy” (1971) (Archie Green, “Austin’s Cosmic Cowboys: Words in Collision,” in *Torching the Fink Books and Other Essays on Vernacular Culture*, [Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001], 88).

cowboy costumes with free lifestyles and unbounded musical tastes,” implying that many scene participants who readily identified with the protagonist of Murphey’s song were merely playing cowboy in costume only.<sup>3</sup> In 1974, journalist Chet Flippo, then a field reporter for *Rolling Stone*, similarly observed that “the Austin-style cosmic cowboy is one who wears long hair and a cowboy outfit and gets loud and aggressive in C&W clubs, has a much-younger ‘old lady’ and drives a pick-up truck with a KOKE bumper-sticker.”<sup>4</sup> But not all observers saw the cosmic cowboy as a passing fad that only toyed with the cowboy lifestyle; Eddie Wilson, proprietor of the Armadillo World Headquarters, remarked in June 1974 that

What we’ve got here in Austin now is a bunch of young, longhaired [shit]kickers that look a whole lot more like our grandfathers than the kickers of the last generation ever thought about.... The local hippies in Austin—it was pretty much an Austin-based sort of thing—grew out of the fatigue and shower shoe costume that San Francisco more or less gave birth to into a real salty bunch of very, very tough hippies.<sup>5</sup>

Many of the youths who migrated to Austin during the early 1970s came from middle-class Texan suburbs and likely had little firsthand experience with rural life. As journalist Jan Reid described in his 1974 book *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*:

In the main they were middle-class youths who hailed from Texas’ cities, but as such, they were rarely more than two or three generations removed from more rural times, and they came to Austin because the ease of those times lingered there.... Most worked at some job or another, but somehow it didn’t cost as much to live in Austin, and many would just as soon quit as report to work on Monday. Politically, they constituted a new breed of conservative, one that despaired over big-city hustle and twentieth-century progress and romanticized “getting back to

---

<sup>3</sup> Bill C. Malone, *Country Music, U.S.A.*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 396.

<sup>4</sup> Chet Flippo, “Austin: The Hucksters Are Coming,” *Rolling Stone* 158 (11 April 1974): 24. “KOKE” refers to KOKE-FM, the first radio station in Austin to program progressive country music.

<sup>5</sup> Eddie Wilson, interview by Robert Heard, tape recording, Austin History Center, Austin Public Library, 26 June 1974.

the land.” (Which was fine with the ruling establishment. At least they weren’t out in the streets ten thousand strong, like they were the Friday after Ohio National Guardsmen killed four Vietnam war protesters at Kent State.)<sup>6</sup>

These children of the Cold War and the post-World War II migration to the suburbs sought to get in touch with their rural roots and to leave the socially conservative world their parents had created for them. In both rhetoric and deed, the cosmic cowboy, like the hippie, sought to return society to its pre-industrial roots and used Austin as a place within which to experiment with these new ideas.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, like Murphey’s “Cosmic Cowboy,” many of the songs by Austin’s songwriters depicted modern society, most often represented by that particular city, as a wasteland and the Texas range as a viable alternative to such blight. In Austin, therefore, the cosmic cowboy sought a space within which to resurrect an idealized, pre-industrial Texan past that could provide refuge from the emerging global economy that had led to the abandonment of many rural Texas towns and the exponential growth of cities like Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston, and San Antonio.

This chapter outlines the key people, places, and musical styles that led to the emergence of progressive country music as a musical and social practice around 1971.

---

<sup>6</sup> Jan Reid, *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*, new edition (Austin: The University of Texas, 2004), 13.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Allen, “‘I Just Want to Be a Cosmic Cowboy’: Hippies, Cowboy Code, and the Culture of a Counterculture,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (Autumn 2005) <<http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/whq/36/3/allen.html>> (28 Nov. 2005), par. 11. Allen has noted that “although there were certainly overlaps, the 1960s counterculture was composed of a diverse array of human beings, the vast majority of whom can best be defined as ‘hippies’ who showed no interest whatsoever in overthrowing the American government to bring ‘power to the people.’ Hippies were much more numerous, influential, artistic, and apolitical than the neo-Marxists.... The hippie counterculture, unlike the New Left, was imbued with a near-Jeffersonian vision of an agrarian republic—hence the anti-industrialism of the ‘commune movement,’ long hair, buckskin, slouched leather and felt hats, leather boots, Indian moccasins and beads, bandanas, the *Whole Earth Catalogue* and *Foxfire* books and all other ‘natural’ trappings of hippieana. The predominant counterculture then—that of a ‘greening of America’—was a vision of arcadia that could quite easily be transcribed into a variant of the Cowboy Code.” See also Eleanor Agnew, *Back from the Land: How Young Americans Went to Nature in the 1970s, and Why They Came Back* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2004).

Such an exploration will demonstrate that the progressive country scene developed as an organic outgrowth of earlier local musical communities in Austin and as a node in a network of interrelated music scenes in Texas and across the country. This chapter moreover challenges Austin's oppositional stance toward the national music industry located in Nashville, Los Angeles, and New York by observing the personal and industrial connections between Austin and national musical centers. Finally, this chapter examines the role of regional chauvinism in the rhetoric of Austin's music scenes to demonstrate how, by building on the shared legacy of Texan nationalism, participants in the progressive country movement simultaneously cast themselves as ultra-Texan and as different from a perceived Texan cultural mainstream.

### **Austin as Music Scene: People and Places**

#### *The Folksinging Community: 1960-1964*

The earliest manifestations of a local music scene in Austin may be traced to Threadgill's, a former filling station that had been transformed into a honky tonk by Kenneth Threadgill in 1933 and that began attracting local musicians from the University of Texas in 1960. Located on Austin's North Lamar Boulevard on what was, in 1933, the northern edge of the city, Threadgill's was the first establishment in Travis County to obtain a beer license following Prohibition, and, as such, the bar was soon a favorite hangout for students at the University of Texas. Threadgill, the son of a Nazarene minister and a former bootlegger, was also a musician, performing blue yodels in the style of Jimmie Rodgers,<sup>8</sup> and he recognized the potential financial gains to be realized

---

<sup>8</sup> Rodgers himself had connections to the Texas Hill Country, having settled in Kerrville in 1931.



by combining live music and the sale of alcoholic beverages. Prior to 1960, Threadgill's featured the music of local honky tonk bands and regional and national touring musicians in addition to the singing of its namesake. But, beginning around 1960, Threadgill's also became an important locus for a growing community of undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Texas who were interested in learning about and performing the region's folk music.<sup>9</sup>

In 1960, a group of graduate students from the history and English departments at the University of Texas began going to Threadgill's to listen to country music and to enjoy the atmosphere of the city's oldest honky tonk. Among them were Stan Alexander, a doctoral student in English who also sang and played guitar, and Bill C. Malone, a doctoral student in history whose dissertation, inspired by the music he encountered at Threadgill's, was later published as *Country Music, U.S.A.*, the first comprehensive history of country music. In the introduction to the second revised edition of this influential text, Malone briefly discusses how he became involved in the scene at Threadgill's:

I sang country music all my life, but made no serious attempts to learn the guitar until my graduate days at the University of Texas in Austin. Until I learned my first chords, such friends as Tom Crouch and Willie Benson wore out their fingers playing accompaniment for me as I sang at parties and beer busts in the Austin area. I eventually discovered Threadgill's, a now-famous bar in North Austin, where I sang a couple of times a week in the informal jam sessions that prevailed around the big wooden tables. It was my notoriety as an amateur country singer that led to the writing of this book.<sup>10</sup>

Another regular at Threadgill's in 1960 was Francis Abernethy, president of the Texas Folklore Society. Alexander and Abernethy soon formed the East Texas String

---

<sup>9</sup> Reid, 17.

<sup>10</sup> Malone, *ix*.

Ensemble, a group that performed traditional folk ballads and old-time country music between 1960 and 1961.<sup>11</sup> These groups typically performed on weeknights, traditionally slow nights for bars, but Alexander, Abernethy, Malone, and others involved in the early Threadgill's scene were not hoping to make financial gains through their musical performances. Rather, because of Kenneth Threadgill's personal connections to earlier generations of country singers and old-time country music, these musicians saw in Threadgill's an opportunity to learn early varieties of country music at the feet of the many knowledgeable old-timers who passed through the club. As historian Barry Shank has explained:

The enthusiasm that these graduate students shared for older music endeared them immediately to the regular performers and customers of the old honky-tonk. For the first two years that the group of graduate students performed at Threadgill's [1960-61], the music they played was exclusively the music of the older generation—oldtime country and bluegrass. [Willie] Benson would back up Mr. Threadgill while he yodeled his Jimmie Rodgers songs. Shorty Ziegler would announce the keys for each song so that the younger musicians could play along.<sup>12</sup>

The relationship that was forged between these early folk musicians and the older contingent at Threadgill's was, therefore, beneficial to both groups; the graduate student community could capitalize on the wealth of knowledge there for their own research and entertainment, while the older generation could pass on their legacy to an enthusiastic and caring younger generation.

Concurrent with the development of a burgeoning folksinging community of graduate students at Threadgill's was the emergence of an undergraduate folksinging group on the campus of the University of Texas. In 1960, the University's English

---

<sup>11</sup> Reid, 18.

<sup>12</sup> Barry Shank, *Dissonant Identities: The Rock 'n' Roll Scene in Austin, Texas* (Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 40.

department hired Roger Abrahams, a scholar of folksong, and shortly after his arrival in Austin, he established the University of Texas Folk Sing. Meeting at the Chuckwagon in the UT Student Union, the folksinging club was comprised primarily of Texan undergraduates who, as Shank has described, sought to affirm identities that stood in opposition to their conservative Texan upbringings and in opposition to the social mainstream at the university:

In Austin, folksinging quickly became a way of marking one's difference from the student body represented by fraternities, sororities, and football players. Students from small towns throughout Texas who felt that their lives differed from the conservative meanings traditionally available were attracted to the folksinging club.<sup>13</sup>

Many of the participants in the UT Folk Sing—including John Clay, Powell St. John, Lanny Wiggins, Janis Joplin, and Tary Owens—also banded together to form not only an ideological community but a physical community, moving off-campus into a rundown apartment complex near campus known as “The Ghetto.”<sup>14</sup> This move proved useful to the growth of the UT Folk Sing community and to the expansion and perpetuation of the scene in all of Austin. The Ghetto teemed with musical collaboration, permitting the development of a core group of talented performers and songwriters to sustain the scene in the future. Furthermore, because of its physical marginality within Austin, the Ghetto community underscored its difference from the social mainstream of the University of Texas and further marked folksinging as a sign of difference within that broader community.

By 1962, the first generation of folksingers at Threadgill's graduated from the

---

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-41.

University of Texas, and some, like Stan Alexander and Bill Malone, left to pursue academic careers, creating space for new members of the Ghetto community to hone their skills and develop their repertoires in front of the knowledgeable audiences at Threadgill's. As is typical in many independent music scenes, many of the Ghetto groups that performed at Threadgill's were comprised of the same core group of musicians and could be differentiated by slight differences in musical style and performers. The Waller Street Boys, for instance, was founded in 1962 and featured the songwriting and guitar playing of Powell St. John, the singing and autoharp of Janis Joplin, and the banjo playing of Larry Wiggins. As Jan Reid has described, the musical style of the Waller Street Boys was based primarily in the songwriting styles of Joan Baez and Judy Collins, drawing heavily from the commercial folk music written and performed in New York's Greenwich Village.<sup>15</sup> By 1963, two-thirds of the Waller Street Boys—St. John and Wiggins—formed the Hootenanny Hoots, which also featured Tary Owens, Bill Neely, Shorty Ziegler, and Kenneth Threadgill. With Threadgill as the featured performer, the Hootenanny Hoots was the first folksinging group in Austin to reach out from the local scene and tap into the national folk music scene. Around 1963, the group was booked to play at an artists' convention at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. According to Reid, the only advertisement for the performance was a newspaper ad that announced “only that Kenneth Threadgill from Texas would provide the entertainment, but when Threadgill checked into his hotel room the phone rang all night long” as locals wanted to know if he was indeed the Kenneth Threadgill of the “beer joint in Austin.”<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Reid, 20-21.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

Concurrent with the Austin folksinging scene's attempts to gain recognition outside of Austin, local entrepreneurs worked to develop an infrastructure to feature the increasing number of musicians who were coming to Austin to become part of the scene and to entice nationally-known musicians to perform for Austin's audiences. Chief among them was the 11<sup>th</sup> Door, a club that presented African American Texas blues musicians Mance Lipscomb and Lightin' Hopkins, North Carolinian guitarist and folksinger Doc Watson, and commercial folksingers such as Jerry Jeff Walker. When these musicians traveled to Austin, many went to Threadgill's following their sets at the 11<sup>th</sup> Door to take part in the impromptu jam sessions there.<sup>17</sup>

Another important development in Austin's folksinging community was the first Zilker Park Folk Festival, held in July 1965 and featuring a wide variety of local, regional, and national folk musicians, including Tom Paxton, Mance Lipscomb, Jerry Jeff Walker, Townes Van Zandt, and the Dallas County Jug Band (which featured Steve Fromholz and Michael Murphey).<sup>18</sup> Founded by Rod Kennedy, an FM radio station operator and racing enthusiast, this festival brought together all of the various strains of the folksinging scene in Austin: the old-timers, the traditionalists, and the new generation of songwriters. Furthermore, it established Austin as an important stop in the national scene and helped to validate and to reinforce the notion within the Austin scene that the city's daily musical activities were of national import. Moreover, the emergence of venues such as the 11<sup>th</sup> Door and the Zilker Park Folk Festival serve as indications that Austin's counterculture had matured to the point that they were prepared to seek not only

---

<sup>17</sup> Shank, 45.

<sup>18</sup> Reid, 35-36; Rod Kennedy, interview by Jan Reid, 1 January 1970, Austin History Center, Austin Public Library.

personal enjoyment from their music but also financial gain.

The folk music scene that flourished in Austin during the early 1960s is the first direct ancestor of Austin's progressive country music scene of the early 1970s. It represents the first critical mass of musicians who became interested in pursuing a similar musical aesthetic; rather than acting alone, the core musicians of the overlapping Folk Sing and Threadgill's communities collaborated to revive the classic blues and ballads that had formed the basis of early American and Texan folk music and to create an extension of the songwriting scenes of Greenwich Village and later Los Angeles. This revivalist aesthetic was later manifested by bands like Asleep at the Wheel and Alvin Crow and the Pleasant Valley Boys that performed classic western swing and honky tonk music, often with period-appropriate instruments and attire, in Austin's clubs and dancehalls. Moreover, while this scene was necessarily based in Austin due to the participants' daily roles as students at the University of Texas, Austin's folksingers were keenly aware of their position within the larger national folk revivalism as local musicians interacted with the regional and national touring musicians who performed at venues like the 11<sup>th</sup> Door. Furthermore, as the scene in Austin became more developed and recognized as a hotbed of folk song outside of the city, Austin's folksingers attempted to reach out to communities beyond the city limits. Thus, even from the earliest days of Austin's music scene, the musicians working with the Austin scene both enjoyed the communal nature of performing with their peers in the local venues and sought to achieve validation and financial gain from audiences outside of Austin.

Austin's folksingers were among the first people to use music to articulate the conflict between the unifying bonds of Texas nationalism and the difference of Austin

and Austin's residents from that unified culture. While most of these early scene participants hailed from Texas and were fully aware of the state's storied history, they were generally scorned by their fellow students at the University of Texas because they were not interested in joining the school's many Greek organizations, showed little interest in collegiate athletics, and were instead interested in aesthetic pursuits. In some ways, these students were castigated for their lack of "Texan-ness" and conformity to the traditions of the University. By turning to folk music, however, the participants in the Folk Sing and the hootenannies at Threadgill's were perhaps even more aware of some aspects of their Texan musical heritage than were their fellow students. From this perspective, therefore, those students who conformed to the social standards of the University may be seen as joined through the common bond of Texas nationalism, while the folksinging community used their own awareness of Texan culture to help define Austin as a unique and countercultural place. This minority community of folksingers has been held up by later generations of musicians, historians, and journalists alike as important bearers of Texas culture and as the innovative founders of a live and recorded music scene that has persisted for over forty-five years.

### *The Rock Scene: 1965-1971*

As members of Austin's folksinging scene began to reach out to a regional and national community of like-minded musicians, a second group of musicians, consisting both of former members of the folk scene and musicians with no prior musical experience in Austin, began to build a music scene focused on the performance and enjoyment of rock music. Musicians in Austin were, in many ways, following the trends of the New

York folk music scene, which by 1965 was attempting to cope with the overwhelming success of The Beatles and other British Invasion bands. It is no wonder then that, as the playlists of Top 40 AM radio stations began to take on a distinctly British flavor, Austin's musicians also sought to emulate those sounds.

The first rock band to emerge from the folksinging scene was St. John and the Conqueroo, founded in the summer of 1965 by Powell St. John and Ed Guinn. Following the relocation of St. John to San Francisco later that year, Guinn became the group's leader and changed the name to The Conqueroo. Guinn was an early participant in Roger Abrahams's Folk Sings, but, as an African American, it was recommended that he avoid performing at the socially conservative Threadgill's.<sup>19</sup> The Conqueroo's interracial composition was groundbreaking in the Austin of the 1960s, a strictly segregated city. Guinn made use of his race to secure a steady gig at the I.L. Club, located on the city's predominantly black East Side and owned by Ira Littlefield. As The Conqueroo's local fame grew, the older black clientele of the I.L. Club was eventually replaced by white friends of the band, marking a racial transgression that was still a rarity well into the 1970s. Reid observes, however, that this interracial congeniality was short-lived:

It was a volatile mixture to contain in this period in central Texas. It exploded one night when the band's sound engineer used the word "niggardly" to describe a friend's plan to fix his car. A "barroom brawl" broke out, a gun went off, the police were called, and the Conqueroo's regular east-side gig came to an end.<sup>20</sup>

After obtaining a significant amount of fame among the Austin rock cognoscenti, Guinn and the rest of The Conqueroo decided to test their music in the clubs of San Francisco's

---

<sup>19</sup> Shank, 43-45.

<sup>20</sup> Reid, 47.



Haight-Ashbury neighborhood around the early part of 1967. As Reid recounts, this trip was brief and unfruitful:

They made the rock pilgrimage to San Francisco, where the drummer promptly freaked out and fled back to Texas, and the others were not so sure they like what they saw. “San Francisco started dying about six months before we got there,” [Bob] Brown said. “The scene was really starting to degenerate. Haight Street smelled like piss, and a lot of the little stores were closing down. All the people we thought were running around with flowers in their hair were not lying around with needles stuck in their necks.”<sup>21</sup>

While The Conqueroo did not achieve great success in San Francisco, their attempt to reach out to the San Francisco scene indicates the increasing confidence of Austin’s musicians; they believed that their music was important enough to share with their neighbors. Furthermore, it is clear that Austin’s rock musicians were hardly provincial but were instead keenly aware of their role within the larger regional and national music scenes.

The Conqueroo was not, however, the first group of Austin-based rock musicians who struck out for San Francisco. First among them was Powell St. John, who left Austin in late 1965 to join the blues-rock group Mother Earth. But perhaps the most famous of Austin’s musicians to head out to the West Coast was Janis Joplin. As a former participant in the Folk Sings, a resident of the Ghetto, and one of Kenneth Threadgill’s favorite singers, Joplin left Austin in 1966 to pursue her career in other Texas cities, including especially the area around her Gulf Coast hometown of Port Arthur. Later that year, Travis Rivers, her boyfriend at the time, learned that San Francisco’s Big Brother and the Holding Company was holding auditions for female vocalists. Big Brother and the Holding Company was then the house band at the Avalon Ballroom, one of San

---

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

San Francisco's most important rock clubs, so Joplin traveled to California for an audition.<sup>22</sup> Joplin's distinctive blues-inflected voice helped her catapult to the top of the scene, and, as San Francisco became the American center for psychedelic rock, Joplin's fame increased exponentially. Signed to Columbia Records following the success of the group's eponymous 1967 release, Joplin's voice became—along with that of Grace Slick, female lead for the San Francisco group The Jefferson Airplane—one of two nationally prominent female voices of the psychedelic sound. In 1969, Joplin released her first solo album, *I Got Dem Ol' Kozmic Blues Again*, an album that allowed the blues influences from her early musical education to shine through, and in 1970, she recorded *Pearl*, her final album, which featured her hit recording of Texan songwriter Kris Kristofferson's "Me and Bobby McGee."<sup>23</sup> Joplin's death from a heroin overdose on 4 October 1970 shook the entire psychedelic music community and hit her colleagues in Austin especially hard.<sup>24</sup> But her success in San Francisco and across the United States proved to other Austin musicians that their amalgam of folksinging traditions and rock music could be welcomed with open arms by the nation's rock music fans.

Although some of the musicians who had been associated with Austin's folksinging scene had struck out for San Francisco by 1965, local musicians and entrepreneurs realized Austin's rock community could not reach its fullest potential without venues to host young, developing groups. One such venue was the New Orleans Club, a Dixieland jazz club that chose to replace jazz with rock around late 1965 when a

---

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-25.

<sup>23</sup> Rick Koster, *Texas Music* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2000), 99-100.

<sup>24</sup> Reid, 28-29.

group led by songwriter Roky Erickson, The 13<sup>th</sup> Floor Elevators, began drawing crowds of one thousand students to its shows there. According to Reid, The Elevators' performances at the New Orleans Club were so popular that a local AM pop station sent its remote broadcast unit to the venue to broadcast the shows to all of the fans who were incapable of attending.<sup>25</sup> Building upon the success of their 1966 single "You're Gonna Miss Me," released on the Houston-based International Artists label, The 13<sup>th</sup> Floor Elevators were soon able to capitalize on the training and exposure they received at the New Orleans Club to reach college and university audiences in towns throughout Texas.<sup>26</sup> Another musician who found early success at the New Orleans Club was Rusty Weir, a young singer-songwriter who played with The Wigs, a group that covered songs by The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, and other Top-40 bands.<sup>27</sup> The New Orleans Club thus reflects the various strains of rock music that were performed in Austin, from the proto-psychedelic music of The 13<sup>th</sup> Floor Elevators to the cover songs of The Wigs.

As a club catering to young musicians and fans, the New Orleans Club served as a breeding ground for the development of rock music and musicians at all stages of their career and, like Threadgill's, demonstrates how the confluence of musicians with different musical abilities in a single venue can result in the creation of a critical mass of musicians with similar aesthetic and rhetorical philosophies. Venues like the New Orleans Club and Threadgill's serve as important gathering places for local musicians in any music scene, acting as sites for formal activities like concert performances and for

---

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 38; see also Shank, 48.

<sup>26</sup> Shank, 48. "You're Gonna Miss Me" received top-ten airplay on AM pop stations throughout Texas during 1966.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

more informal interactions between fellow musicians and between musicians and their audiences. Moreover, musicians often take on different roles in these local clubs on different occasions, appearing sometimes as the evening's featured entertainment while other times attending only as a member of the audience. As a result, such venues provide numerous opportunities for musical exchange and for the standardization of musical aesthetics and scene-based rhetoric: artists hear one another's performances, discuss the meaning of music during intermission, and trade musical licks backstage. Local venues, as loci of the music scene, are essential, therefore, to the development of local musical communities and to formation of local musical identities.

The most important rock club in Austin during the second half of the 1960s was the Vulcan Gas Company, located on Congress Avenue, just blocks from the State Capitol.<sup>28</sup> Sandy Lockett, a sound technician for The Conqueroo and The 13<sup>th</sup> Floor Elevators, founded the Vulcan in October 1967 and apparently did little to improve the venue's physical plant. As Jan Reid observes: "The seating inside the Vulcan consisted of benches nailed to the floor, and plumbing pipes stood out from the walls. There was no beer.... [T]he Vulcan had a frantic light show blinking on all walls, a patient landlord, a lot of energy, and the Elevators and the Conqueroo."<sup>29</sup> Like the I.L. Club, the Vulcan Gas Company was the site for interracial contact; Reid explains that "The Vulcan was a wild, wild place by Texas standards, frequented by a few blacks who stopped by occasionally for some jive, sun-shaded Airmen [from nearby Bergstrom Air Force Base]

---

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>29</sup> Reid, 40-41.

trying to be cool, and everybody in Austin who wanted to be a hippie.”<sup>30</sup> Because of limited funding and its lack of a beer license, Vulcan was limited primarily to booking house bands, including The Elevators, The Conqueroo, and black Texas bluesmen Mance Lipscomb, Lightin’ Hopkins, and Big Joe Williams.<sup>31</sup> In addition, the Vulcan was not supported by the local community, including the *Austin American-Statesman*, which banned all of its advertising from the newspaper. In response, the Vulcan hired several visual artists and underground comic book authors—including Gilbert Shelton and Jim Franklin—to create flashy handbills which were posted near campus along the Drag and advertising their performances on a grassroots level.<sup>32</sup>

The Vulcan Gas Company became home to an Austin band that had great potential for commercial success, Shiva’s Head Band. The group was founded by fiddler Spencer Perskin, a former student at North Texas State who had studied folksinging with Stan Alexander, then a professor in the English department there.<sup>33</sup> As a result of Perskin’s early exposure to the folksinging traditions that had inspired St. John, Joplin, and others who had gained regional and national recognition for their music, Shiva’s Head Band was one of the first Austin rock bands to attempt to bridge the ideological and musical gaps between the city’s rock sounds and folksinging traditions.<sup>34</sup> Around 1970, as Shiva’s Head Band became one of the more popular acts at the Vulcan Gas Company

---

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Shank, 51-53.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>34</sup> Stephen R. Tucker, “Progressive Country Music, 1972-1976: Its Impact and Creative Highlights,” *Southern Quarterly* 22, no. 3 (Spring 1984), 95.

and as Austin musicians continued to immigrate to San Francisco, Capitol Records began to take notice of the burgeoning rock scene.<sup>35</sup> The producers at Capitol were aware of the role the Vulcan played as the premiere venue for rock music in Austin, and, because Shiva's Head Band was one of the club's most popular acts, the label signed the group to a recording contract as part of a marketing campaign designed to exploit the then-undefined "Austin" sound. One of the more significant components of the deal included a development fund to be used at the discretion of Perskin and Eddie Wilson, the group's manager, to build an industrial infrastructure to support the scene. Unfortunately, within weeks of establishing Armadillo Productions, a company to handle the operations of this new project, the Vulcan closed, leaving a dearth of venues for Austin's developing rock music scene and temporarily stifling Austin's musical growth.

The rock music scene in Austin was developed by the same group of musicians who were involved in the earlier folksinging scene, including Powell St. John and Ed Guinn. Shank has argued that, despite the shared personnel, the development of the rock scene in Austin was not based in the same communal spirit of the folksinging community:

This rock 'n' roll in Austin was marked by a contradiction at its very heart. It had grown out of the articulation of two opposing practices—folksinging as the marker of youthful distance from mass culture and the honky-tonk commodification of an antimodernist critique. Throughout the early sixties, young people from all regions of Texas had flocked to Austin as a center of cultural possibility, where they could live a bohemian, beatnik, proto-hippie life and mark their own difference from the Texan cultural mainstream through such practices as folksinging, liberal politics, and drug use. However, at the very moment when they were singing the pleasures of immediate, uncommodified, collective difference, they were also dependent upon the recognition and

---

<sup>35</sup> Shank, 52.

economic support of a system that produced a commodity from their performance.<sup>36</sup>

While the basic facts here are correct—that is, that the folksinging scene was centered primarily on the communal performance of folksong and that the rock scene manifested the first serious attempts to commodify the local scene—he grants the city’s musicians little agency in the decision to reap financial gains from their performances and thus ignores an important factor in the development of the Austin music scene. First, the musicians who were performing at the University of Texas Folk Sing and at Threadgill’s were primarily amateurs at the time, learning to perform from older musicians like Kenneth Threadgill, from academics like Roger Abrahams, and from the older fans who experienced the culture first hand. That is to say that most of the musicians who sang folk songs in these venues were not yet musically equipped to charge admission to their performances.

The emergence of the rock scene in Austin was not, as Shank implies in his analysis, a sign that local musicians “were... dependent upon the recognition and economic support of a system that produced a commodity from their performance,”<sup>37</sup> but instead suggests a conscious decision on the part of some musicians to use their early musical training for their own financial benefit. These musicians were not the pawns of a cold and uncaring music industry but were instead the very agents who formed the clubs, recruited the talent, and purposefully sought out ways to extend their musical influence within Austin and around the country. Furthermore, the emergence of a rock music scene in Austin paralleled similar developments on the national scene. By most estimates, the

---

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

folksinging scene in Austin peaked in 1963, a full year before The Beatles' first performance on *The Ed Sullivan Show* and the beginning of the British Invasion. The arrival of The Beatles and their compatriots on American soil posed a new challenge to the nation's folk scenes. Following the release of The Byrds' 1965 recording of Bob Dylan's "Mr. Tambourine Man" and the release later that year of Dylan's electric folk-rock album *Bringing It All Back Home*, musicians who had been performing in the nation's local folk scenes began to borrow the sounds and imagery of the British Invasion groups. Austin's musicians did not fail to capitalize on this success, and, while Capitol Records' investment in the scene does provide some evidence of the music industry's role in defining this trend, the grassroots growth of clubs like the Vulcan Gas Company and of groups like The Conqueroo from the local population reinforces the notion that the decision to play rock music was a conscious one. Moreover, the fact that Austin's musicians followed national and international music trends indicates that, no matter how idyllic and idealistic local music scenes might appear to be, most musicians in Austin were keenly aware of their role in both the local and national music scenes. The Austin rock scene, by looking beyond the city into San Francisco, New York, and even Los Angeles, thus brought national attention to Austin's musicians while simultaneously instilling in them the confidence to strike out in search of regional and national success.

The rock scene that flourished in Austin during the mid- and late-1960s was important to the progressive country music movement of the early 1970s for several reasons. First, this period in Austin's musical history marks the first significant expansion of the city's live music venues. Although most of the clubs established at the height of the rock scene in Austin did not survive the 1960s, they were important training



grounds for several entrepreneurs who built new venues in the 1970s and in which progressive country music developed and thrived. Second, the exportation of several talented members of Austin's rock scene to the nationally-recognized rock scenes of San Francisco and Los Angeles helped to develop an interest in Austin among musicians and music industry executives on the national level, spurring major-label investments in the city and encouraging the continued development of local infrastructure. Finally, as Austin's rock musicians began to witness the demise of the West Coast rock communities and to search for alternative spaces in which to create their music, many of them returned to Austin, bringing with them important connections to the national music industry that would help to promulgate the sound, image, and rhetoric of progressive country music to a national audience.

### *The Progressive Country Era: 1971-1975*

When the Vulcan Gas Company closed in 1970, Austin's musicians had no large venue in which to perform and listen to the city's latest sounds, but Capitol Records' investment in Shiva's Head Band and Armadillo Productions provided the necessary financial capital and a mandate to resurrect Austin's rock scene. Just months after the closure of the Vulcan, lawyer Mike Tolleson, Shiva's Head Band manager Eddie Wilson, and artist Jim Franklin concocted a plan to spend four thousand dollars of Spencer Perskin's advance to lease an old National Guard armory located on Barton Springs Road in downtown Austin.<sup>38</sup> In July, the Armadillo World Headquarters opened its doors to the former Vulcan crowd; as Wilson reflected in 1974, "We inherited the legacy of the

---

<sup>38</sup> David Menconi, "Music, Media and the Metropolis: The Case of Austin's Armadillo World Headquarters," M.J. thesis, The University of Texas at Austin, 1985, 60-64.

Vulcan Gas Company.”<sup>39</sup> The vast spaces of the armory provided the opportunity to divide the club into several smaller sections, including a seating area on the floor immediately in front of the stage, a dancefloor in the rear, a bar area, and even an outdoor beer garden. The variety of spaces contained within the Armadillo suggests that Wilson, Tolleson, and Franklin were in tune with the various ways in which the fans in Austin hoped to experience music and the equally numerous reasons that people were attracted to clubs and dancehalls. By combining the best aspects of the dancehall and concert hall, the Armadillo was poised to take the Austin music scene by storm.

The Armadillo could not have been transformed from an armory to a musical venue so quickly, however, without the assistance of numerous volunteers from the scene who wished to expedite the process. As Jan Reid observed, the cooperation of these “hangers-on” was invaluable to the resurrection of Austin’s live music scene:

For now there could be no specialization. Though Perskin and Shiva’s Headband called the new club home and infused a healthy portion of their contract bonus into the project, the Armadillo was a mad scramble for survival that demanded all hands everywhere. The staff hammered and nailed a stage together, dragged in some carpet scraps, offered some apple juice and pumpkin bread for refreshments, and opened with three top local bands, but the odds seemed against them.<sup>40</sup>

Moreover, in the early days of the Armadillo, a dozen bartenders, kitchen staff, and sound technicians lived together at the home of Eddie and Genie Wilson, who even in 1974—four years after the Armadillo opened its doors and at the height of its popularity in Austin—were each drawing a weekly net salary of only \$51.29.<sup>41</sup> Local legend even has

---

<sup>39</sup> Wilson, interview by Robert Heard, 26 June 1974.

<sup>40</sup> Reid, 62-63.

<sup>41</sup> Wilson, interview by Robert Heard, 26 June 1974. Jim Franklin actually took up residence backstage.

it that most of the volunteers in the early days of the Armadillo were paid a small amount of cash and all of the marijuana they could smoke for their services; because there are no payroll records from this period of the Armadillo's history, such an arrangement cannot be verified.<sup>42</sup> It is clear, however, that, because of the skills of these volunteers, the Armadillo quickly expanded from a little-known Texas-sized concert hall into a world-class audio and video production center, a venue capable of attracting national touring acts of all varieties, and a beer garden and restaurant that served the local community.<sup>43</sup>

A sense of community and local activism was integral to the survival of the Armadillo's communal business model and was equally important in keeping the audiences and owners alike out of trouble with law enforcement. As Eddie Wilson observed in 1974, one reason for the success of clubs like the Armadillo World Headquarters was the lowering of the legal drinking age from twenty-one to eighteen in 1973 and the reduction of the penalty for marijuana possession from a felony to a misdemeanor. The loosening of state laws would not, however, be enough to prevent the arrest of intoxicated or troublemaking customers; rather, stringent self-policing and the complicity of local law enforcement were integral components in keeping the Armadillo out of legal trouble. As Wilson noted:

What we had was a place that was damn near too big to bust, and there was not anything going on that was malicious or vicious or really dangerous to anyone. And I can't say too much for the general attitude of the Austin Police Department.... [The cops on the beat] work with us real, real hard.<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> Business records for the Armadillo World Headquarters are spotty. They are housed in the Armadillo World Headquarters Collection, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.

<sup>43</sup> Menconi, "Music, Media and the Metropolis."

<sup>44</sup> Wilson, interview by Robert Heard, 26 June 1974.

Furthermore, because scene participants pooled their financial, creative, and physical resources to build a significant venue for live music, they were invested not only in the success of the Armadillo World Headquarters but also of the entire musical community in Austin. Such grassroots entrepreneurship, which had manifested itself in Austin as early as 1962, was an essential component of the progressive country music movement's success locally, regionally, and nationally.<sup>45</sup>

The establishment of the Armadillo World Headquarters also marked an attempt on the part of the cosmic cowboy population to come to terms with local and regional history. Shank has posited that "Austin's rock 'n' roll scene was supported by a honky-tonk economy that reinforced a local set of traditional cultural meanings and established a flexible yet consistent musical aesthetic."<sup>46</sup> Shank indicates that the power of clubs like the Armadillo World Headquarters lay in their ability to invoke the communal nature of the rural honky tonk. In both facilities, the community could gather to drink, dance, socialize, and enjoy music that spoke to their own musical, social, and moral sensibilities. Because the music performed in honky tonks was, most often, created by local musicians, the honky tonk community found affirmation of their values and could use the honky tonk as a tool in the shaping of local identity. Moreover, the relatively small size of the audiences at rural honky tonks permitted fans and musicians alike to know their fellow fans and musicians, often on a deeply personal level. The honky tonk is, therefore, a sort of utopian setting in which no one is a stranger and in which everyone feels connected to

---

<sup>45</sup> In a 1974 article for the *American-Statesman*, Wilson estimated that, while the club began with regular audiences of around four hundred people per night, "around 150,000 in town will probably attend Armadillo at one time or another" (Susan White, "Armadillo World Headquarters Celebrates 4<sup>th</sup> Year," *Austin (Tex.) American-Statesman*, morning ed. (14 August 1974), p. 45).

<sup>46</sup> Shank, 15.

the honky tonk's daily activities, thus contributing to a sense of ownership and a desire to preserve the sanctity of the venue from negative influences. Furthermore, the communality of the Armadillo was further amplified by the living arrangements of those who worked at there; Wilson housed and boarded several of his employees, and Jim Franklin resided in the club's backstage area.<sup>47</sup> The Armadillo World Headquarters thus shared many characteristics with the rural honky tonk through its insistence on programming local music (normally as an opening act for a major national touring act) and the affirmation of the community's desire to improve the world around them through the arts and through entrepreneurship.

In the months following its grand opening in July 1970, the Armadillo World Headquarters struggled to remain open because the costs of running such an establishment proved difficult to recoup through ticket sales. As Reid recalls, "The organizers of the Armadillo tried to run the place as a haven for local talent, but they found if they charged enough for the local bands to pay expenses, nobody came. Yet if they let everybody in for next to nothing, that wouldn't support the overhead either."<sup>48</sup> Wilson, Tolleson, and Franklin soon realized that the way to capitalize on the cavernous spaces of the Armadillo was to book nationally recognized acts and to hire local bands to open for them. In late 1971, therefore, the Armadillo featured a performance by John Sebastian, formerly of The Lovin' Spoonful, but this initial attempt to promote a national act was unsuccessful. The Armadillo reportedly lost five thousand dollars as a result of

---

<sup>47</sup> Wilson, interview by Robert Heard, 26 June 1974.

<sup>48</sup> Reid, 66.

Sebastian's one-night stand.<sup>49</sup> After obtaining a beer license and a twenty-thousand-dollar gift from a friend of the Armadillo,<sup>50</sup> Wilson and his cohort were able to use the revenue generated by beer sales to subsidize the booking of national acts.

Many of the musicians who were to become important figures in Austin's progressive country movement first performed at the Armadillo prior to settling in Austin permanently. Beginning in late 1971, a group of Texan singer-songwriters working in Los Angeles began to travel to Austin to perform at the Armadillo. Chief among these musicians were Michael Murphey and Steven Fromholz. Murphey, a native of Dallas and a former member of the Dallas County Jug Band, had moved to Los Angeles in late 1965 following the completion of a degree in Greek at North Texas State University, where he had been influenced by Stan Alexander.<sup>51</sup> In Los Angeles, Murphey secured a songwriting contract with Screen Gems, where he wrote songs for the Monkees (including "What Am I Doing Hanging Around") and became involved in the folksinging community on the Sunset Strip. His stay in Los Angeles thus completed an education that Murphey had begun as a high school student exploring field recordings and commercial folk music. As a performing musician and songwriter in Los Angeles in the late 1960s, Murphey's musical style developed a country-rock element similar to that of The Byrds and Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young, and in 1967, his group The Lewis & Clark Expedition enjoyed a pop chart single in "I Feel Good (I Feel Bad)." In 1971, Murphey moved back to Texas and soon became a fixture at the Armadillo World

---

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 58; Don Cusic, "Michael Martin Murphey," in *The Encyclopedia of Country Music*, ed. Paul Kingsbury (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 360.

Headquarters and other Austin venues.<sup>52</sup> When Jan Reid asked Murphey why he chose Austin for his new home, he replied: “It’s not too big yet.... And it’s a place where you can be fairly familiar with what’s going on. You know who the pickers are, but you can also relate to your neighbors who aren’t musicians. It’s a small-town kind of feeling.”<sup>53</sup>

Steven Fromholz, another commercial songwriter who relocated to Austin in the early 1970s and who wrote songs about tragic Texan figures, followed a similar path from Texas to California and back. First, the Texas-born Fromholz spent a short time at North Texas State University in Denton, where he too came under the influence of Stan Alexander.<sup>54</sup> While there, he also learned to play guitar from Travis Holland, one of the more enthusiastic members of the Denton folk crowd, and began to listen to field and commercial folk music recordings. In 1965, he joined Murphey in the Dallas County Jug Band and performed regularly with Murphey at Rod Kennedy’s Zilker Park concerts. Following a stint in the Air Force, Fromholz joined Dan McCrimmon in Denver to form a duo called Frummox, which recorded their debut album on Probe Records, an ABC subsidiary, in 1969.<sup>55</sup> By the summer of 1971, Frummox had disbanded, and Fromholz joined Steven Stills’s Manassas,<sup>56</sup> thus tying him to the Los Angeles country-rock and folk-rock scene with which Murphey was also associated. In 1972, Michael Nesmith, formerly the guitarist for the Monkees and himself a native Texan, convinced Elektra Records to finance the construction of a Los Angeles studio to record folk singers and

---

<sup>52</sup> Cusic, 360.

<sup>53</sup> Reid, 205.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 115-116.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 116, 123.

country-rock acts. In the summer of 1973, Fromholz recorded his first album for Nesmith's Countryside label, and subsequent FM airplay brought Fromholz's music to national, albeit underground, attention.<sup>57</sup> After experiencing some difficulties working with Nesmith, Fromholz traveled to Austin in late 1973 or early 1974 because he was familiar with the musicians in the community (especially Murphey), with the enthusiasm of the fans at the Armadillo, and with the growing number of venues for live music that had followed the increasing local and regional success of the Armadillo.

Fromholz and Murphey were only two members of a rather large group of singer-songwriters who began to congregate in Austin between 1972 and 1974, a group that included Jerry Jeff Walker, B.W. Stevenson, Willis Alan Ramsey, and Bobby Bridger. This new wave of Austin-based musicians were not, however, altogether different from the musicians who had been active in Austin since the early 1960s. All of them emerged from the national folk revivalism of the late 1950s and early 1960s, and Fromholz and Murphey had been personally connected to the Austin folksinging scene through Stan Alexander, one of the first performers at Threadgill's, and through their performances at Zilker Park. Furthermore, while they were not directly affiliated with the Austin musicians who migrated to San Francisco during the late 1960s, the progressive country songwriters had tried their luck as rock musicians in California during the same time, mirroring the attempts of the Austin rockers to achieve national reputations. The parallel journeys of the progressive country singer-songwriters and Austin's rock musicians back to Austin in the early 1970s also reflects an analogous disillusion with the sounds and business models of the major national music centers, as well as with the damage that

---

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 118, 120.



extensive drug use had inflicted on the music scenes in Los Angeles and San Francisco. Because of the similarities in their backgrounds and their shared experiences in the national music industry, the progressive country singer-songwriters and the musicians of Austin's rock scene were poised to tap into the communality and Texan-ness of the Austin music scene and to develop further the local, regional, and national audiences for the music created there.

The continued growth and expansion of venues for the performance of live music throughout the city was perhaps one of the most important components in the establishment of Austin as an important musical center in the 1970s. Building on the success of the Armadillo and capitalizing on its focus on national artists, Soap Creek Saloon was founded in 1973 by George Majewski and his wife Carlyne Majer. As an 11 June 1981 press release announcing the closure of the Soap Creek Saloon explained, the venue featured

an energy packed, non-stop party for the past eight and a half years featuring the very best in regional musical artists—music that ranged from the Texas roadhouse boogie of Delbert McClinton to the Tex-Mex soul of Freddy Fender, from the Cajun zydeco of Clifton Chenier to the conjunto sounds of Flaco Jimenez [*sic*, Jimenez], from the blues of the Fabulous Thunderbirds to the outrageousness of the Uranium Savages, and consistently drew from the well of Austin-based musicians including Greezy Wheels, Alvin Crow and the Pleasant Valley Boys, Marcia Ball, Lewis and the Legends, Storm, Willie Nelson, Doug Sahm, The Lotions, Beto y los Fairlanes, The Joe Ely Band, Jerry Jeff Walker, Rusty Wier, and Asleep at the Wheel to name a few (and to unintentionally and apologetically leave off a few).<sup>58</sup>

Similarly, the Texas Opry House, a venture initiated by Wichita Falls native Bronson Evans and financed by former Nashville-based country songwriter and recording artist Willie Nelson, challenged the dominance of the Armadillo by leasing a convention center

---

<sup>58</sup> Press release, 11 June 1981, Soap Creek Saloon Archives, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.

only a few blocks from the Armadillo. The facilities included “restaurant capabilities, three large barrooms with tiled dance floors, any number of party rooms under lock and key, and an adjacent, unused swimming pool.”<sup>59</sup> Even before the 1974 grand opening, the Texas Opry House had booked Ferlin Husky, Tanya Tucker, and the Eagles, and also featured local acts prominently in their concert schedule. Because of the business savvy of the recently-arrived progressive country songwriters, their clout with the regional and national industry, and their financial backing, therefore, Austin was able to extend its national reputation as a center for live music and Texan culture still further.

Nelson was among the first artists with ties to Nashville, the primary locus of the country music industry, to take note of Austin in the early 1970s. Nelson was born in Abbott, Texas, and was raised by his grandparents in nearby Waco. After several years apprenticing with the honky tonk and dance bands that served the German- and Czech-populated area around Waco, Nelson moved to Nashville in 1960, where he became a successful songwriter, penning such hits as “Crazy,” “Funny How Time Slips Away,” and “Hello Walls.”<sup>60</sup> After a three-year stint with Liberty Records (1962-1965) and his induction into the Grand Ole Opry cast in 1964,<sup>61</sup> Nelson signed with RCA Records in 1965 where, working under producer Chet Atkins, he released several moderately successful albums, including *Country Willie: His Own Songs* (1965) and *Country Favorites: Willie Nelson Style* (1966). But, by 1969, he was growing tired of Nashville

---

<sup>59</sup> Reid, 80.

<sup>60</sup> Bob Allen, “Willie Nelson,” in *The Encyclopedia of Country Music*, ed. Paul Kingsbury (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 374-375. For more information on German and Czech music in Texas, consult: Carolyn F. Griffith, “Czech and Polish Music in Texas before World War II,” in *The Roots of Texas Music*, eds. Lawrence Clayton and Joe W. Specht (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2003), 175-191.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 375.

life and sought respite in Texas, moving first to Houston and then to Austin. It was in Austin that Nelson first became aware of a burgeoning youth population that was interested in Texas's western swing and honky tonk music traditions; Jan Reid recalled that it was quite common for Austin's young people to travel into the rural Hill Country towns to hear Nelson perform, often at the risk of their physical safety.<sup>62</sup>

Nelson's 12 August 1972 debut at the Armadillo World Headquarters has been described as one of the key moments in the legitimization of progressive country music.<sup>63</sup> This performance was first a sign that established country artists with ties to Nashville were interested in Austin. Furthermore, it brought several typically oppositional communities together for a single purpose: to enjoy the music of Willie Nelson. As Reid described it:

As remarkable as Nelson's act that night was his audience. While freaks in gingham gowns and cowboy boots sashayed like they invented country music, remnants of Nelson's old audience had themselves a time, too. A prim little grandmother from Taylor sat at a table beaming with excitement. "Oh, lord, hon," she said. "I got every one of Willie's records, but I never got to see him before." A booted, western-dressed beauty from Waxahachie drove three hours for the show, and she said, "I just love Willie Nelson and I'd drive anywhere to see him... but you know, he's sure been doin' some changin' lately." She looked around. "I have never seen so many hippies in all my life." But she abandoned her date to dance a good part of the night away with one of them, a brawny thirty-year-old named Sunshine who used to ride broncs and play football for Texas Tech before he underwent some changes of his own.<sup>64</sup>

Like the hootenannies at Threadgill's before it, Nelson's debut at the Armadillo established deep personal connections between the generations through shared musical experiences. Nelson, approaching forty at the time of this performance, was himself a

---

<sup>62</sup> Jan Reid, telephone interview with author, 20 April 2005.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Reid, *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*, 8, 10.

symbol of the older generation, but, by reaching out to the young crowd at the Armadillo, he reinvented himself for the progressive country music scene. Furthermore, as a country artist who had not severed his ties to Nashville's powerful Music Row, Nelson's presence on the Austin music scene offered local musicians and promoters a direct connection to the national music industry.

One of the first musicians Nelson convinced to visit Austin was Waylon Jennings. A native of Littlefield, Texas, Jennings was also an RCA recording artist whose career first started to take off around 1965, but by 1972, he was beginning to chafe under the strict production practices of Music Row's studio system. Nelson, excited by his recent success at the Armadillo, encouraged Jennings to join him there. As Jennings recalled, he soon realized that the Armadillo crowd was quite different from the typical country audience:

I'd never worked the Armadillo before. I thought it was a cowboy place. After I set up, I peeked through the curtains and saw that it was a rock and roll club. We'd played a festival in Dripping Springs—they called it a Reunion—the previous July Fourth, but there were so many different performers on the bill that you figured some of the audience had to be yours. The Armadillo crowd was all young kids, longhairs, sitting on the floor. The smell of reefer hung heavy in the room. I thought about my head in the mouth of a lion. . . .

I didn't have to worry. They went nuts when I hit the stage, and even crazier when Willie came out to join me.<sup>65</sup>

The Armadillo's response to Jennings's performance proved to Jennings that "a new way of thinking" about country music was underway, and, through collaboration with Austin's progressive country musicians, Jennings and Nelson were convinced that they

---

<sup>65</sup> Waylon Jennings with Lenny Kaye, *Waylon: An Autobiography* (New York: Warner Books, 1996), 207.

could use their Nashville connections to bring progressive country and mainstream country music closer together.<sup>66</sup>

Building on the success of these Armadillo debuts, Nelson established the Willie Nelson Fourth of July Picnic in 1973. Taking control of the Dripping Springs [Tex.] Reunion, which had featured Loretta Lynn, Tex Ritter, Kris Kristofferson, Waylon Jennings, and others in 1972, Nelson sought to create an annual event to feature the music of innovative country performers from both Austin and Nashville. Borrowing five thousand dollars from Houston lawyer Joe Jamail and working in conjunction with Eddie Wilson and others in Austin,<sup>67</sup> the first Willie Nelson Picnic was a sellout event featuring performances by Leon Russell, B.W. Stevenson, David Allan Coe, Doug Kershaw, Jerry Jeff Walker and the Lost Gonzo Band, Jennings, and, of course, Nelson. Despite an estimated attendance of over forty thousand people, the first Willie Nelson Picnic barely broke even.<sup>68</sup> But the overwhelming attendance gave proof to the notion that a large group of young people were interested in the recent mergers of rock and country music, and this interest helped fuel the development of an ancillary movement, the “Outlaw” movement, that was already brewing in Nashville—a movement that included a core group of Texas-born songwriters, such as Billy Joe Shaver and Kris Kristofferson, who put a distinctly Texan spin on their realist portraits of rural life.

The influence of these musicians on the Austin scene was great and varied. First, Austin’s reputation as a center for folk revivalism, which had first been exported in the

---

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Willie Nelson with Bud Shrake, *Willie: An Autobiography*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988; reprint ed. New York: Cooper Square Press, 2000), 183.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 262.

mid-1960s, continued to draw musicians to Austin who wished to continue their explorations of Texan folk and traditional music, including the western swing and honky tonk revival groups Asleep at the Wheel and Alvin Crow and the Pleasant Valley Boys. Second, many of the musicians working together and alongside one another had been innovators in country-rock, psychedelic rock, and folk music, and elements of each of these musical styles are evident in progressive country music. Progressive country music was, therefore, a hybrid music, joining the trebly Telecasters and heavy bass and drums of the Bakersfield sound of Buck Owens and Merle Haggard; the twin fiddles of the western swing of Bob Wills; the steel guitars of the honky tonk music of Ernest Tubb; the improvisatory elements of contemporaneous rock music; and a firm grounding in local and regional blues and ballad styles. Progressive country music was created as the city's musicians worked together in the city's clubs and dancehalls, shared ideas with one another, and collaborated on songwriting and recording projects.

By 1975, the progressive country scene in Austin had developed into a musically diverse community of musicians, fans, and entrepreneurs who sought both to maintain the sanctity of the Austin scene and to reach out to musicians with similar aesthetic and rhetorical stances in Los Angeles and Nashville. Successive migrations of musicians to and from Austin had established an extensive network that linked the Austin scene to other parts of the country and facilitated the transfer of musical styles and financial capital into the city's growing scene. But, as an independent music scene that was populated primarily by musicians who had tried their hands in major music industry centers and returned disenchanted, bankrupt, or both, the progressive country scene was equally wary of outside interest in their idyllic community. While the translocal

networks that constituted Austin's progressive country music scene make it a difficult task to distinguish between "Austin" musicians, "Austin-based" musicians, and musicians influenced by Austin, the scene's rhetoric was generally clear on the subject. To most scene participants in Austin during the early 1970s, the Austin music scene was a space free from outside influence and marked by the spirit of Texan independence.

### **Romantic Regionalism and the Articulation of Difference in Austin's Music Scenes**

The idea of Texas as a liberating space is one of the central themes of Texan culture, and it was especially prominent in the Austin progressive country music scene. As historian Glen E. Lich has observed: "Texas appeals to romantics. It seems always to have attracted more than its share of people looking back over their shoulders as they rode ahead into the future, sometimes refractory or recalcitrant, always ready to bolt the party and initiate an independent course."<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, as historian Mark E. Nackman has explained: "The struggle to form a nation left its mark on that and future generations of Texans. Both the struggle and the nation made an imprint. The struggle yielded an *esprit de corps*; the nation gave a memory of nationality and a hallowed tradition of revolution and independence."<sup>70</sup> Much of the fascination with Texas as a space in which people who felt cast aside by their own people—as was the case for many of the state's English, German, French, and Spanish colonists<sup>71</sup>—may be attributed to the notion that

---

<sup>69</sup> Glen E. Lich, "The Rural Scene in Texas: Half-Created/Half-Perceived," in *Texas Country: The Changing Rural Scene*, eds. Glen E. Lich and Dona B. Reeves-Marquardt (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1986), 3.

<sup>70</sup> Mark E. Nackman, *A Nation within a Nation: The Rise of Texas Nationalism* (Port Washington, NY, and London: Kennikat Press, 1975), 3.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 6; Lich, 7.

the landscape of Texas, with its topographic diversity and large expanses of undeveloped land, offers boundless opportunities for freedom, renewal, and rebirth. In fact, as Lich goes on to explain, many of media representations of Texas emphasize the rurality of the state, using Texas as a symbol of the unspoiled frontier, as an exotic place within an otherwise familiar America.<sup>72</sup> The settlers of the Texas plains are typically depicted as a misunderstood but heroic class of people forced to battle against nature and indigenous peoples in order to stake their claim on the American Dream.

It should not be surprising, then, that symbolic representations of historical Texas and Texans have been adopted by many Texans, the descendants of the original Anglo settlers, as a way of visualizing a utopian future: through such nostalgic remembrances of pre-industrial Texas, Lich argues, modern Texans invoke “a time when food, rather than house and clothing, was an important discriminator of status.... When life was picturesque and simple, though hard, and the land was the fixed point by which people knew their relationships to everyone and everything else.”<sup>73</sup> Folklorist Nicholas Spitzer, himself a graduate student at the University of Texas and a disc jockey at Austin’s KOKE-FM during the 1970s, has posited that such nostalgia for “simpler” times and the desire to rediscover and redefine regional (and even “national”) identities may be interpreted as a reaction to the sociopolitical fragmentation brought about by the Vietnam War:

---

<sup>72</sup> Lich, 8. Lich is particularly intrigued with how notions of Texas as a frontier land have persisted nearly a century after the frontiers were effectively closed and how such stereotypical portrayals of the state have ignored or erased the social, political, and cultural changes that took place in Texas during the twentieth century.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* Lich warns however, that no matter how promising such imagery may appear to modern Texans, “nostalgia and romance are not cures for physical, political, and ethical illnesses. Texans today must not remember things that their ancestors never knew.”



In the post-Vietnam era, unlike earlier post-war eras and other periods producing nationalistic feelings and art forms, there is less of a sense of national correctness or agreement. As we experience what some have called a search for community (i.e., not on the national level), or more metaphysically, a “turning inward,” various cultural traits, often regional and ethnic in nature, are being consciously resurrected and reasserted.<sup>74</sup>

The “turning inward” that Spitzer observed in Central Texas during the 1970s was certainly not a unique phenomenon. Raymond Williams, in his monumental study of English pastoral poetry *The Country and the City*, has noted that widespread appearances of pastoral tropes are often indicative of larger societal ills. He remarks that, although

the country and the city are changing historical realities..., the ideas and the images of country and city retain their great force. Clearly the contrast of country and city is one of the major forms in which we become conscious of a central part of our experience and of the crises of our society.<sup>75</sup>

It is no wonder, then, that as many Americans—especially those with financial means—faced the social turmoil of the era, they headed to the Texas plains and to Austin, Texas’s urban approximation of a pastoral space, to find respite from the upheavals of the Civil Rights Movement, Women’s Liberation, and the Vietnam War. As a result, the tropes which featured prominently in the work of progressive country songwriters not only reflected the actual conditions facing the cosmic cowboy generation as they negotiated the new economic, social, and cultural realities brought about by Sunbelt expansion, but also created a romantic landscape in which the entire community worked toward common goals rather than fighting with each other.

Spitzer describes this turn away from the nation-state and turn toward regional

---

<sup>74</sup> Nicholas R. Spitzer, “Romantic Regionalism and Convergent Culture in Central Texas,” in *All That Glitters: Country Music in America*, ed. George H. Lewis (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Press, 1993), 87.

<sup>75</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 289.

culture as “romantic regionalism.”<sup>76</sup> In part because Spitzer coined this term in response to his own experiences in Austin during the 1970s, this is a particularly instructive framework through which to view progressive country music and the cosmic cowboy. The cosmic cowboys looked to the regional culture of Central Texas, but they filtered it through popular culture, including dime novels to “B” westerns, that portrayed Texas as a conflict-free space. This romanticized Texas virtually ignored the ethnic conflicts that had characterized the initial settlement of the state and perpetuated Anglo-Texan cultural dominance. As historian Arnolde De León has noted, the romantic Texas “is in reality an Anglo construct, invented by contemporaries who participated in the Texas independence movement in 1836 and in the subsequent adventures of the nineteenth century.”<sup>77</sup> Thus, through romantic regionalism, Texas’s distinctive regional identities—what De León describes as “the convergence of diverse peoples in different regional settings”<sup>78</sup>—are subsumed by an essentializing force that, as Spitzer claims, “telescopes time and geography.”<sup>79</sup>

Romantic regionalism may both unify a population and draw attention to the disjunction between the cultural archetype and lived experience.<sup>80</sup> In Austin, one of the most notable and oft-repeated examples of romantic regionalism’s power to unite was

---

<sup>76</sup> Spitzer, 87.

<sup>77</sup> Arnolde De León, “Region and Ethnicity: Topographical Identities in Texas,” in *Many Wests: Place, Culture, & Regional Identity*, eds. David M. Wrobel and Michael C. Steiner (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 260-261.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

<sup>79</sup> Spitzer, 92.

<sup>80</sup> Williams discusses some of the problems attendant to such archetypes in *The Country and the City*, noting that, while there is often a “temptation... to abstract even these most evidently social forms [country and city] and to give them a primarily psychological or metaphysical status,” it is necessary to look beyond archetypes to understand why the idea has persisted (289).

progressive country music's ability to bring the "hippie" and the "redneck" together in the same club. Spitzer sees the extreme popularity of artists like Nelson to white audiences of all classes working in different ways for different segments of the population. Pointing out the initial friction between the hippies and rednecks (to which we will return later in this chapter), he notes that romantically regional music became the common denominator in their relationship. Whereas the hippie population sought affirmation in an idealized past with which they had no real contact, the rednecks saw in progressive country music an "equally nostalgic and self-referential [*sic*] [image that was]... rooted in the actual experience of leaving the farm, ranch or rural situation."<sup>81</sup>

While most fans of progressive country music found in it an idealized vision of Texan-ness with which they could readily identify, Spitzer's characterization of the ease with which the cosmic cowboys merged "kicker" and "hippie" imagery and culture is somewhat troubling because it appears to ignore the power dynamics that shaped the cosmic cowboy generation's appropriation of Anglo-Texan imagery. The largest contingent in Austin's largely Anglo-American youth population, drawn to Austin primarily by the University of Texas at Austin, hailed largely from Texas's urban areas, from middle- and upper-class families. These youths were, therefore, economically, educationally, and socially privileged, and were permitted greater social mobility than were their working-class counterparts. Thus, whereas Reid's rural Texans worked in the outlying regions of Austin and came to see progressive country music as a reflection of their lived experience, the city's cosmic cowboys could consciously and casually adopt working-class Texan symbolism as a way of rebelling against the middle- and upper-class

---

<sup>81</sup> Spitzer, 88.

expectations their parents set forth for them.<sup>82</sup>

If divisions within the Anglo-Texan population were made all the more clear through progressive country music, the scene's romantic regionalism virtually ignored other aspects of cultural difference in Austin, especially regarding the African-American presence in the city. Austin had long been the home of a thriving African-American community and a blues scene in East Austin, including most notably the Clarksville neighborhood, but black musicians and audiences played a minimal role in the progressive country scene.<sup>83</sup>

The notable absence of African-Americans and African-American culture in progressive country music, despite their presence in Austin, can be traced to three issues. First, as De Léon explains, romantic regionalism as manifest in Texas often privileged Anglo-Texan culture over Tejano, African-American, and Eastern European cultures. Second, the city of Austin's geographic layout marginalized the African-American populations that resided to the east of the city center. Interstate Highway 35, the primary north-south thoroughfare in Central Texas, bisects the city, separating the western half of the city—known as North Austin and South Austin and inhabited mostly by white businesspeople, University of Texas faculty, bureaucrats, and students—from the

---

<sup>82</sup> This phenomenon is quite common in independent music scenes and is perhaps best exemplified by the punk scenes that emerged in London during the 1970s. See especially: Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979; reprint ed., London and New York: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>83</sup> Blues musicians Mance Lipscomb, who had risen to prominence in Austin due to a series of field recordings released by the Arhoolie label in the late 1960s, and Freddy King, who was signed to Leon Russell's Austin-based Shelter Records label, performed regularly at the Armadillo World Headquarters.

Archie Green has argued that the merger of "cedar chopper" imagery—that is, the rural or small-town working-class Texan—and Austin's student population represents a resistant commentary "upon a complicated dialectic between Southern and national norms as well as between black and white expressions," citing an undated performance of The Conqueroo at an African-American bar in East Austin as an act of "considerable meaning" (79). But this event, which was, no doubt, of great significance to Austin's late 1960s' rock scene, was not necessarily relevant to the cosmic cowboy generation of the early 1970s.

historically black neighborhoods of East Austin. The bifurcation of the city in many ways enforced the boundaries already in place as a consequence of Jim Crow-era segregation. But the geographic exclusion of Austin’s black community was made all the more obvious when, as part of a freeway expansion plan developed in the 1960s and undertaken in the early 1970s, I-35 was transformed into an eight-lane highway with upper and lower decks standing up from the ground as a kind of boundary between Austin’s white neighborhoods to the west and its black neighborhoods to the east.<sup>84</sup> Whereas the city’s African-American population was, in many ways, restricted to the East Austin suburbs, most of the activity associated with the progressive country scene took place in the western part of the city, especially the neighborhoods of South Austin. The geography of Austin therefore reinforced the separation of the city’s Anglo-Texan and African-American cultures by imposing a physical barrier between the populations which underscored the transgressive nature of interracial contact in the city.

Fall Term	Caucasian	American Indian	Black	Asian American	Spanish Surname	Foreign Students	Others	Unknown	Total Students
1972*		83	326	178	1,542				39,900
1973	34,482	103	417	177	1,668	1,728	753	1,283	40,611
1974	35,388	149	521	223	2,096	1,457	861	1,146	41,841
1975	34,213	114	707	217	2,366	1,598	671	2,712	42,598
1976	35,534	91	855	246	2,723	1,857		81	41,387
1977	35,551	75	971	295	2,842	1,926			41,660
* Ethnic information for Fall 1972 was only for those categories in which figures appear.									

**Figure 1-1. University of Texas at Austin Fall Enrollment Totals by Ethnic Background, 1972-1977.**<sup>85</sup>

The legacy of Jim Crow was a third factor in the cosmic cowboys’ exclusion of difference. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Austin struggled to accommodate federal

<sup>84</sup> <http://www.texasfreeway.com/austin/historic/historic.shtml>. Accessed 23 March 2006.

<sup>85</sup> The *University of Texas at Austin, Office of Institutional Studies, Statistical Handbook, 1977-78* (Austin: University of Texas, 1979), 2.

imperatives to desegregate the city, to integrate its public schools (including the University of Texas), and to enact Equal Employment Opportunity practices.<sup>86</sup> The fight for African-American equality in Austin is best explored through closer inspection of the fight on the University of Texas's campus. Statistics gathered by the University's Office of Institutional Studies indicate that at no time between the years of 1972 and 1977 did African-Americans comprise more than 2.5% of the total student body, despite a nearly 200% increase in the total number of black students at the University of Texas during those five years (Figure 1-1). University officials released several public statements concerning the persistence of limited enrollment of African Americans and other minority populations. The headline of an 18 October 1973 article published in the *Austin Statesman* boasts "Minority Total Up at UT," while the article itself observed that, "despite the announced increase in minority enrollments, UT student government president Sandy Kress said he is dissatisfied with the slow progress the figures indicated is being made in opening the school to minority students."<sup>87</sup> But while some UT students were troubled with the lack of diversity on their campus, others, especially those among the small black contingent, were outraged. On 23 October 1973, less than a week after the University announced increases in its total minority population, the president of the University of Texas Student Bar Association, Lee Rohn, publicly charged the University with racial discrimination. She noted that "the enrollment of only 10 black students at the law school [for the 1973-74 academic year and]... low enrollments of women and

---

<sup>86</sup> In 1950, the University of Texas law school was required to integrate after the United States Supreme Court ruled that a separate law school created for its only African-American student was insufficient (*Sweatt v. Painter*, 339 U.S. 629 [1950]), but the university-wide admissions patterns still favored white students well into the 1980s ("Sweatt v. Painter Archive," <<http://www.law.du.edu/russell/lh/sweatt/>>, accessed 5 February 2007).

<sup>87</sup> "Minority Total Up at UT," *Austin [Tex.] Statesman* (18 October 1973), p. A9.

Chicano students indicate[d] a policy of blatant discrimination at the school.”<sup>88</sup> In response to these allegations, W. Page Keeton, dean of the law school, took exception to the charges and noted that he had long supported “admissions programs for ethnic minorities” but had encountered numerous roadblocks along the way.<sup>89</sup>

Just as quota systems proved problematic for the University, Equal Employment Opportunity practices were slow to penetrate the state government, the other major employer in Austin. A 21 April 1974 report in the *American-Statesman* indicates that “state agencies in Texas are 10 years behind industry in implementing non-discriminatory employment practices.”<sup>90</sup> Institutional discrimination against African-Americans was, therefore, a reality in Austin during the 1970s, resulting in the restriction of interracial contact between the black population and the University’s overwhelmingly white student body and further reinforcing the Anglo-centric vision of Texan culture promoted by romantic regionalism.

In terms of both its geography and its culture, Austin, and especially the western neighborhoods of Austin in which participants in the progressive country movement lived, was a predominantly white city during the early 1970s, reinforcing the scene’s Anglo-Texan regional identity. The Anglo-centrism of romantic regionalism in the progressive country scene was manifest in two related cultural trends. First, scene participants glorified the frontiersman, represented by the cowboy, both as a symbol of Anglo-Texan culture and as an emblem representing the realization of Manifest Destiny.

---

<sup>88</sup> “Racism Charged by Law Student,” *Austin [Tex.] American* (23 October 1973), p. 5.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Wendell Fuqua, “State is Behind in Non-Discrimination Practices,” *Austin [Tex.] American-Statesman*, morning ed. (21 April 1974), p. A1.

Second, and closely linked to this elevation of the cowboy, was a sense of entitlement, informed in part by the land grabs that characterized the early settlement of Texas and Oklahoma during the late nineteenth century. That sensibility encouraged progressive country musicians to exercise their dominance over musical territories as well, questioning the generic boundaries imposed by the music industry, to seeking recognition in crossover markets, and claiming musical lineages in Anglo-Texan, African-American, and Hispanic musical traditions. In Austin, therefore, romantic regionalism sought on the one hand to break down the mythologies of the nation-state, while on the other it simultaneously reinforced the symbolism that was central to both national and regional identity. In other words, because the cowboy, as the popular embodiment of Manifest Destiny, was such a powerful symbol, the cowboy's role as both a regional and national cultural symbol posed significant challenges to its adoption as a countercultural symbol. How could a symbol of Texas nationalism be reinvented by a fairly homogeneous majority—albeit a majority that purposefully denied its majority status—in order to articulate countercultural ideologies?

*Promoting Romantic Regionalism: The Rhetoric of Place*

One way the cosmic cowboy generation addressed the contradictions and conflicts of romantic regionalism in the progressive country movement was through the rhetoric of the scene. This rhetoric defines the central values of the scene and establishes the boundaries that separate it from the rest of the musical world. As Holly Kruse explains in her study of college rock in the 1980s, scene participants often position themselves in opposition to or marginalized from a “mainstream” musical culture:



The “us” versus “them” mentality that posits “our” music, presumably created and consumed in a pure environment free of the bottom line concerns of major labels, commercial radio, and chain record stores, as authentic is one that is found among adherents of many forms of music that have at some point in their histories been perceived as marginal.<sup>91</sup>

This marginalized and marginalizing rhetoric was certainly in place in Austin during the 1970s, bringing musicians from around the United States to the city in search of a musical environment that was free from the pressures of the national commercial music industry. Furthermore, as the home of the state’s flagship public university, Austin offered a liberating space within the already independent spaces of Texas within which the predominantly white middle-class youths of Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston, and San Antonio who comprised the majority of the school’s student body could articulate their difference from the unifying bonds of Texas nationalism.

In large part because it developed a reputation as a free-spirited hangout, Austin witnessed one of its largest periods of growth during the 1970s. According to United States census records, just over 250,000 people were full-year residents of Austin in 1970; by 1980, Austin had experienced a 37.2 percent population increase, bringing the total population to 345,496, as slightly fewer than 94,000 people made the city their new home.<sup>92</sup> At the same time, the city’s student population was also enjoying significant growth. For the fall semester of 1968, the University of Texas was home to 32,155

---

<sup>91</sup> Holly Kruse, *Site and Sound: Understanding Independent Music Scenes* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 5. See also: Jeffrey Ellrick Farley, “Culture Industry as Cottage Industry: The Production of Musical Meaning in Austin, Texas,” Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1996; Alan Craig Turley, “The Social and Ecological Determinants of the Production of Original Rock Music in Austin, Texas,” Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1997.

<sup>92</sup> *Texas Almanac and State Industrial Guide, 1980-1981* (Dallas: A.H. Belo Corp., 1981), 187. In 1970, the full-year population of Austin stood at 251,808, while in 1980, 345,496 people resided there. This increase continued a trend that had been mounting since around 1920. Interestingly enough, to that point, Austin had never enjoyed less than a 16 percent increase in population since it was founded.

students, nearly 26,000 of whom were undergraduates. By the fall of 1977, the University boasted 32,535 undergraduates—nearly four hundred more than had been enrolled in all of the campus’s programs in 1968.<sup>93</sup>

This trend toward urban growth was, of course, nothing unusual for Texan cities during the 1970s. Houston and Dallas, benefiting from the decade’s oil boom, witnessed similar population increases and were faced with many of the same questions that Austin was confronting, namely how to accommodate new residents, how to promote economic growth without ruining the land around them, and how to maintain local identity in an increasingly national and international economic arena. Austin was different from its sister cities, however, because its new residents were predominantly young. Because the University of Texas’s student body accounted for nearly ten percent of the city’s population, presumably, when combined with the youth population that was not attending the University, young people played an unusually important role in the shaping of Austin’s culture in the 1970s. The cultural institutions that one would expect to find in major centers of commerce, such as symphony orchestras and art museums, were therefore conspicuously absent as Austin’s youths instead built venues to showcase local culture.

The demographic composition of the University of Texas’s student body during this period reveals the background of the typical cosmic cowboy. As a 20 October 1973 article in the *Austin Statesman* reported, nearly 45 percent of the student body did not

---

<sup>93</sup> The growth of the University of Texas’s student body actually happened in spite of a trend toward smaller incoming freshman classes throughout the decade between 1968 and 1977. In fact, it appears as though UT’s student body grew as older students returned to their studies after some time off. Whereas the size of incoming freshman classes decreased steadily from 9,165 in 1968 to 7,689 in 1977, the senior class nearly doubled from 5,911 in 1968 to 10,642 in 1977. Similarly, the University’s graduate and professional programs were a source of growth as more women entered graduate schools in the 1970s.

need to work to pay for school or their leisure activities, suggesting that they came from middle-class backgrounds.<sup>94</sup> Nevertheless, UT students lived on a modest income, which was probably aided by Austin's notoriously low cost of living (most tickets at the Armadillo World Headquarters, for instance, seldom sold for more than four dollars).<sup>95</sup> Moreover, while nearly 90 percent of the student body was from Texas, most came from the urban counties that were experiencing an economic boom during the 1970s, making them children of the suburbs, not the offspring of a rural ranch.<sup>96</sup> Thus it may be assumed that most of the knowledge these students had of rural life and, in particular, the cowboying that was so important to the cosmic cowboy lifestyle and aesthetic, was secondhand and probably mediated by film, literature, and the spirit of folk revivalism that had flourished in Austin during the 1950s and 1960s.

Many of the musicians who were involved with the cosmic cowboy movement at its inception had a great deal in common with their fan base, socioeconomically, geographically, and culturally. Ray Wylie Hubbard, the Dallas-born songwriter known best for his pro-cosmic cowboy anthem "Up Against the Wall, Redneck Mother,"

---

<sup>94</sup> Robert Schwab, "Profile of UT Student: Costs, Cars and Children," *Austin (Tex.) Statesman* (20 October 1973), p. A6: "[A survey administered during fall registration] showed that the number of single students registered this year went up while the number of married students attending the school went down compared to last fall's enrollment. It showed that nearly 2000 students have at least one child of their own living with them and that 291 students support four or more children. All figures involving the number of students' children living with them increased slightly this year compared to last.

"About 27,000 students indicated in the survey that they lived on \$300 or less per month to cover expenses not including tuition, fees and books. About 15,000 students indicated they hoped to raise at least part of that money by working part-time. More than 18,000 students said they were not going to work during the semester. The number of unemployed students may not be surprising either since about 13,500 students indicated that their parents' income was \$15,000 annually or higher."

<sup>95</sup> Gathered from Armadillo World Headquarters Collection, Center for American History, University of Texas, Box 3K183.

<sup>96</sup> According to statistics collected in 1977, the majority of students hailed from Travis, Harris, Bexar, Tarrant, and Dallas Counties (of which Austin, Houston, San Antonio, Fort Worth, and Dallas, respectively, are the county seats) (*The University of Texas at Austin, Office of Institutional Studies, Statistical Handbook, 1977-78*, 1-2).

attended a largely middle-class high school in Dallas along with future Austin luminaries Michael Murphey and Steven Fromholz. There, Hubbard had helped form the Dallas County Jug Band, a group that mimicked contemporaneous field recordings released on Folkways and Vanguard Records and reissues of early 78-rpm recordings of hillbilly music and blues.<sup>97</sup> Similarly, Ray Benson, leader of the Austin-based western swing revival band Asleep at the Wheel began his exploration of early country music, blues, jazz, and other music while he was a high school student in the suburbs of Philadelphia, far removed from the Texas range, and developed his skills as a musician in Paw Paw, West Virginia, a town located nearly 120 miles from Washington, DC.<sup>98</sup> Yet another example among many, Tommy Goldsmith, a guitarist who played with Marcia Ball in the Misery Brothers, Alvin Crow and the Pleasant Valley Boys, and the Contenders, was raised in Raleigh, North Carolina, the son of parents employed at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and got his start as a musician playing with folk music groups in Chapel Hill in the 1960s.<sup>99</sup> All of these musicians were keenly aware of the history of Texan music and their role as the next generation of culture bearers for this music. But, although these musicians had shared musical and cultural upbringings, Austin's role as a physical locus around which these musicians could gather should not be underestimated. Austin provided an environment within which a hyper-Texan musical style could be fashioned, one that borrowed the steel guitars and fiddles of Texan honky tonk and western swing music as markers of the difference and independence of its performers and

---

<sup>97</sup> Ray Wylie Hubbard, telephone interview with author, 6 July 2005; Reid, *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*, 115.

<sup>98</sup> Ray Benson, telephone interview with author, 31 May 2005.

<sup>99</sup> Tommy Goldsmith, interview with author, Raleigh, NC, 23 May 2005.

fans. Moreover, it also offered a space in which non-Texan musicians could refashion themselves as leaders of the self-consciously Texan progressive country music scene.

One of the most prominent forces in both constructing and promoting a rhetoric of authenticity and romantic regionalism was a corps of music journalists residing in the city, chief among them Austin businessman and freelance reporter Townsend Miller and *Rolling Stone* contributor Chet Flippo.<sup>100</sup> These journalists used their respective local and national platforms to promote Austin's progressive country scene as an inclusive and authentic space that was separate from mainstream musical and cultural pressures. As David Menconi has demonstrated, much of the growth of the progressive country scene in Austin can be attributed to the development of national rock criticism in the late 1960s and early 1970s with such publications as *Creem*, *Crawdaddy*, and *Rolling Stone*.<sup>101</sup> It is no wonder, then, that these nationally- and internationally-read music publications, as well as other publications with a broader topical scope, sent journalists to Austin to cover the progressive country music scene. During this time, the city also boasted the presence of a thriving independent local press, including such publications as *The Rag* (founded 1966), *The Gar* (founded 1971), *Glyptodon News* (founded 1973), and *The Austin Sun* (founded 1977). By 1974, even the city's largest newspaper, *The Austin American-Statesman*, had begun to include reports on local musical happenings. These publications served a number of important purposes in the scene. Local papers were central in the

---

<sup>100</sup> Miller held down a day job as a stockbroker while reporting on the Austin scene for the *Austin American-Statesman* at night. For a synopsis of a typical day in the life of Townsend Miller, consult: Michael Smith, "It's a Bird, It's a Plane, It's Austin's Townsend Miller," *Austin [Tex.] American-Statesman* (17 May 1976), p. B3. Regarding Flippo's role in Austin, consult: Bob Doerschur, "Local Recluse Chet Flippo Making Waves in Magazine," *Austin [Tex.] American-Statesman*, morning ed. (25 March 1974), p. 6.

<sup>101</sup> Menconi, "Music, Media and the Metropolis."

day-to-day musical happenings, advertising engagements at local clubs, reviewing recent concerts, and printing in-depth interviews with some of the scene's lesser-known figures. The national music press, on the other hand, encapsulated the scene's energy in biweekly or monthly reports that captured its high points, transmitted them to an interested audience, and enticed others to travel to Austin in search of the music and the spirit of the scene.

Perhaps the greatest contribution these journalists offer to this study is the employment of Anglo-Texan romantic regionalism to distinguish the scene from others and from the national political climate. Romantic regionalism was a problematic construction for the cosmic cowboy generation because the symbols they adopted as markers of difference were also symbols of American national dominance and the subjugation of the indigenous peoples of North America. In order to further mark Austin as distinct from the national culture, the music press took up the imagery of the cowboy, but they shifted their focus away from the cowboy as broad national symbol by drawing attention to the unique individuals who comprised the scene. With this slight shift, the cowboy was no longer an agent of the American nation-state. Instead, he was a product of the Texas landscape and was imbued with an authenticity that could not be found in national culture. Furthermore, to many participants in the progressive country scene, the "cosmic" attributes of the cosmic cowboys—their frequent and often public marijuana use, introspective nature, and deeply held beliefs concerning their role as saviors of Texan culture—distinguished this figure from the hegemonic cowboys of the Old West. Moreover, they believed that, because of their sincerity and self-awareness, they could

realize positive social change, unlike their colonizing antecedents.<sup>102</sup> The cosmic cowboy was, therefore, a contradictory character, one that drew upon notions of Anglo-Texan ethnic purity, the righteousness of Texan independence, and the self-consciousness (and self-absorbedness) of the hippies to position the cosmic cowboy as the true and authentic representation of the Texan spirit.

The authenticity ascribed to participants in Austin's progressive country music scene was, for journalists and participants alike, grounded in the same mythical spaces from which Anglo-Texan romantic regionalism had grown. During the early years of the scene's formation—especially between 1972 and 1974—Austin and its musicians were cast as having a stronger connection to human experience because they eschewed the commercialism of the national music industry and because they were in touch with the rural “folk” of Texas. In a March 1973 report on Leon Russell's Armadillo World Headquarters concert, Jeff Nightbyrd juxtaposed the elaborate stage shows of contemporaneous glam rock acts like Alice Cooper against the honesty of expression that was possible in Austin:

[The] Armadillo's the kind of place where musicians don't need drag Queen [*sic*] costumes, fake electric chairs, pythons curling around their necks, or other gimmicks to be appreciated. Leon wasn't forced into a star trip routine by the hungry crowd. Bevises of groupies didn't assault the stage. He could just play music. Austin is still that kind of town.<sup>103</sup>

While Nightbyrd's commentary indicates that the people of Austin exerted a positive influence on the musicians who performed in Austin, other authors emphasized that local musicians also led to positive changes in local culture. As Chet Flippo explained in a

---

<sup>102</sup> Joe Kruppa, “The New Hicks: Mellow, Righteous, Sincere,” Typescript, Archie Green Collection, Southern Folklife Collection, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>103</sup> Jeff Nightbyrd, “Highway 71 Revisited,” *Crawdaddy* 22 (March 1973), 26.

1974 *Rolling Stone* article arguing for the continued isolation of the Austin scene from a national audience:

Whatever the national verdict, Austin's music has had a profound effect on local culture. Austin is a virtual island, physically set off by surrounding green hills, culturally isolated by a strong local pride and sense of regionalism and politically isolated from the rest of Texas by its liberalism.<sup>104</sup>

In some ways, therefore, journalistic accounts echoed the sentiments of local businesspeople and political leaders who articulated positions that challenged local residents to work toward improving the spaces around them by developing a distinctive local and regional, "Austin" identity. By invoking the organicism of the scene and the symbiosis of musicians, fans, and the regional landscape, journalists not only invoked romantic regionalism but helped construct it.

Another way in which the relationship between musicians, fans, and the landscape was invoked and reified in the national music press was the use of geographically-evocative language to discuss the music and musicians themselves. Journalists often turned to stock formulations drawn from fictional treatments of the Old West in dime novels, western films, and the imagery of nineteenth-century landscape paintings in their descriptions of progressive country music and musicians. In Chet Flippo's March 1974 review of Willie Nelson's *Phases and Stages*, he observed, "One song—'I Still Can't Believe You're Gone'... —is without a doubt the saddest, most compelling C&W song I've ever heard. The sadness of the lyrics is echoed in Nelson's voice, which is as bare and desolate as the monochromatic West Texas plains."<sup>105</sup> Similarly, an October 1976 *Stereo Review* feature on Waylon Jennings commented on the "craggy magnificence" of

---

<sup>104</sup> Flippo, "Austin: The Hucksters Are Coming," 24.

<sup>105</sup> Chet Flippo, "Honky Tonk Bravado," *Rolling Stone* 156 (14 March 1974), 61.



his voice.<sup>106</sup> In the case of Willie Nelson, even his outward physical appearance was perceived as a landscape, shaped by his years of wandering the nation and sharing his music with others. As John Swenson explained in a 1973 feature article for *Crawdaddy*:

The first thing you notice about Willie Nelson is his smile. He presents it slowly, warmly, like a welcoming invitation to laugh along with him in an honest celebration of the life process that sweeps him around the country, playing and singing his songs like a ragged, dusty tumbleweed. Etched into the leathery creases around his eyes, the softer lines that span his forehead and the deep laugh lines that sink into his cheeks to form a triangle with his slightly cracked lips, is a lifetime of carefully gathered impressions, the process result of uncountable meetings with people, innumerable impressions picked up on his windblown excursions across the countryside—impressions received, acknowledged and remembered.<sup>107</sup>

This use of landscape metaphors drawn from artistic and popular representations of the American West reinforced the notion that Nelson, his music, and his lifestyles were organic outgrowths of Texas itself. By implying that progressive country music and the musicians who constituted the highest profile representatives of the scene were themselves part of the landscape, music journalists depicted the people and music of Austin's progressive country music scene as products of the culture and land that supported them, endowing the music and musicians with an authenticity that stood in stark contrast to the "artificiality" of national rock acts.

If Texas was perceived as being capable of developing and supporting musicians who created "honest" expression and fans who could appreciate it, the generic boundaries imposed by the Nashville country music industry were perceived as the epitome of artificiality. Progressive country's organicism and transcendence of mainstream generic

---

<sup>106</sup> Noel Coppage, "Crossing Over with Waylon Jennings," *Stereo Review* 37 (October 1976), 105.

<sup>107</sup> John Swenson, "A Slice of the Night Life from Willie Nelson," *Crawdaddy* 28 (September 1973), 24.

boundaries, it was thought, could unite America around a new set of national ideals.

Steve Ditlea's August 1973 *Rolling Stone* review of Nelson's *Shotgun Willie* album

noted:

At the age of 39, Nelson finally seems destined for the stardom he deserves. Possessed of one of country's classic voices and the author of such standards as "Funny How Time Slips Away," "The Night Life" and "One Day at a Time," Willie Nelson transcends music's arbitrary boundary lines of style. Like his fellow Texan, Waylon Jennings, and many of the singer-songwriters represented at this year's Dripping Springs Festival, Willie Nelson's roots lie in the blues and gospel as well as in country, and his music rightfully belongs within the ever-widening spectrum of pop.<sup>108</sup>

For Ditlea, Nelson's diverse musical influences, manifested both through his blues-inflected vocals and the amalgamation of country songs with rhythm-and-blues arrangements on *Shotgun Willie*, were seen as breaking through the strict generic distinctions of "country," "rock," and "rhythm and blues" to reach the larger and more inclusive "pop" audience. As a result of this pop crossover, the messages of Nelson's straightforward lyrics could, therefore, reach the entire nation and not just the small subset of country fans. Similarly, Waylon Jennings articulated this ideal in a 1974 *Stereo Review* feature, observing that

Country music is universal.... I really believe that. Especially now. Country music is real. It's about people and their ups and downs and good and bad. For the last ten years, not that I don't dig it, they've had to listen really hard to get anything out of music, especially the words. Acid rock and hard rock are like that. Sort of superficial musically. Everything was done in the recording studio with gadgets.

But country music isn't like that. Even people in the North can relate to it. There's something in it for everybody.<sup>109</sup>

While Jennings did not provide examples of "acid rock" and "hard rock," his distinction

---

<sup>108</sup> Steve Ditlea, "Records: Shotgun Willie," *Rolling Stone* 142 (30 August 1973), 80, 82.

<sup>109</sup> Allan Parachini, "Waylon Jennings," *Stereo Review* 32 (February 1974), 63.

was likely not lost on the readers of *Stereo Review*. Jennings insisted that the interference of the music industry through the introduction of “recording studio... gadgets” interferes with the transmission of musical meaning and which prevents real human interaction. Given his early career as a replacement bassist on Buddy Holly’s final tour, it is unlikely that he stood opposed to rock ‘n’ roll. In fact, Holly’s own music was marked by stylistic traits of both country and rock ‘n’ roll, drawing primarily from the diverse sounds he heard growing up in Lubbock, Texas, and Jennings’s conception of musical genres reflects a similar stylistic hybridity. Rather, Jennings and others like him saw a stylistically inclusive country music as a tool for transcending human difference, as made evident by his comment that “even people in the North can relate to it.” But Jennings was quite aware of the difficulty he faced in changing audience perceptions of country music and in educating people about the differences between progressive country music and mainstream country from Nashville.

Because Austin’s progressive country movement defined itself as a countercultural force in opposition to the national music industry in Los Angeles and Nashville, journalists covering Austin’s progressive country music scene relied primarily on the most prominent national recording artists as subjects for subjects rather than covering the lesser-known artists who worked in Austin on a daily basis. By looking at artists like Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings, journalists cast the relative obscurity of their Nashville Sound-era work and the prominence of their progressive country work as manifestations of a Music Row conspiracy to squelch “original” voices in country music. Moreover, had journalists focused their attention upon exponents of the local Austin scene, the national readership would likely have not paid attention to such reports

because they would have had little reason to read about musicians that they would not be able to access.<sup>110</sup> Furthermore, Nelson and Jennings were ready-made symbols of the Anglo-Texan romantic regionalism that was being constructed and promoted within the local Austin scene. Journalists emphasized not only the countercultural stance these musicians took toward the mainstream music industry, but they also inscribed in their appearances and musical styles an organic quality that presented Texas as a space from which honest people emerged and within which human expression would not be constricted by social mores.

### **Conclusions**

The progressive country music scene in Austin, Texas, emerged in the early 1970s following over a decade of development in the local music scene. Beginning with the folksinging community at Threadgill's and in the Ghetto, Austin's musicians sought to mark themselves as different from other students at the University of Texas, other Texans, and even other Americans through the performance of old-time country music and traditional Anglo-Texan folk music. As musicians like Janis Joplin, Powell St. John, and others who developed their talent as folksingers began to reach out to the rock scene in San Francisco, a countervailing trend also emerged in Austin: the desire to gain the recognition and approval of a national audience. Most musicians who made this journey soon returned after achieving only moderate success or no recognition at all, but, despite these failures, they returned to Austin with an increased awareness of the structures that

---

<sup>110</sup> This practice is still common in music journalism. *Rolling Stone*, the most prominent American music magazine, focuses primarily on breakout artists from local music scenes, while the independent press and "DIY" publications are responsible for maintaining a record of lesser-known local acts.

control the national music industry and with alternative models for the administration and development of local music scenes. As other Texan musicians began to converge on Austin from Los Angeles and Nashville at the beginning of the 1970s, they brought with them a similar business acumen and the desire to capitalize on the laidback and receptive audiences of Austin's clubs to develop a hybrid form of country music that merged western swing and honky tonk with contemporary rock music. At the same time, the attention that artists like Michael Murphey and Willie Nelson lavished on the Austin scene also threatened to destroy the scene's pastoral ambience.

For these reasons, members of Austin's progressive country movement turned to romantic regionalism, an ideology that preserved Austin's rhetorical distance from the national music industry by building upon the idea of Texan independence. While the influence of the national industry and the expansion of the Austin scene into other markets was inevitable and necessary, romantic regionalism permitted scene participants to believe that they were creating and enjoying music away that was liberated from commercial interests. Moreover, participants in the progressive country scene, many of whom were living away from their parents for the first time, built upon the idea of Texan independence to mark their own independence from parental influence, from their middle-class suburban upbringings, and from their colleagues at the University of Texas. As progressive country music became one of the dominant musical trends throughout Austin and began to exert an influence on the sounds of Nashville-based country music, the potency of these markers of difference was certainly diminished, but, at the same time, the romantic Texan spirit reinvigorated Texan musicians elsewhere to diverge from the musical mainstream. Austin's progressive country music scene, therefore, existed

within a network of local and national influences, drawing musicians from around the country to its thriving live club scene while at the same time exporting its musicians and countercultural rhetoric to the national music industry.

## CHAPTER 2

### PROGRESSIVE COUNTRY SINGER-SONGWRTITERS AND THE AMERICAN WEST

In the earliest stages of its development, Austin's progressive country music was dominated by the work of a small group of singer-songwriters, including Michael Murphey, Guy Clark, and Steven Fromholz, that composed songs romanticizing the physical and cultural landscapes of Austin, Texas, and the American West, idealizing the masculine Anglo-Texan cowboy, and lamenting the closure of the western frontier and the decline of small-town Texas. As these singer-songwriters began to call Austin home in the early 1970s, they developed a catalog of songs that manifested a number of significant lyrical tropes positioning Austin, Texas, or an idealized West as the antithesis of the city and its physical and moral decay. These tropes included: 1) the city as symbolic of the breakdown of American society; 2) the superiority of rural culture over metropolitan culture; and 3) a desire to escape from the city into more rural climes. At the same time, a second group of songwriters, including Ray Wylie Hubbard and Kinky Friedman, problematized the idealism of Murphey, Clark, and others and castigated adherents to their message for their naïveté by depicting the American West as the home of violent "rednecks" and narrow-minded "shit-kickers." Historian David M. Wrobel has noted a similar conflict between romantic and realistic portrayals of the American West in his study of Western-themed rock music written and recorded between 1970 and 2000.

He notes that the lyrics in songs about the American West typically fall into two broad categories: 1) “songs that play into and popularize mythic conceptions of the West and the theme of the ‘West as Promised Land,’” and 2) “those [songs] that seek to demythologize the West and are generally marked by a degree of cynicism—even anger concerning notion of the West as promised land—and view the place more as a veritable Badland.”<sup>1</sup>

The music composed by Austin’s progressive country singer-songwriters displays the many conflicts and paradoxes of the city’s music scene as scene participants struggled to define their relationship with Texan culture. As cultural texts, the songs of Murphey, Clark, Hubbard, and others embody the tensions resulting from the interaction of the predominantly white, middle-class youths of Austin’s progressive country scene and working-class rural Texans in Austin’s country music venues and rural honky tonks. As musical texts, these songs demonstrate the influence of commercial songwriting styles on progressive country music and belie the anti-commercial rhetoric of the scene. The work of progressive country’s singer-songwriters highlights the contradictions inherent in the construction of Austin as a local music scene as musicians and fans alike came to Austin in search of independence while also seeking to develop the city as an alternative commercial music center.

This chapter explores the ways that Austin’s singer-songwriters depicted rural and small-town Texas and, more broadly, the American West in their commercial recordings and live performances. An examination of these songs as musical texts reinforces Wrobel’s lyric discoveries and extends them to reveal the existence of two distinct bodies

---

<sup>1</sup> David M. Wrobel, “Western Themes in Contemporary Rock Music, 1970-2000: A Lyric Analysis,” *American Music Research Center Journal* 10 (2000), 85.



of musical signifiers that Austin's singer-songwriters used to invoke images of an idealized Texas and a demythologized American West. As musical and cultural texts, therefore, these songs became sites for the articulation, refinement, and contestation of Texan identities and for articulating artistic "authenticity." Moreover, the popular and critical reception history of these songs sheds new light on how specific songs and musical styles, as both sonic and cultural texts, can unify a musical community, highlight its internal divisions, or both.

### **Constructing an Idealized American West**

Michael Murphey's "Cosmic Cowboy" was one of the most important songs to shape the pastoralism of progressive country music, in large part because it provided a term to describe the growing community of young people who came to the Texas Hill Country seeking freedom and offered a constellation of images that they could adopt as part of their personal identities. The term "cosmic cowboy" was, as folklorist Archie Green notes, used "to mark [the] contemporary social collision and convergence" of young, middle-class, liberal Texans and older, working-class, conservative Texans.<sup>2</sup> These young people, the majority of whom were congregated in and around Austin, often wore their hair long (especially the men, for whom this was a transgressive behavior) and smoked marijuana like "hippies" and dressed in the faded blue jeans, work shirts, cowboy hats, and boots of the rural cowboy, "cedar chopper," or "redneck." This conflation of hippie and redneck imagery paralleled broader developments in contemporaneous

---

<sup>2</sup> Archie Green, "Austin's Cosmic Cowboys: Words in Collision," in *Torching the Fink Books & Other Essays on Vernacular Culture* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 65-67.

American culture, as many hippies left American urban centers in search of what historian Michael Allen has described as “a near-Jeffersonian vision of an agrarian republic” in rural and small-town America, resulting in direct interaction and conflict between the migrating hippies and the native “rednecks.”<sup>3</sup> It was in search of this agrarian ideal that many participants in Austin’s progressive country movement came to Austin and the surrounding Texas Hill Country, despite the fact that Austin was then a city that boasted a population of more than 250,000. It is not surprising, therefore, that many of the songs composed and performed as part of the scene reflect the cosmic cowboy’s desire to escape from the nation’s cities and suburbs into an idealized rural environment.<sup>4</sup>

Murphey, a student of former Threadgill’s folksinger Stan Alexander at North Texas State University, was born and raised in Dallas where, as he remembered in a 1993 interview, he regularly attended concerts of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra on the weekends and helped with chores on his uncle’s ranch outside of Dallas after school.<sup>5</sup> He gained widespread recognition as a musician in Texas only after he left his position as a studio songwriter in Los Angeles to join the Austin progressive country scene in 1971.<sup>6</sup> Murphey wrote “Cosmic Cowboy” in New York in August 1972, recorded it in Nashville on 17 January 1973 during a four-day session at a studio owned by singer-songwriter Ray

---

<sup>3</sup> Michael Allen, “‘I Just Want to Be a Cosmic Cowboy’: Hippies, Cowboy Code, and the Culture of a Counterculture,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (Autumn 2005) <<http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/whq/36.3/allen.html>> (accessed 28 November 2005), par.11.

<sup>4</sup> *Texas Almanac and State Industrial Guide, 1980-1981* (Dallas: A.H. Belo Corp., 1981), 187.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Martin Murphey, interview by Jack Bernhardt, 27 May 1993, Jack Bernhardt Collection (#20061), Southern Folklife Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>6</sup> Don Cusic, “Michael Martin Murphey,” in *The Encyclopedia of Country Music*, ed. Paul Kingsbury (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 360.

Stevens, and premiered the new song during a two-day stint at the Armadillo World Headquarters on 23-24 February 1973.<sup>7</sup> The song appeared on his 1973 album *Cosmic Cowboy Souvenir*.<sup>8</sup> It was also one of the first songs expressing the idealism of the progressive country movement to be exported from Austin; the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, formerly of Santa Monica, California, and later based in Nashville, recorded it on their 1974 album *Stars & Stripes Forever*.<sup>9</sup>

Murphey's pedal steel guitarist Herb Steiner and lead guitarist Craig Hillis have observed that the contradictions of the "cosmic cowboy" character were immediately apparent to his sidemen, many of whom felt personally connected to the character. As folklorist Archie Green has summarized:

Steiner and Hillis recalled for me the specific circumstance of Murphey's composition of "Cosmic Cowboy," literally at the edge of a Manhattan Holiday Inn's roof swimming pool (above 57<sup>th</sup> Street). (The notes on the album give this credit to [the Greenwich Village folk venue] the Bitter End's dressing room.) From Steiner and Hillis, I learned that the song was inspired directly by the antics of [bassist] Bob Livingston, a Texan musician from Lubbock. While at the Bitter End, Livingston had met Cosmic Suzanne, a lost Austinite in Manhattan. Livingston served as the butt for much band humor, and Suzanne, temporarily on the scene, brought the word "cosmic," connoting drugs, into constant group usage by the band members....

Murphey literally taught the new song to his sidemen at the pool's edge; it helped them trip back from the skyscrapers rimming the Holiday Inn to the open range. Hillis immediately sensed the contradiction in the song's title: cowboys then were not usually expected to experience altered states of consciousness. However, Steiner liked very much the alliteration of the title. Both sidemen, of course, caught the phrase's verbal charge; they saw themselves as participants in a high drama of musical linkage.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Green, 87. Green also cites an interview with Murphey's pedal steel guitarist Herb Steiner and lead guitarist Craig Hillis, both of whom claim that "Cosmic Cowboy" was composed around a rooftop swimming pool at a Holiday Inn on 57<sup>th</sup> Street in New York

<sup>8</sup> A&M SP-4388.

<sup>9</sup> United Artists UALA-184J2.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 91-92.

While the initial inspiration for the song may have been a job at Livingston's New York trust, it was soon clear to Murphey's sidemen that the resulting fusion of the "cosmic" drug culture and the more conservative "cowboy" was an uncomfortable one.<sup>11</sup> The cosmic cowboy sprang forth, therefore, from a bundle of cultural conflicts, including not only those resulting from the merger of drug culture and cowboy symbolism, but also from the intersection of communal music-making and the national music industry and the invocation of rural romanticism in an American metropolis.

"Cosmic Cowboy" places the Los Angeles-based country-rock scene diametrically opposite the mythical rural West—presumably Texas, given Murphey's biography. The cosmic cowboy, as the speaker in the song, makes note of the intense competition in the mainstream music industry of a place like Los Angeles. Moreover, the cosmic cowboy notes that a less urban environment offers a space in which competition is not an issue and where people can be as creative as they wish. He observes that "Lone Star sippin' and skinny-dippin' and steel guitars and stars / Are just as good as Hollywood and them boogie-woogie bars." These images offer stark contrasts between the relaxed atmosphere of Austin and the fast pace of Hollywood, but Murphey does not achieve these contrasts simply through the use of stock "western" imagery. Rather, he evokes Austin by pointing to specific elements of Austin's local culture: Lone Star Beer's largest account was at the Armadillo World Headquarters;<sup>12</sup> local hippies regularly

---

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 77-79; Nicholas R. Spitzer, "Romantic Regionalism and Convergent Culture in Central Texas," in *All That Glitters: Country Music in America*, ed. George H. Lewis (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Press, 1993), 88-91.

<sup>12</sup> Eddie Wilson, interview by Robert Heard, tape recording, Austin History Center, Austin Public Library, 26 June 1974.

bathed at Lake Travis's "Hippie Hollow";<sup>13</sup> and steel guitars invoke the country music for which Austin was becoming famous, in part, because of the work of Murphey himself. Thus, for Murphey's cosmic cowboy, the American West (and Austin, as its *de facto* capital) was constructed as a place of refuge from the stifling urban atmosphere. In contrast to the city, the romanticized spaces of rural Texas offered a place in which the cosmic cowboy could "ride and rope and hoot."

Not only did Murphey's "Cosmic Cowboy" posit that Texas, as a physical space, permitted residents to do as they please, it also proposed that this liberating space was also the home to a community of individuals who were interested in supporting the cosmic cowboy's freedom. As the cosmic cowboy observes in the second verse, the Texas plains are populated by communities that were unsullied by the competition and selfishness of metropolitan West Coast culture. Rather, this Texan community displays genuine concern for the physical and spiritual health of the community: "I'm gonna buy me a vest and head out West, my little woman and myself. / When they come to town, they're gonna gather 'round and marvel at my little baby's health." Unlike the residents of the city, therefore, the rural community into which the cosmic cowboy wishes to escape is seen as exhibiting genuine concern for its neighbors and, through the symbol of the baby, the perpetuation of rural cultural values. At the same time, the cosmic cowboy's desire to obtain a vest seems to indicate that the only thing standing between him and true understanding of the rural West is the adoption of the outward symbols of a "rural" identity, an identity that can be acquired and just as easily shed should he decide to seek enlightenment elsewhere.

---

<sup>13</sup> Kinky Friedman, *The Great Psychedelic Armadillo Picnic: A "Walk" in Austin*, Crown Journeys (New York: Crown Publishers, 2004), 92-94.

*Verse 1*  
 Burial grounds and merry-go-rounds are all the same to me.  
 Horses on posts and kids and ghosts are spirits we ought to set free.  
 Them city slicker pickers, they got a lot of slicker licks than you and me.  
 But ridin' the range and actin' strange is where I wanna be.

*Chorus*  
 I just wanna be a cosmic cowboy.  
 I just wanna ride and rope and hoot.  
 I just wanna be a cosmic cowboy—  
 A supernatural country-rockin' galoot.

*Verse 2*  
 Lone Star sippin' and skinny-dippin' and steel guitars and stars  
 Just as good as Hollywood and them boogie-woogie bars.  
 I'm gonna buy me a vest and head out west, my little woman and myself,  
 When they come to town, they're gonna gather round and marvel at my little baby's health.

*Chorus 2 (change "I just wanna" to "I'm just gonna")*

*Verse 3*  
 Now big raccoons and harvest moons keep rollin' through my mind.  
 Home on the range where the antelope play is very hard to find.  
 Don't bury me on the lone prairie; I'd rather play there alive.  
 I'm doin' my best to keep my little pony in overdrive.

*Chorus 2*

*Tag*  
 And up is the not the way I'm gonna shoot.

**Figure 2-1. Michael Murphey, "Cosmic Cowboy" (1973).**

The sense of community and communality described in “Cosmic Cowboy” is further amplified through the sonic characteristics of Murphey’s 1973 studio recording. Murphey’s cosmic cowboy observes that, unlike musicians in Austin, “Them city slicker pickers, they got a lot of slicker licks than you and me.” This line implies that the preferred musical aesthetic of Austin’s singer-songwriters was rougher than the sounds of their colleagues elsewhere in the United States, an implication that is reinforced by the background vocals in the chorus of “Cosmic Cowboy.” These vocals are not the polished and rehearsed sounds of Nashville’s top background vocalists, including the Jordanaires, the Anita Kerr Singers, and the Nashville Edition; rather, they were recorded and mixed so as not to hide the imperfections of pitch, timbre, dynamics, or articulation and to

distinguish each individual's contribution to the final product. The singers do not attempt to blend the timbres of their voices to create a homogeneous vocal timbre, but instead allow each individual voice to add its own unique coloration. Nor do they sing each pitch or articulate each syllable precisely. The vocalists sing, to varying degrees, ahead of or behind the beat, bend pitches, and offer their own personal pronunciation of the words. Murphey was not the first artist to employ this type of vocal arrangement, nor was he the last: this imprecise vocal style was an important element of rock music in the late 1960s and early 1970s, appearing on records by artists as diverse as Joe Cocker and Stephen Stills.<sup>14</sup> But, in the hands of Murphey and other contemporaneous progressive country songwriters, this vocal style underscored the cosmic cowboy's idealism. Appearing when the speaker begins to dream of a rural utopia, the background vocals symbolize the cosmic cowboy's retreat from the city. Moreover, the emphasis that this vocal arrangement places on individual contributions to the overall sound seems to underscore the communality of the hippie lifestyle and its perceived presence on the Texas range.

Murphey's cosmic cowboy may have sought to escape into an idealized pre-industrial Western landscape, but the language he uses to describe it demonstrates that those rural spaces were actually influenced by the interaction of pre-industrial, industrial, and post-industrial cultures. Modernity intrudes in the first lines of the song: "Burial grounds and merry-go-rounds are all the same to me. / Horses on posts and kids and ghosts are spirits we ought to set free." Particularly striking here is Murphey's reference to Native American burial grounds, which stand as symbols of the ravages of Anglo-Texan colonialism, a theme Murphey explored in the title track of his 1972 debut album,

---

<sup>14</sup> Listen, for instance, to Joe Cocker's *Mad Dogs and Englishmen* (1970) and Stephen Stills's eponymous release (1970).

*Geronimo's Cadillac*.<sup>15</sup> Yet at the same time, the song's second line indicates that the cosmic cowboy, himself a colonial figure, has the power to liberate the "horses on posts and kids and ghosts" that reside in the West. Moreover, in order to escape the West Coast scene for Texas, the cosmic cowboy is forced to "keep [his] little pony in overdrive," juxtaposing a symbol of the unity of man and beast in the riding cowboy and one of the most widespread manifestations of modern industrialism in the automobile or motorcycle. As such, the cosmic cowboy is himself also a symbol of the modern world's invasion of a romanticized American West. In other words, as an interloper from the industrialized world, the cosmic cowboy acts as an agent of cultural change, bringing modernity to his hosts at the same time that he draws strength from them.

The ease with which Murphey mixes symbols of the unspoiled frontier and modernity in "Cosmic Cowboy" is, in some ways, reflective of his own middle-class Texan upbringing and the ease with which Anglo-Texan romantic regionalist myths and modern urbanization co-exist. Whereas De León has observed that the mythology of romantic regionalism requires the erasure or ignorance of cultural diversity, it seems that Murphey's cosmic cowboy is aware that the idealized West is actually a complex cultural fabric.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, however, the cosmic cowboy regrets the increased intrusion of modernity on the range, while never considering his own role in effecting such cultural transformations.

This avoidance of introspection is made still more evident in some of the changes

---

<sup>15</sup> A&M 4358.

<sup>16</sup> Arnaldo De León, "Region and Ethnicity: Topographical Identities in Texas," in *Many Wests: Place, Culture, and Regional Identity*, eds. David M. Wrobel and Michael C. Steiner (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 270-273.



that Murphey made to “Cosmic Cowboy” in the months following its Austin premiere and its commercial release. In the third verse of Murphey’s 1973 studio recording, the cosmic cowboy observes that “home on the range where the antelope play is very hard to find.” This statement may be read both as a confirmation of the Texas range as a simulacrum of liberation and as a commentary on the intrusion of industry into this idealized space. This issue was of grave concern to many young Austinites at the time, many of whom had recently confronted construction crews that were razing historic neighborhoods and replacing them with large apartment complexes.<sup>17</sup> This latter reading is made all the more plausible in a 1974 performance of the song at Willie Nelson’s Fourth of July Picnic, held at Texas World Speedway in Bryan, Texas. For this performance, Murphey was joined onstage by many of the most prominent musicians of Austin’s progressive country music scene: Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, Leon Russell, B.W. Stevenson, David Allan Coe, and Jerry Jeff Walker and the Lost Gonzo Band. Murphey altered the final verse of “Cosmic Cowboy” to state a less ambiguous position on urban development: “Now don’t let them bring no bulldozer, no bulldozer across your land, / ‘Cause a home on the range where the antelope play is where I’m gonna take my stand.”<sup>18</sup> Here, Murphey’s cosmic cowboy entreats his audience to rise up

---

<sup>17</sup> Anthony M. Orum, *Power, Money, & People: The Making of Modern Austin* (Austin: Texas Monthly Press, 1987), 290: “The early 1970s... were also a time when challenges to the normal routine of political life were breaking out everywhere. A large part of that broad movement of revolt took place in urban areas, and it concerned the struggle between individual homeowners and their perceived nemesis, the land developer.... Annoyed and angry citizens, believing their lives unjustly disrupted by the excavating rigs of the developers, took to the streets and to the homes of neighbors. In the vicinity of the University of Texas, for example, there emerged the Save University Neighborhood group, an organization founded to protect the integrity of the local university neighborhood against realtors and developers who, neighbors claimed, preyed on empty lots almost like vultures.”

<sup>18</sup> This performance was captured in the feature-length film *Willie Nelson’s 4<sup>th</sup> of July Picnic* (La Paz Productions, 1977).

in physical protest against corporate intrusion into the neighborhoods of Austin and into the idealized rural spaces of Texas. Yet, while the cosmic cowboy articulates a strong political statement about industry's role in the erasure of the American West, he does not examine the impact of his own interactions with the same landscape. Rather, the cosmic cowboy is constructed as an honest and forthright individual, mirroring the heroic tropes of Anglo-Texan nationalism and romantic regionalism that had shaped Texan mythology.

Murphey's "Cosmic Cowboy" brings together several of the most important aspects of the Anglo-Texan romantic regionalism that were prevalent in Austin's progressive country music scene. First, the generic "city" was a powerful symbol, in part because of its multivalence: the city stood for the failure of the modern American Dream, for the corruption and greed of industry, and for the distance between humanity and nature, while the rural landscape existed as a more problematic and semiologically slippery symbol of humanity's promise. Austin itself embodied this conflict between urban and rural, the burgeoning city playing host to a community of country musicians. Second, the cosmic cowboys felt the need to escape both to a new region, even if within their home state of Texas, and to a different, time: either an idealized, pre-industrial past or a utopian, post-industrial future.<sup>19</sup> And finally, the restrictions that the cosmic cowboy generation wished to escape were those put in place by middle- and upper-class whites: competition for employment, social class structures, and the cash-based economy. Rather than working like the perceived majority of society, therefore, Murphey's cosmic cowboy

---

<sup>19</sup> Parallels to the escapism of the cosmic cowboy may be found in any number of other musical styles from the roughly the same era. The glam rock of David Bowie, T. Rex, and Alice Cooper, among others, witnessed artists exploring androgynous performance attire as a way of examining contemporaneous definitions of masculinity, while funk bands such as George Clinton's Parliament/Funkadelic and jazz musicians such as Sun Ra exploited science fiction and space exploration in their stage shows, rhetoric, and music as a way of expressing utopian landscapes for racial equality.

and his followers often expressed the belief that they could simply arrive in a new place with no money and settle on rural land without consequence, just as their pioneer forefathers had done as they enacted the Doctrine of Manifest Destiny.<sup>20</sup> These aspects of the cosmic cowboy's philosophy, as expressed by Murphey, may be seen as a manifestation of the privilege bestowed upon the cosmic cowboy generation through their position as heirs to the same white, middle-class capitalism that had made their parents' generation successful. Murphey and the many songwriters who embraced the same idealistic themes were soon faced with the very real challenge of coexisting peacefully with the same people they venerated in song.

Murphey's "Cosmic Cowboy" was one of the most significant songs of Austin's progressive country scene because it offered a unifying name for scene participants and because it was the first progressive country song to be exported from Austin. It was not, however, the first song to articulate a desire to escape from a stifling urban environment into the wide open spaces of the West, nor was Murphey the first songwriter to leave the Los Angeles music industry for the more relaxed atmosphere of Texas. Rather, "Cosmic Cowboy" was part of a larger family of songs that depicted the city as an oppressive space and the rural American West as a liberating one.

Composed by songwriters who relocated to Austin or who maintained close ties to the city, this collection of songs reinforced the idea that Austin, despite its urbanity and its continued expansion throughout the 1970s, and Texas were conflict-free spaces in which the participants in Austin's progressive country movement could roam without care.

---

<sup>20</sup> This was, in fact, a reality for members of this generation. Ray Benson recalled that his initial settlement in Paw Paw, West Virginia, was at an apple orchard owned by the father of a friend of his. After nearly two years of rent-free living, the father discovered the squatters and had them promptly evicted (Ray Benson, interview by author, 31 May 2005).

If Murphey's "Cosmic Cowboy" portrayed a man who was looking for a place "to ride and rope and hoot," Guy Clark's 1971 song "L.A. Freeway" presented a character who felt compelled to escape the city for a rural hideaway: a character that remarkably resembled Clark himself and whose biography parallels Murphey's in many ways. Clark was born in Monahans, Texas, a town about thirty-five miles southwest of Odessa, and also spent a significant amount of time in Rockport, Texas, outside of Corpus Christi. The son of a lawyer, Clark attended the University of Texas at Austin for one semester before leaving school to play clubs in Houston and Austin with nationally-known songwriters like Townes Van Zandt and Jerry Jeff Walker.<sup>21</sup> In the late 1960s, he headed to Los Angeles by way of San Francisco, where he struggled to break onto the Los Angeles music scene because, as he described in a 1988 interview, he felt the scene was "spread out" and had "no real sense of community—[it was] real cliquish."<sup>22</sup> To make ends meet, he turned to luthierie, apprenticing with the Dopyera Brothers, famous for their "Dobro" resonator guitar design.<sup>23</sup> In 1971, after less than a year in California, Clark signed a contract with Sunbury-Dunbar, a publishing house affiliated with RCA that had offices in Los Angeles, Nashville, and New York.<sup>24</sup> Deciding that the Los Angeles scene no longer appealed to him, he moved to Nashville because "it seemed the

---

<sup>21</sup> Jack Bernhardt, "Guy Clark," in *The Encyclopedia of Country Music*, ed. Paul Kingsbury (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 94.

<sup>22</sup> Guy Clark, interview by Jack Bernhardt, 7 November 1988, Southern Folklife Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>23</sup> Bernhardt, "Guy Clark," 94.

<sup>24</sup> Guy Clark, interview by Art Young, KRMH-FM, 14 January 1976, Oral History Collection, Austin History Center, Austin Public Libraries.

best place for me.”<sup>25</sup> There, he became involved with a network of songwriters headed by Kris Kristofferson, Mickey Newberry, and his former Texas colleague Townes Van Zandt, a network that Clark has compared to the folk music scene of Greenwich Village in the 1960s and the literary culture of 1920s Paris because it was “small and accessible” and songwriters were not required to “go through two armed guards and two armed secretaries to see someone.”<sup>26</sup> As part of the Nashville songwriters’ scene in the early 1970s, the path for Clark’s success in Austin had already been cleared by Nashville artists like Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings who used Austin as a foil for their own personal battles with the Nashville music industry. Thus, while Clark never took up full-time residence in the Lone Star capital, his connections to Kristofferson and Van Zandt, his involvement in the Los Angeles-Nashville-Austin country music triangle, and, later, Jerry Jeff Walker’s recordings of his songs brought Clark’s voice to the cosmic cowboy generation.<sup>27</sup>

“L.A. Freeway,” Clark’s first national success as a songwriter, was written on the heels of his relocation from Los Angeles to Nashville in 1971, and, for this reason, it may be read as an almost autobiographical treatment of the topic (Figure 2-2). The lyrics depict a couple in the midst of the final preparations to leave Los Angeles for “some land that I [they] ain’t bought, bought, bought,” invoking the same idealized pastoral tropes as Murphey would two years later in “Cosmic Cowboy.” The listener is quickly made

---

<sup>25</sup> Guy Clark, interview by Jack Bernhardt, 24 October 1988, Southern Folklife Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>26</sup> Guy Clark, interview by Jack Bernhardt, 24 October 1988.

<sup>27</sup> Unlike many of his contemporaries, Clark was quite frank about his positive connections to Nashville, casting the city not as the site of a malevolent Music Row but as a relaxed, creative atmosphere that shared much in common with Austin.

aware that this move is not a casual one; rather, the speaker is eager to leave Los Angeles behind him. The song opens *in media res* as the speaker requests the help of an unnamed second-person character to “pack up all your dishes” and to “throw out them L.A. papers / and that moldy box of Vanilla Wafers.”<sup>28</sup> The speaker appears to be in quite a hurry to leave Los Angeles, leaving “the key in the old front door lock” rather than vacating the property in an orderly fashion with the landlord’s approval (because, after all, the “sons-of-bitches always bore me”). Even more instructive here is the tone of voice used to convey these requests: both Clark and Jerry Jeff Walker (in his 1972 cover) perform the song in an affable tone, indicating perhaps that, although the completion of these tasks would be beneficial, it is not necessary. Rather, the most important task facing the speaker is to say “*adios* to all this concrete,” leaving the urban world to its own devices.

This release into the rural environment of the American West is underscored by the striking musical contrast between the verses and chorus of “L.A. Freeway” (Figure 2-3). The song begins with Clark’s finger-picked acoustic guitar that plays the first half of the verse melody before being joined by a fiddle. The first two phrases of the melody begin on <sup>5</sup> of the underlying chord, and Clark takes advantage of this in his voicing of the guitar part, choosing an open voicing that emphasizes the interval of a perfect fifth and creates a musical and physical space (Figure 2-4). When Clark’s vocals begin, the finger-picked guitar doubles the vocal melody, accompanied by high-hat cymbals sounding on the offbeats and a very quiet electric piano playing sustained chords. The rather sparse texture of the first verse is paralleled in the remaining verses, as a plaintive

---

<sup>28</sup> The unnamed character in the first verse is probably Clark’s wife Susanna, who is addressed directly in the song’s third verse, in which the speaker chides “Oh, Susanna, don’t you cry, babe.” Similarly, “old skinny Dennis” in the second verse refers to Dennis Sanchez, a friend of Clark’s who played bass with him in Los Angeles. Such references reinforce the autobiographical nature of the song.

harmonica responds to Clark's vocals in the second verse, and the fiddle takes over in the third verse. This arrangement is especially appropriate for the verses, creating a sense of emptiness and solitude as the speaker reflects upon his time in Los Angeles as he packs his belongings. Moreover, the fatigue that the speaker feels is amplified as the harmonica and fiddle's fills are articulated softly and seem to fade into the distance.

*Verse 1*

Pack up all your dishes.  
Make note of all good wishes.  
And say goodbye to the landlord for me.  
Sons-of-bitches always bore me.  
Throw out them L.A. papers  
And that moldy box of Vanilla Wafers.  
Adios to all this concrete.  
Gonna get me some dirt road, back street.

*Chorus*

If I can just get off of this L.A. freeway without getting killed or caught,  
I'll be down the road in a cloud of smoke to some land that I ain't bought, bought, bought.

*Verse 2*

Here's to you old skinny Dennis,  
Only one I think I will miss.  
I can hear that old bass singin',  
Sweet and low like a gift you're bringin'.  
Play it for me one more time now.  
Got to give it all we can now.  
I believe everything you're saying.  
Just keep on, keep on playing.

*Chorus*

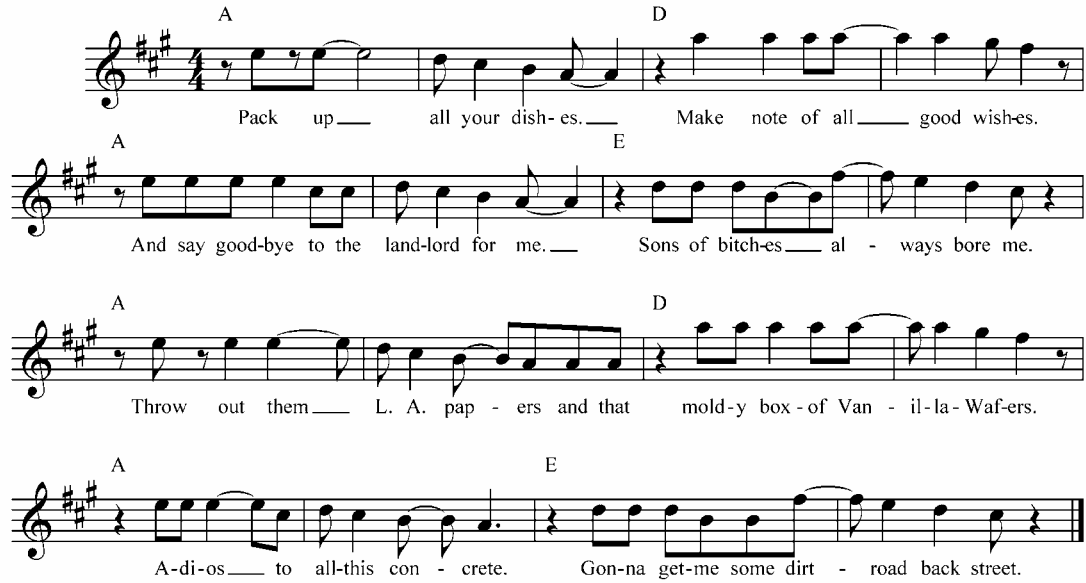
*Verse 3*

And you put the pink card in the mailbox.  
Leave the key in the old front door lock.  
They will find it likely as not.  
I'm sure there's somethin' we have forgot.  
Oh Susanna, don't you cry, babe.  
Love's a gift that's surely handmade.  
We've got something to believe in.  
Dontcha' think it's time we're leavin'?

*Chorus*

*Verse 1 (first four lines)*

Figure 2-2. Guy Clark, "L.A. Freeway" (1971).



A D  
Pack up all your dishes. Make note of all good wishes.

A E  
And say good-bye to the land-lord for me. Sons of bitches always bore me.

A D  
Throw out them L. A. papers and that mold-y box-of Van-illa-Waf-ers.

A E  
A-di-os to all-this con-crete. Gon-na get-me some dirt-road back street.

Figure 2-3. Guy Clark, "L.A. Freeway" (1971), Verse 1 melody.

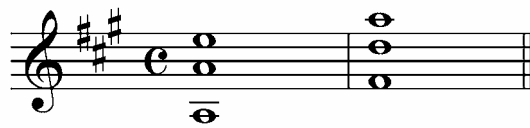
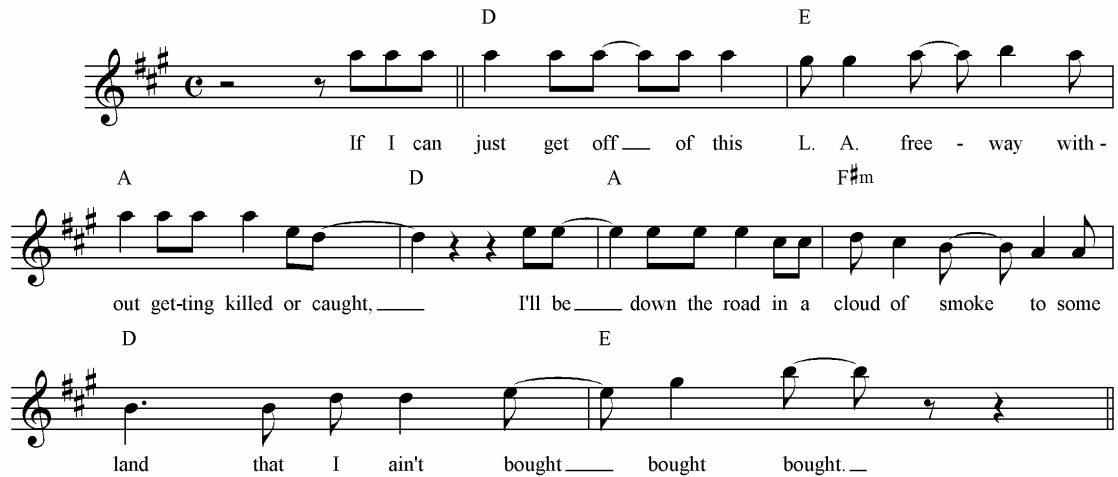


Figure 2-4. Open chord voicings in introduction of Guy Clark's "L.A. Freeway" (1971).



D E  
If I can just get off of this L. A. freeway without

A D A F#m  
getting killed or caught, I'll be down the road in a cloud of smoke to some

D E  
land that I ain't bought bought bought.

Figure 2-5. Guy Clark, "L.A. Freeway" (1971), Chorus melody.

The sparse textures of the verses, Clark's lackadaisical vocal delivery, and the downward trajectory of the verse melody underscore the exhaustion and somberness articulated in their lyrics. In the chorus of "L.A. Freeway," however, the speaker's



thoughts turn to his upcoming release into more rural spaces, and the accompaniment here echoes that sentiment. The finger-picked guitar of the verses gives way to a rapidly strummed acoustic guitar playing chords in close voicing in contrast to the open voicings of the verses. The strummed guitar is also joined by a steel guitar descant, and the drummer becomes more active as well, making use of the snare drum, tom toms, and kick drum in addition to the high-hat cymbal in the verses. Furthermore, whereas the verse melody is based around a stepwise descending figure, the chorus opens with Clark intoning its first line on and around A5, the highest pitch heard to that point (Figure 2-5). But the most dramatic contrast between the verses and the chorus may be found, much like Murphey's "Cosmic Cowboy," in the use of exuberant background singers to underscore the emotional climax of the song: "If I can just get off of this L.A. Freeway without getting killed or caught." The female background vocalists disappear when the speaker begins to think about the physical journey away from Los Angeles, but they return at the end of the verse when Clark thrice repeats the word "bought." As in Murphey's song, therefore, the background singers in "L.A. Freeway" create musical contrast and mark the speaker's release into the idealized rural environment of which he dreamed.

Considering the imperative mood of the verses of "L.A. Freeway," the relative calm of the second verse is strikingly out of place in the narrative structure. Here the speaker addresses a dear friend from Los Angeles, "old skinny Dennis, / [the] only one I think I will miss." It is significant that, although the speaker despises the city and its lack of humanity, the only friendships he develops are found in musical performance. The speaker finds in Dennis's "old bass singing" a touch of humanity in an otherwise cold

and unforgiving urban environment, commenting that “I believe everything you’re saying. / Just keep on, keep on playing.” Thus, in spite of all of the supposed cruelty and inhumanity of Los Angeles as depicted in this song as well as in “Cosmic Cowboy,” music and the personal connection with another singer (and presumably songwriter) provided a glimmer of hope for humanity in the metropolis.

Such a glorification of music as a way to remain compassionate in a cold, corrupt, and corrupting urban environment is not a surprising element in Clark’s work, given his own constructed autobiography and the performance history of the song. “L.A. Freeway” made its first recorded appearance as the lead song on the B-side of Jerry Jeff Walker’s eponymous 1972 MCA Records release and was later included on Clark’s 1975 RCA Records album *Old No. 1*.<sup>29</sup> The sense of community that Clark found in Nashville and in Austin is underscored on the back of the jacket of Walker’s release, where Walker observes:

Both L.A. Freeway and Old Time Feelin’ were written by Guy Clark. Townes Van Zandt, Guy Clark, Gary White and myself go way back, seven or eight years to Houston, Texas. Guy was making guitars then. I lived for a while on Guy & Gary’s couch on Fannin Street. Recently, I had the chance to do so again in Nashville, where Guy is trying to get people to hear his songs. He told me once, “You know, I used to hear you & Townes play a new song every couple of days, but it never dawned on me that I could just write one of my own.” O.K., Sleepy John, it never dawned on me to build my own guitar either.<sup>30</sup>

As Walker’s sleeve notes indicate, many of the most prominent musicians in Austin and in Nashville maintained close-knit local communities within which they could exchange ideas and songs. By informing his listeners of the close personal and musical relationship between himself and Clark, Walker validates his performance of “L.A. Freeway,”

---

<sup>29</sup> Decca DL7-5384 and RCA 1303, respectively.

<sup>30</sup> Jacket of *Jerry Jeff Walker* (Decca DL7-5384).

implying that, because he and Clark are friends, his reading is a more accurate one. At the same time, Walker's sleeve notes imply that Austin's musicians also sought to extend their influence beyond their immediate circle of colleagues and admirers by traveling around the Los Angeles-Nashville-Austin industrial triangle to make recordings, to sell songs, and to perform before a live audience.

Walker's inclusion of this brief narrative on the jacket of his 1972 album implies that progressive country music resided in a world partially defined by an overt, conscious, and frequently touted allegiance to the handmade *objet d'art* and to the craftsman, while playing down progressive country's economic reliance on the national music industry. This message is also articulated in the closing scene from James Szalapski's 1975 documentary film *Heartworn Highways*, a film that presented the work of "the originals of country music's new wave," including Clark, Townes Van Zandt, David Allan Coe, Rodney Crowell, Steve Young, and Charlie Daniels.<sup>31</sup> The scene documents a sing-along following a Christmas dinner at the Nashville home of Guy and Susanna Clark. Amid the half-eaten plates of food, the empty beer cans filled with cigarette butts, and the oil lamps, the Clarks, Steve Young, Steve Earle, Rodney Crowell, and others are seen gathered around the dining room table with guitars in hand to sing "Silent Night." The smiling faces of the participants in this impromptu assembly are prominently displayed, demonstrating the pleasure that these musicians derived from performing with their friends and colleagues. Moreover, as the song continues, the singers forget the words to the later verses, compose new ones to some hilarity, and create new (often musically questionable) countermelodies. As the concluding scene to a

---

<sup>31</sup> *Heartworn Highways*, James Szalapski, dir. (Crimson Productions, 1975).

documentary film that follows the young singer-songwriters around the country and portrays them on stage and in more domestic settings, this is a powerful scene, drawing attention to the idea that progressive country music was the result of a collaborative experience, not a commercial directive.

While Murphey's "Cosmic Cowboy" and Clark's "L.A. Freeway" captured and encouraged the rural utopianism of Austin's progressive country movement, neither of the songs directly situate Austin as a rural hideaway, and, given the city's exponential growth during the 1960s and 1970s, such a conceit would be difficult to maintain.<sup>32</sup> Yet, because Austin was the seat of the progressive country music movement and, as a university city, it played host to tens of thousands of idealistic youths, the city became the closest approximation of the rural spaces of West Texas in the minds of many participants.

Michael Murphey's "Alleys of Austin" (Figure 2-6), which appeared on the *Cosmic Cowboy Souvenir* album alongside "Cosmic Cowboy," does make this connection explicit.<sup>33</sup> The song, certainly the most idealistic of all of the progressive country songs treating the rural utopianism of Austin's progressive country movement, is cast in three verses, the first of which focuses on "the alleys of Austin," the second on "the alleys of heaven," and the third on the similarities between the alleys of both places. In both Austin and heaven, music is a key cultural element: in Austin, "there's a song on the side of a wall," while in heaven "there's a funky-feeling angel strumming chords." In the third verse, Murphey posits that, in both Austin and in heaven, "the song they're

---

<sup>32</sup> The population of Austin nearly doubled from 186,545 people in 1960 to 345,496 in 1980 (*Texas Almanac and State Industrial Guide, 1980-1981*, 187).

<sup>33</sup> A&M SP-4388.

playing is the same,” implying that Austin is a sort of earthly manifestation of Paradise in part because of musical performance.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, after this connection between Austin and Heaven is articulated in the third verse, the preachers and Jesus Christ of the second verse may be interpreted as synecdoches for the songwriters and fans of the progressive country scene in Austin. By equating Austin and Heaven, the listener is left to wonder whether Murphey is proposing that the members of the progressive country scene have some sort of divine insight into life. At the same time, a more ironic interpretation of “Alleys of Austin” transforms the second verse into a biting criticism of progressive country, chastising Austin’s youths for their ersatz sincerity. Yet, regardless of Murphey’s intent, the comparison of Austin and Heaven is indicative of the romantic regionalism that pervaded the progressive country scene, on the one hand lauding Austin’s youths for their progressive values, on the other criticizing them for believing in themselves too much.

“Alleys of Austin,” in its focus on Austin and heaven, does not contrast city and country like “Cosmic Cowboy” and “L.A. Freeway.” As such, there is little need for the same type of dramatic musical and lyrical release found in the latter songs’ choruses. Cast in three strophes, the song does not even contain a chorus. Yet, “Alleys of Austin” does suggest musically that Austin is a liberating space by interpolating a wordless verse between the second and third narrative verses. Here, a choir of male and female singers, led by Murphey himself, performs a wordless version of the song’s melody, using only the syllable “la.” Like the bridges of “Cosmic Cowboy” and “L.A. Freeway,” this section

---

<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, by implying that Christ is part of the translocal music scene of Austin and heaven, “Alleys of Austin” resonates with Kris Kristofferson’s 1972 song “Jesus Was a Capricorn” (Monument 31909), which posits that Christ would have been ridiculed by mainstream culture because his appearance and ideology more closely resembled that of the hippie counterculture than it did that mainline Christianity.

exploits the imprecise articulations and pitch of the choir to add emotional weight to the speaker's release from the grips of the city. The vocalise thus functions both as an emotional release—a kind of ecstatic state that transcends words—and as a musical depiction of the participatory nature of Austin's music scene. The textures of the surrounding verses are particularly sparse, featuring only a finger-picked acoustic guitar, bass guitar, and light drums and emphasizing both the high and low boundaries of the frequency spectrum, thus making the density of the added vocalists almost overpowering. This interlude is also repeated at the conclusion of the recording, fading into the sonic distance much as was the case in both "L.A. Freeway" and "Cosmic Cowboy," further underscoring the liberating power of the American West.

*Verse 1*

Out in the alleys of Austin,  
There's a song on the side of the wall.  
The bricks and the bottles and the mongrels  
Are trying to make sense out of it all.  
And the moon looks all too familiar.  
And the kids say, there ain't no man in there  
While the laid-back baboon by the light of the Texas moon  
Is combing his auburn hair.  
He's just combing his auburn hair.

*Verse 2*

Now out in the alleys of Heaven,  
There's a funky feeling angel strummin' chords  
While the preachers sit and get stoned in their Buicks  
Jesus Christ rolls by in his Ford.  
And the clouds are like the feathers of sparrows  
A thousand different colors of gray.  
It's the hustle of the paradise barroom  
And the glory of hanging out in space.  
It's the glory of hanging out in space.

***Interlude (Vocalise on verse progression)***

*Verse 3*

In the alleys of Austin and Heaven,  
The song they're playin' is the same.  
The jam session sounds like the gutters  
As the muddy licks and sticks roll down the drain  
And the drain pipe she rolls out to the river  
And the Pedernales flows out to the sea  
And the sea waters rise up to heaven  
And they rain down on the alleys of Austin and you and me.

**Figure 2-6. Michael Murphey, "Alleys of Austin" (1973).**

At the same time that singer-songwriters were describing Austin and the American West as liberating spaces, they were also concerned that this paradise not be subsumed by an expanding and constantly modernizing society. Dallas native Steven Fromholz's "Texas Trilogy" (1969) was among the first songs by a progressive country songwriter to address this issue.<sup>35</sup> The expansive, eleven-minute-plus work takes the form of a first-person narrative told from the perspective of a native of Bosque County, Texas, which lies northwest of Waco. Each of the three sections—"Daybreak," "Trainride," and "Bosque County Romance"—discusses the negative effects that urban growth and the promise of gainful employment in America's growing cities had on small-town life. "Texas Trilogy" does not paint rural life in the same idealized light as Murphey's "Cosmic Cowboy," but instead creates a more nuanced portrayal of the difficulties of life in a small central Texas town. The first part, "Daybreak," begins with only Fromholz's rich baritone voice and a lone acoustic guitar as the speaker describes the way in which the town awakens to their daily drudgery:

Six o'clock silence of a new day beginning is heard in a small Texas town.  
Like a signal from nowhere the people who live there are up and moving around.  
'Cause there's bacon to fry and biscuits to bake  
On a stove that the Salvation Army won't take.  
Open the windows and turn on the fan  
'Cause it's hotter than hell when the sun hits the land.

While the life of these small-town residents appears to be simple but challenging, the listener soon discovers that this lifestyle is not necessarily one that was chosen by the residents. Rather, as Fromholz quits singing and speaks directly to the listener at the end

---

<sup>35</sup> Frummo, *Here to There* (Probe 45115). Although this song was written and recorded while Fromholz was working in Los Angeles, his later involvement in Austin's progressive country movement and his own Texan upbringing place him squarely within the community of songwriters that included Murphey and Clark.

of “Daybreak,”

Hell, I can remember when Kopperl, Texas, was a good place for a man to live and raise a family. Course that was before the cotton gin closed down. It’s been that long ago.... Course the new highway helped some. They damned up the Brazos to build Lake Whitney. Brought some fisherman down from Dallas and Fort Worth. Town sure has been quiet, though, since they closed down the depot and built that new trestle out west of town. Y’know the train just don’t stop here anymore.

The second section of “Trainride”—the second vignette in “Texas Trilogy”—takes the form of the narrator’s reminiscence of the last time he saw the train arrive at the depot in Kopperl. He was only a small child, thus implying that the Kopperl’s residents suffered this decay for several years. The concluding vignette, “Bosque County Romance,” provides a case study of this decline, presenting the story of high school sweethearts Mary Martin and Billy Archer as they struggle to maintain a ranch and raise a family in Bosque County.

In “Texas Trilogy,” Fromholz draws a clear connection between the growing economic and social potential of Texas’s cities (especially Bosque County’s closest urban competitors, Dallas and Fort Worth) and the significant decline in the economic and social viability of small-town life. The lessons of “Texas Trilogy” are twofold. First, without the continued investment of young people in their own communities, small towns do not have the chance to flourish economically and run the risk of eventually becoming ghost towns. This is indicated by Fromholz’s spoken comments at the end of “Trainride,” in which he ponders, “Why is it you never see any young folks around Kopperl? Seems like as soon as they graduate, they go runnin’ off... and get ‘em a good job....” Second, Fromholz suggests that progress for progress’s sake is not always beneficial to the community. Rather, the same notions of progress that inspired planners to search for



more efficient railroad routes led to the regression of Kopperl into a depressed economic and social state. Thus, Fromholz insists, it is imperative that planners consider local heritage as they plan for the future, lest progress go unbounded to the eventual detriment of others.

At the same time, however, Fromholz's depiction of Kopperl and Bosque County's economic and social decline perpetuates the romantic regionalism of early progressive country songwriting. First, the patina of age and disuse that Fromholz brings to "Texas Trilogy" creates an imaginary space into which listeners can interpolate their own visions of life in a Texan town. Furthermore, Fromholz valorizes the area's residents, especially Mary Martin and Billy Archer, for their persistence and perseverance in the face of adversity. By championing the determination of Bosque County's residents, Fromholz directly invokes the spirit of Texan nationalism and the strength of the Texan people. While Fromholz does not position Bosque County as a rural hideaway for the cosmic cowboy (because the cosmic cowboy was not to emerge for another four years), he does create a romantic vision of a dying small-town Texas that further underscores the adverse effects of metropolitan growth upon the state's agricultural towns much as "Cosmic Cowboy" and "L.A. Freeway" juxtapose the city and the country. Such conflict allowed progressive country songwriters to champion the underdogs—rural Texans—while simultaneously creating distance between themselves and their middle-class upbringings. This threat of extinction at the hands of urban and suburban sprawl was a very real problem for Fromholz, who has since dedicated his life to serving as an advocate for cowboy culture and rural and small-town Texan folkways. This adversity also allowed Austin's songwriters to champion the working-class residents

of small-town and rural Texas as part of a socially progressive fight against the faceless corporations and cities that their parents sought to build.

Romanticized portrayals of Austin and the American West circulated not only among the singer-songwriters who were active within the Los Angeles-Nashville-Austin triangle. Rather, rock-oriented progressive country groups borrowed from and further developed these tropes almost as quickly as they emerged. One of the most prominent examples, in part because of its direct mention of Austin, is the 1974 recording by The New Riders of the Purple Sage of “Instant Armadillo Blues.”<sup>36</sup> New Riders of the Purple Sage emerged from the San Francisco psychedelic scene of the late 1960s, resulting from jam sessions between the Grateful Dead’s Jerry Garcia and songwriter John “Marmaduke” Dawson and featuring former Jefferson Airplane drummer Spencer Dryden.<sup>37</sup> The group was immensely popular in Austin and had a particular fondness for the Armadillo World Headquarters, even expressing interest in recording an album there.<sup>38</sup> Unlike Murphey, Walker, and Clark, however, New Riders of the Purple Sage were only peripherally related to the Austin scene, and “Instant Armadillo Blues” bears witness to some of the ways the romantic regionalism and Texan chauvinism of the Austin progressive country scene were interpreted by outsiders.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> *Brujo* (CBS PC33145).

<sup>37</sup> Kevin Coffey, “New Riders of the Purple Sage,” in *The Encyclopedia of Country Music*, ed. Paul Kingsbury (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 377.

<sup>38</sup> Reid, *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*, 82. This album was never recorded.

<sup>39</sup> New Riders of the Purple Sage performed seven concerts in Austin during between 1970 and 1976. They played with the Grateful Dead at Austin’s Municipal Auditorium on 15 November 1971 and played six concerts at the Armadillo World Headquarters (4 November 1973, 1-2 March 1974, 12-14 June 1975) (“NRPS Concert History,” <<http://www.nrpsmusic.com/music/history.html>> [accessed 11 February 2007]).

*Verse 1*  
 When I get up this morning, tell ya what I'm gonna do.  
 Gonna pack my suitcase, honey, and I'm gonna leave with you.  
 We're going to Austin.  
 Going down, see the town, hang around down in Austin.  
 We're going down to Austin.  
 Going down to watch the Armadillo rootin', Armadillo rootin' on the ground.

*Verse 2*  
 When I get down to Austin, I'm gonna sit my butt right down,  
 Grab a little bit of that Lone Star Beer, honey, plan to hang around  
 Down in Austin.  
 Going down, see the town, hang around down in Austin.  
 We're going down to Austin.  
 Going down to watch the Armadillo rootin', Armadillo rootin' on the ground.

**Figure 2-7. The New Riders of the Purple Sage (John Dawson), “Instant Armadillo Blues” (1974).**

Although one of the central characteristics of the romantic regionalist songs was the juxtaposition of the urban and rural, the lyrics of “Instant Armadillo Blues” (Figure 2-7) are focused entirely on the promotion of Austin as a liberating space yet without constructing a restrictive space that justifies the need for liberation. The song mimics the “retreat narrative” of “L.A. Freeway” and “Cosmic Cowboy” in the first verse: “When I get up this morning / Tell you what I’m gonna do / Gonna pack my suitcase, honey / And I’m gonna leave with you / We’re going down to Austin.” However, the speaker’s motivation for leaving the current locale is left unspoken.

The lack of narrative tension and contrast in “Instant Armadillo Blues” is echoed in the song’s structure, as well. Unlike the above-mentioned examples that make use of modified standard song form (including the pseudo-bridge vocalise of “Alleys of Austin”) and verse-chorus structures, “Instant Armadillo Blues” is, as the title suggests, a twelve-bar blues.<sup>40</sup> Songwriter John Dawson’s choice of this song structure is

---

<sup>40</sup> Verse-chorus form is a songwriting structure comprised of through-composed verses that typically end with a half cadence which are typically followed by the chorus, a section which bears the same lyrics from one repetition to the next and which is harmonically closed. Standard song form is normally a thirty-two-bar structure comprised of four eight-bar phrases assembled in an AABA pattern.

noteworthy because the twelve-bar blues, as a strophic form, does not permit the same type of narrative contrast as standard song form or verse-chorus structures. This structural difference also marks New Riders of the Purple Sage as somewhat distanced from the Austin progressive country scene. Neither Clark nor Murphey were writing songs in blues form during this era, and, although African-American blues musicians such as Freddie King and Mance Lipscomb were regulars in the Austin club scene, blues structures did not form a significant component of the singer-songwriters' repertoire. Because much of the Austin scene was centered on the talent of songwriters who had worked in mainstream commercial markets like Los Angeles, New York, and Nashville and composed songs with more complicated structures, the simple structure of "Instant Armadillo Blues" that may be traced to the jam-based practices of San Francisco's late 1960s psychedelic scene, a scene that was populated by Austinites and other Texans seeking to obtain national success, marks this song's musical difference. Although "Instant Armadillo Blues" does not sit comfortably with the romantic regionalist songs of the Austin scene, the presence of such tropes in music originating outside Austin is indicative both of the widespread dissemination of such themes and of the problems associated with the reception of romantic regionalism.

One of the central concerns of the first group of progressive country songwriters working within the industrial and creative networks of Austin, Los Angeles, and Nashville was the construction of a rural American West within which those people who had grown weary of urban and suburban living could flourish. As such, songs such as

---

The "B" phrase is often referred to as the "bridge," "release," or "middle eight" and is characterized primarily by its harmonic, melodic, and lyrical contrast to the surrounding "A" phrases. (Thomas Owens, "Forms," *Grove Music Online*, ed. Laura Macy [Accessed 1 August 2006], <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>.)

“Cosmic Cowboy,” “L.A. Freeway,” and “Alleys of Austin” constructed Austin, Texas, and the American West as liberating spaces by exploiting stock pastoral imagery in which the city represents moral, social, and economic decay and the country stands as a pure and morally upright space. At the same time, these songwriters recognized that the rural spaces they were exalting also faced great pressure to adapt to an increasingly modern America, as exemplified by Fromholz’s “Texas Trilogy” as well as other songs such as Clark’s “Desperadoes Waiting for a Train” and Murphey’s “Geronimo’s Cadillac.” Furthermore, because of their connections to the national music industries in Nashville and Los Angeles, the work of Clark, Murphey, Walker, Fromholz, and others broadcast the romantic regionalism of Austin’s music scene to a regional and national audience, further cementing romantic visions of Austin, Texas, and the American West in the imaginations of America’s youth in the early 1970s.

### **Resistance to the Cosmic Cowboy: Realism and Progressive Country Songwriting**

The songs of the first wave of progressive country songwriters were both indicative of a widespread “back to the land” movement underway in the early 1970s and helped to entice non-Austinites and non-Texans alike to travel to central Texas (as well as New Mexico, Colorado, and Arizona) in search of the liberation promised in songs like “L.A. Freeway.” While the romantic regionalism manifested in these songs often made use of stock pastoral imagery that did not address conflicting visions or realities, the simplicity of this conceit was met with marked resistance from the many native Austinites and transplants who arrived prior to the emergence of the progressive country scene and Sunbelt economic expansion. Resistance took many forms. Sometimes young

cosmic cowboys traveled into rural districts in search of country music only to find a local population that was unreceptive to their long-haired appearance, while in other cases, Austinites who had been active in the city's musical life in the decade prior to scene's national fame questioned the authenticity of the cosmic cowboy both as a symbol, as a subculture, and as an individual. As a result, songs treating resistance to the tidal wave of cosmic cowboy migration to Austin and the surrounding area appeared almost as soon as the new residents arrived in Austin, representing the perspectives of both native Austinites and the city's new arrivals.

Perhaps not surprisingly, one of the first targets of criticism and scorn to emerge from the progressive country scene was the very song that gave name to the generation: Michael Murphey's "Cosmic Cowboy." On 4 September 1973, just months after the release of Murphey's *Cosmic Cowboy Souvenir*, an interview with local folk musician John Clay appeared in the independent newspaper *The Rag* along with the lyrics to one of Clay's recent compositions entitled "Drifting through the Seventies."<sup>41</sup> The interview itself is little more than a biographical sketch of Clay, who, following his relocation from Stamford, Texas, in 1960, had been part of the first generation of Austin folk musicians who resided in a neighborhood known as "The Ghetto." The article's introduction and conclusion indicate that, to some members of the Austin scene, Clay was himself one of the last "authentic" vestiges of Austin's folksinging community from the early 1960s:

With all the Michael Murphy's [*sic*], Marc Benno's [*sic*], Leon Russell's [*sic*], various recording studios, etc., etc. zeroing in on Austin (as the entire state of New York moves to Texas), we must recognize and remember the music that was already here. So we decided to get in touch with John Clay at his South Austin

---

<sup>41</sup> Green, "Austin's Cosmic Cowboys: Words in Collision," 88-89.

home. When we pulled up John was busy repairing his VW. He was quite amicable to our interruption.<sup>42</sup>

Furthermore, to the anonymous interviewer/editor, Clay's music represented

a refreshing respite from the usual boogie-woogie scene [i.e., progressive country music as played at the Armadillo World Headquarters]. There's not a bit of slickness in his approach, he is totally hisself. [*sic*] what he lacks in hype is made up in his original songs and blue stories.<sup>43</sup>

The tone of these quotations is particularly striking, as it indicates that neither the fans nor the music of the progressive country scene—including the music of Austin's singer-songwriters and the many other musicians living and working in Austin—were homogeneous bodies; rather, conceptions of the “purity” of Austin music varied greatly among individuals depending upon how long they had resided in Austin, whether they were originally from Texas, and their race, class, gender, and age. While Michael Murphey, Jerry Jeff Walker, and others were coming to Austin to escape the pressures of the music industries in Los Angeles, Nashville, and New York, for instance, those musicians who had witnessed the rise and fall of several musical movements in the city perceived progressive country as either another passing phase or a substantial threat to the sanctity and purity of local culture. The latter sentiment is made especially clear in the powerful rhetoric employed by the interviewer/editor of the article, describing outside musicians as “zeroing in on Austin” and characterizing the influx of non-natives as a postbellum Yankee invasion as “the entire state of New York moves to Texas.” Moreover, references to the “slickness” of progressive country music—an adjective that would not have been used by Murphey, Clark, and others to describe their music—may

---

<sup>42</sup> “John Clay: Plastic Plowboy,” *The Rag* (4 September 1973), p. 16.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

be read as a criticism of the perceived lack of authenticity of both the music and the musicians who perform it, as the rough edges that tie it to the folk music tradition were sanded off in favor of a more commercially viable musical style.<sup>44</sup>

Appended to the Clay interview is “Drifting through the Seventies,” a rambling ballad that both ridicules the idealism of the cosmic cowboy generation and laments the loss of innocence experienced by Clay’s own generation. The version published in *The Rag* is a strophic ballad written in the same poetic style as the folk-revival-era ballads that Clay would have learned while living, playing, and writing alongside other members of the Ghetto community during the early 1960s. Because of its formal structure, it stands in stark contrast to the more complex songwriting structures employed by more commercially-oriented songwriters like Murphey and Clark. These fourteen stanzas are divided roughly into three sections: an expository passage introducing the cosmic cowboy (stanzas 1-2), a meditation on the failures of the psychedelic generation (stanzas 3-7), and a criticism of the cosmic cowboy’s naïveté (stanzas 8-14).

The expository passage depicts the cosmic cowboy as disengaged from the Austin community (Figure 2-8). The speaker makes note of three characteristics that permit the “young freak” to remain oblivious to the world around him: the “earphones” he wears as he drives down the street, piping in music and shutting out the environmental soundscape; his use of marijuana (“I could tell that he was stoned by the way he drove along”), which facilitated a psychological escape; and his status as a transient student

---

<sup>44</sup> The critic of *The Rag* is not the first commentator to invoke this type of rhetoric to contrast the perceived authenticity of folk music with more commercially successful versions of the same music. The same criticism has been leveled against “folk revival” groups like the New Christy Minstrels, Nashville Sound-era country singers such as Jim Reeves and Patsy Cline, and, more recently, Top-40 punk bands like Green Day.



who will “have to graduate someday” while long-term residents of the city would stay behind to engage with the city’s social and political problems. Furthermore, the cosmic cowboy is cast as a child of privilege. As someone whose “record will stay clean while he stays on the scene,” he is permitted a tolerance that was not granted to members of the “Ghetto” community of Clay’s generation, who were often derided by students and local residents alike.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, the second verse implies that the older Austin community resented the fact that the cosmic cowboy enjoyed an attitude of acceptance that emerged as a result of the struggles that Clay’s generation endured. Moreover, the speaker implies that, because he is unaware of the city’s musical and social legacy, the cosmic cowboy took such freedoms for granted.<sup>46</sup>

One night I saw a young freak driving down the street.  
I noticed he had earphones on his head.  
I could tell that he was stoned by the way he drove along,  
And the way he was grinning it musta been a nice song.

And I be[t] no cop would never stop him  
'Cause of how he looked like they did back in my day.  
And his record will stay clean while he stays in this scene,  
But he'll have to graduate someday.

**Figure 2-8. John Clay, "Drifting through the Seventies" (1973), Stanzas 1-2.**

If the expository section casts the cosmic cowboy as a vacuous, entitled character with no real connection to Austin, the speaker begins to question the role his generation played in the creation of this figure during the second section of “Drifting through the Seventies” (Figure 2-9). Each of the three stanzas comprising this portion of the song

---

<sup>45</sup> For a more detailed discussion of “the Ghetto” community, please consult: Laura Joplin, *Love, Janis* (New York: Villard Books, 1992; paperback ed. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2005), 105-131; Jan Reid, *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*, 17-34.

<sup>46</sup> This interpretation is also supported by a comment Clay made at the end of the interview for *The Rag*, joking, “I’m gonna play this sometime at the Armadillo, [*sic*] they might disown me for insulting the regular crowd.”

begins with a question, invoking the rhetoric of protest songs like Pete Seeger's "Where Have All the Flowers Gone?" (1961) or Bob Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind" (1962), songs with which the "Ghetto" community would have been familiar. In stanzas 4 and 5, the speaker asks about the location of his "psychedelic posters" and "psychedelic records," drawing attention to the similarities between Austin's psychedelic rock scene that had flourished in the late 1960s and the cosmic cowboy generation by highlighting each group's focus on local music. The speaker goes on to posit that the records—and, by extension, the music that had been so important to the psychedelic age—had receded into the background for most scene participants, who most likely allowed "the junkies to take 'em out... to sell... off so they can get laid out...." Although music may have brought the scene together initially, it soon passed into memories like most other fads. As Clay argues, the idealism of the scene also diminished over time, leaving Austin with homeless junkies who were forced to resort to stealing records and "selling rags" to survive. This sentiment is echoed in stanza 4 in which the speaker asks, "And where did our psychedelic future go?" Here, he observes that, in spite of "that bright new day we thought was almost due," the psychedelic age ended when "the lightshows all burned out." Thus, in spite of any great social aspirations Austin's psychedelic scene may have entertained, the political and social power of this group was activated through the gathering of people in communal spaces like Vulcan Gas Co. and Chequered Flag. When those venues closed in the late 1960s, scene participants dispersed, and the scene's power to enact social change was reduced significantly. Furthermore, as the third and fourth stanzas indicate, the potency of the scene was reduced greatly by excessive drug use, which allowed the psychedelic age to disappear as scene participants "trip[ped] out for

hours on dreams of fruit and flowers.”

These stanzas deliver two distinct messages to two distinct audiences. To the cosmic cowboy, stanzas 3 through 7 of “Drifting through the Seventies” stand as a cynical warning that, despite how much positive energy might surround a local music scene like Austin’s progressive country movement, the importance of the scene will inevitably diminish as the core participants age, mature, and move on to other entertainment outlets. The speaker’s comments may be read, therefore, as an attempt to encourage the cosmic cowboy, characterized in the first two stanzas as disengaged from the Austin community residing outside of the Armadillo World Headquarters and other clubs, to become more socially active within the community. On the other hand, these stanzas also read as a direct criticism of those Austinites who are remnants of the psychedelic rock scene at Vulcan Gas Co. and Chequered Flag, inquiring, “Where has our Psychedelic America gone?” Like the cosmic cowboys, the speaker claims, these residents once had lofty goals for community action and social responsibility, but these goals may have fallen to the wayside as new economic opportunities arrived in Austin and scene participants forsook “that bright new day we thought was almost due” in order to care for their families. Thus Clay’s speaker appeals to the psychedelic holdovers to reinvigorate their social purpose and to serve as role models for the younger generation. Moreover, Clay’s rhetorical question may also stand as a prediction of the cosmic cowboy’s eventual demise and a criticism of the intensity and “sincerity” of Austin’s young people.

And where has Psychedelic America gone?  
 All those swinging days and nights of yesteryear  
 When we'd trip out for hours on dreams of fruit and flowers  
 But the kids nowadays are drinking wine and beer.

Where have my psychedelic posters gone?  
 Did the landlord burn 'em where we used to live?  
 My memory has lapsed, and it used to be a steel trap,  
 But nowadays it's much more like a sieve.

Where have our psychedelic records gone?  
 I wonder did the junkies take 'em out?  
 Are they standing on the Drag by the guy that's selling rags  
 Trying to sell 'em off so they can get laid out?

And where did our psychedelic future go?  
 That bright new day we thought was almost due.  
 We missed the turn no doubt when the lightshows all burned out  
 Like the minds of many speed freaks that I know.

Where has Psychedelic America gone?  
 Where do we go if we know we can't go there?  
 Where do we have our fun if life is not yet done?  
 I can't stay here; I gotta go somewhere.

**Figure 2-9.** John Clay, "Drifting through the Seventies" (1973), Stanzas 3-7.

The seventh stanza of "Drifting through the Seventies" is a transitional one that trades the speaker's criticism of the psychedelic age for a satire of the values put forth in Michael Murphey's "Cosmic Cowboy" and other romantic regionalist songs. This stanza witnesses the speaker at the nadir of his despair, asking, "Where do we have our fun if our life is not yet done?" As in the romantic regionalist songs, the speaker here reaches a moment of crisis when the pressures of his current environment—in this case, the constant reminders that the psychedelic age has passed—push him to search for new climes. As the third section of the song begins, therefore, the speaker prepares to enter the idealized world of the cosmic cowboy. Although the song does not adhere to the structural complexities of the songs of Murphey, Clark, and others in favor of a strophic form more common to ballads and other folksongs, this transitional stanza indicates that Clay is satirizing not only the ideology of the cosmic cowboy, but also the songs that

propagated the message of romantic regionalism.

After presenting a particularly bleak outlook on the power of local music scenes to enact social change in the second section of “Drifting through the Seventies,” the final six stanzas unleash a direct attack on the romantic regionalism of the cosmic cowboy generation and the popularity of the “back-to-the-land” movement (Figure 2-10). In the eighth stanza, Clay’s speaker exclaims that he wants to be a “plastic plowboy,” punning the name of the cosmic cowboy in such a way as to castigate the perceived artificiality of the emergent youth population. This criticism could have been, and often was, leveled on nearly all aspects of the cosmic cowboy, from the commercial origins of the music to which he listened to the strange combination of hippie and cowboy imagery he drew upon in his attire and his attitudes. Furthermore, as the ninth stanza indicates, part of the cosmic cowboy’s perceived artificiality is the result of his own socioeconomic status, observing that “the city’s not my home, [*sic*] it’s the suburbs that I’m from, / But the country’s where I wanna spend my time.” For Clay, therefore, the cosmic cowboy/plastic plowboy’s desire to move to the country is described as the prerogative of his social standing because he is not forced to stay there like full-time rural dwellers. Rather, the speaker observes in an offhand comment that concludes the song that he needs only to “be a plastic plowboy / Till something better comes around.”

So I wanna be a plastic plowboy.  
 Sophisticates don't make it anymore.  
 You cannot say you're hip if you don't know how to kick the ship.  
 Things today ain't like they were before.

I wanna live out in the country.  
 This city trip's too heavy on my mind.  
 Oh the city's not my home, it['s] the suburbs that I'm from,  
 But the country's where I wanna spend my time.

I wanna goat and several chickens  
 And an armadillo digging in the yard.  
 Grackles hopping across the land, and 'possums in the garbage cans.  
 I wanna raise some plants if it['s] not hard.

I wanna raise some carrots and some spinach,  
 Tomatoes and some watermelon, too.  
 Do you think we could get by on watermelon pie  
 If we lived on that all the summer thru?

When winter comes, we'll eat the cats and puppies  
 And the grackle birds that ate our chicken feed.  
 Armadillo will taste nice and 'possums fine with rice,  
 But the goat can live if he doesn't eat our weed.

'Cause how can you live out in the country  
 If you always have to see it when you're down?  
 So if things get too hard, I will know it's gone too far,  
 And I'll be a plastic plowboy back in town.

And I'll be a plastic plowboy  
 Till something else better comes around.

**Figure 2-10. John Clay, "Drifting through the Seventies" (1973), Stanzas 8-14.**

Just as romantic regionalism in progressive country music constructed a rural landscape that was free of generational, racial, gender, and class conflict and that would permit a relatively easy way of life, Clay's plastic plowboy enters a realm that poses a number of almost insurmountable challenges. The tenth and eleventh stanzas recall the naïveté of Murphey's cosmic cowboy, who thinks that life on the range will be a place where he can "ride and rope and hoot" as the plastic plowboy paints a vivid pastoral portrait in which he can commune directly with nature:

I wanna goat and several chickens  
 And an armadillo digging in the yard,

Grackles hopping across the land, and ‘possums in the garbage cans.  
I wanna raise some plants if it’s not too hard.

Unfortunately for Clay’s plastic plowboy, his tenacity and idealism is soon challenged as conditions worsen in the winter, when food becomes scarce and he is forced to “eat the cats and the puppies / And the grackle birds that ate our chicken feed” in the twelfth stanza. These challenges turn out to be much too difficult for Clay’s plastic plowboy, who soon grows tired of the hard work needed to cultivate a crop, the instability of food supplies, and the absence of a regular source of marijuana; as the speaker realizes the possibility of the goat eating his stash of marijuana, he contemplates aloud, “How can you live out in the country / If you always have to see it when you’re down?” While Clay’s portrait may appear to be overly cynical, many people who, like the cosmic cowboy/plastic plowboy, left middle-class suburban neighborhoods for the country, found the daily challenges of rural life to be too difficult and eventually returned to their suburban environments. As Eleanor Agnew observes in her history/memoir of the back-to-the-land movement of the 1970s:

Many of us had clearly romanticized the idea of low-income living because of our lack of exposure to it.... As refugees from the middle class seeking asylum within the peaceful shelter of genteel poverty, many of us had a rude awakening. Instead of the poor-but-happy lifestyle we had anticipated, we got tension, sporadic or nonexistent income, and broken cars.<sup>47</sup>

Clay’s plastic plowboy/cosmic cowboy is quickly awakened to these problems, but, like the people Agnew describes, he has the socioeconomic status and flexibility to live wherever he may wish. As he observes at the conclusion of the last stanza, “So if things get too hard, I will know it’s gone too far / And I’ll be a plastic plowboy back in town.”

---

<sup>47</sup> Eleanor Agnew, *Back from the Land: How Young Americans Went to Nature in the 1970s, and Why They Came Back* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2004), 117-118.

In some ways, the criticisms that Clay levied against the cosmic cowboy generation in “Drifting through the Seventies” were warranted. Evidence indicates that many members of Austin’s youth population did not fully appreciate the hardships of daily life in a rural environment for which they were not prepared. Furthermore, it is instructive that Clay’s ballad points to the privileged status of most members of the cosmic cowboy generation because the romantic regionalist tropes that dominated early manifestations of progressive country music were informed by racial, gender, and class positions that granted them a degree of freedom of choice that the rural poor whom they emulated did not possess.

Murphey, the party responsible for naming the generation and for providing fodder for Clay’s pun, soon responded to the challenges set forth in “Drifting through the Seventies.” Yet Murphey’s reply shocked many fans in Austin because of his capitulation to Clay’s incisive criticism. In an 11 April 1974 article in *Rolling Stone*—exactly seven months after the song appeared in *The Rag*—Murphey noted his disappointment with the results of his song, observing that “Cosmic Cowboy” was not an earnest manifestation of the romantic regionalism described above, but was instead “meant... as satire. People here took it seriously[,] and now we’ve got a bunch of long-haired rednecks running around.”<sup>48</sup> Similarly, in another April 1974 interview with Chet Flippo, this time for *Texas Parade* magazine, Murphey observed that he “never intended that it be taken seriously.... Somehow that phrase caught on and people said, yeah, that’s what we are and they started wearing boots and huge cowboy hats. It went too far.”<sup>49</sup> By

---

<sup>48</sup> Flippo, “Austin: The Hucksters Are Coming,” 24.

<sup>49</sup> Chet Flippo, “Hill Country Sound,” *Texas Parade* 34, no. 11 (April 1974), 20.



Murphey's estimation, therefore, the subjects of Clay's criticism had fundamentally misinterpreted the message of "Cosmic Cowboy," hearing the song not as a satire of the emerging "back to the land" movement but instead as a literal celebration of Austin, Texas, and the American West.

Less than a year after "Cosmic Cowboy" premiered before an enthusiastic Armadillo crowd, the ironic distance Murphey placed between himself and the primary interpretation of his local hit seemed suspicious to many fans and musicians in Austin. Murphey may well have intended the song to be a satire of the romantic regionalism that had already emerged within the Austin-Nashville-Los Angeles triangle (as evidenced by "L.A. Freeway"), but, to the people who came to Austin because of "Cosmic Cowboy," his public disavowal of the song's idealism made them distrustful of Murphey.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, as Clay's response indicates, some outsiders to the cosmic cowboy phenomenon had, by early 1974, grown equally weary of the free-spirited youth movement, and Murphey may have wished to clarify his position on the matter further.

Yet Murphey's proposal of an ironic intent of "Cosmic Cowboy" and his attempts to distance himself from the flourishing cosmic cowboy generation do not make sense when his contemporaneous local political activities are taken into account. First, Murphey's 1974 performance of "Cosmic Cowboy" at Willie Nelson's 4<sup>th</sup> of July Picnic in College Station, Texas, stands out as a vocal criticism of the increased rate of development that was taking place in Austin, as well as Dallas, Fort Worth, San Antonio, and Houston. Furthermore, a 22 March 1974 article in *The Daily Texan* indicates that Murphey was active in the anti-development protests that cropped up in 1974 and that

---

<sup>50</sup> Archie Green, interview by author, 25 May 2006.

surrounded the City of Austin's attempts to implement the "Austin Tomorrow" initiative.

Murphey comments that

I get the feeling right now that Austin is like a small town that's about two years away from becoming a city. I admit I shared in starting up the mystique, so now when I go around the country[,] I don't play up the scene.... I'd like to get people to work together to change the zoning ordinances in Austin so realtors cannot subdivide the land around Lake Travis into lots and destroy the woods for apartment complexes.<sup>51</sup>

Murphey's desire to prevent widespread development in Austin was primarily motivated by his concern for the sanctity of his own privacy; he resided near Lake Travis. In early 1974, Murphey was on a whirlwind publicity tour to establish distance between himself and his most popular song, positing that the influx of newcomers to Austin had misinterpreted the romanticized portraits of unspoiled Texan spaces in "Cosmic Cowboy." But, at the same, Murphey was working desperately to preserve his own private liberating Texan space. This was for naught, however; journalist Jan Reid observes in *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock* that, later that year, Murphey moved to Colorado to escape what he perceived to be the imminent collapse of the city and the local music scene.<sup>52</sup> Thus, just like the plastic plowboy of John Clay's "Drifting through the Seventies," Murphey was forced to leave Austin when the pressures of daily existence as one of the figureheads of the city's music scene grew to be too much for him to handle. Murphey's idyllic depiction of Austin led, therefore, to the destruction of its tranquility and led him to escape from the very place to which he had escaped initially.

If Michael Murphey's "Cosmic Cowboy" became a lightning rod for criticism

---

<sup>51</sup> David Dailey, "Michael Murphey: More than a Cosmic Cowboy," *The Daily Texan* (22 March 1974).

<sup>52</sup> Reid, p. 211; Flippo, "Austin: The Hucksters Are Coming," p. 24.

from outsiders who perceived Austin's progressive country scene as too idealistic for its own good, a contemporaneous strain of songs written by Austin-based songwriters provides clearer insight into the challenges that faced those young people who sought to get in touch with their Texan roots by venturing outside the safe spaces of Austin's nightclub scene. Songs like Ray Wylie Hubbard's "Up Against the Wall, Redneck Mother" (1972), Gary P. Nunn's "London Homesick Blues" (1973), and Kinky Friedman's "They Ain't Making Jews Like Jesus Anymore" (1974) confronted the idealistic constructions of "Texan-ness" promulgated and propagated by romantic regionalist songs like "Cosmic Cowboy." They did so by drawing their attention both to those racial, gender, class, and generational conflicts that emerge in the rural spaces of Texas; by challenging the use of signifiers of Texan identity to disseminate a countercultural message; and by adopting the sounds of Texan honky tonk music to offer an ironic musical take on the cosmic cowboy's encounters with the region's rednecks. Furthermore, these songs also challenged representations of rural America in mainstream country music, using Merle Haggard's controversial depiction of conservative America, "Okie from Muskogee," as a foil against which both the naïveté and ambition of the cosmic cowboy generation could be caricatured and critiqued.

Few country songs have been the source of great controversy on the national stage, but in the more than thirty-five years since the 1969 Capitol Records release of Merle Haggard and Roy Edward Burris's "Okie from Muskogee,"<sup>53</sup> fans and detractors of country music alike have debated the intentions of the song. Haggard, the son of working-class Dust Bowl migrants who settled in Bakersfield, California, honed his

---

<sup>53</sup> Merle Haggard, "Okie from Muskogee/If I Had Left It Up to You" (Capitol 2626).

musical skills in the region's many large dancehalls, playing bass for Wynn Stewart, Buck Owens, and others. After signing a contract with Capitol Records in 1965, Haggard worked to establish a link to the legacies of fellow Dust Bowl migrant Woody Guthrie, becoming immensely popular among some pockets of folk music enthusiasts, performing songs like "Mama Tried," which chronicles a convict's criminal path and the unceasing love of his mother, and "Sing Me Back Home," which captures the last request of a condemned convict.<sup>54</sup> But Haggard's cultural capital among the liberal, folk-singing crowd was spent following the release of "Okie from Muskogee," a song that depicts a conservative, Middle American man's perspective on the wrong-doings of late 1960s counterculture. The "Silent Majority" and high-ranking officials in the Republican Party rapidly embraced the song, propelling it to number one on the *Billboard* country charts.<sup>55</sup> Although Haggard has often claimed in interviews that "Okie from Muskogee" was both intended as a satire of conservative America and was tossed off as a bit of comic relief during a songwriting session or a rehearsal,<sup>56</sup> the song's message encapsulated working-class attitudes toward liberal politics, represented by the hippie counterculture, and

---

<sup>54</sup> Bill C. Malone, *Don't Get Above Your Raisin': Country Music and the Southern Working Class* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 46. "Mama Tried" and "Sing Me Back Home" were the title tracks of Capitol ST-2972 and ST-2848, respectively.

<sup>55</sup> Bryan Di Salvatore, "Merle Haggard," in *The Encyclopedia of Country Music*, ed. Paul Kingsbury (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 223; Malone, *Country Music, U.S.A.*, 319. On 21 March 1972, Haggard received a letter expunging and pardoning Haggard's criminal record from Ronald Reagan, and, on 13 July 1973, played a concert at the White House at the request of First Lady Pat Nixon. This performance took place, perhaps ironically, on the same day that the press implicated Nixon in the Watergate scandal (Merle Haggard with Tom Carter, *Merle Haggard's My House of Memories: For the Record* [New York: HarperEntertainment, 1999], 227-230; Malone, *Country Music, U.S.A.*, 373).

<sup>56</sup> Cecilia Tichi, *High Lonesome: The American Culture of Country Music* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 198-200; Malone, *Country Music, U.S.A.*, 319; Di Salvatore, 223; Jens Lund and R. Serge Denisoff, "The Folk Music Revival and the Counter Culture: Contributions and Contradictions," *The Journal of American Folklore* 84, no. 334 (October-December 1971), 404; Barbara Ching, *Wrong's What I Do Best: Hard Country Music and Contemporary Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 43-44.

galvanized mainstream American opposition to the counterculture of the late 1960s.<sup>57</sup> As Bill C. Malone has described, “The blue-collar patriotism heard in songs like Merle Haggard’s ‘Okie from Muskogee’ . . . appealed to audiences throughout the nation and encouraged the belief that country music voiced the values, aspirations, and prejudices of forgotten working people, north and south.”<sup>58</sup>

*Verse 1*  
We don't smoke marijuana in Muskogee.  
We don't take our trips on LSD.  
We don't burn our draft cards down on Main Street.  
We like livin' right, and bein' free.

*Chorus*  
I'm proud to be an Okie from Muskogee,  
A place where even squares can have a ball.  
We still wave Old Glory down at the courthouse,  
And white lightnin's still the biggest thrill of all

*Verse 2*  
We don't make a party out of lovin'.  
We like holdin' hands and pitchin' woo.  
We don't let our hair grow long and shaggy  
Like the hippies out in San Francisco do.

*Chorus*

*Verse 3*  
Leather boots are still in style for manly footwear;  
Beads and Roman sandals won't be seen.  
Football's still the roughest thing on campus,  
And the kids here still respect the college dean.

*Chorus*

*Tag*  
In Muskogee, Oklahoma, USA.

Figure 2-11. Merle Haggard/Roy Edward Burris, "Okie from Muskogee" (1969).

Regardless of the meaning that Haggard intended when he composed “Okie from Muskogee,” the song’s speaker clearly delineates the differences between mainstream

---

<sup>57</sup> Malone, *Don't Get Above Your Raisin'*, 241-243.

<sup>58</sup> Malone, *Don't Get Above Your Raisin'*, 45-46.

American culture and the hippie counterculture (Figure 2-11).<sup>59</sup> Rather than directly criticizing the hippie culture, the Okie generally constructs what is bad about the youth counterculture by describing what is not done in Muskogee. For instance, in the first verse, the speaker explains that drugs and rebellion are not acceptable in Muskogee. Haggard's Okie is particularly critical of what he perceives to be the self-indulgence of the hippie counterculture: they consume drugs, partake of free love ("We don't make a party out of lovin'"), and refuse to fight for the safety and security of their country. In the chorus, conversely, the Okie proclaims the pride he has for his heritage and his enjoyment of simple pleasures, which when done in moderation, satisfy the entertainment needs of the local population. Moreover, as Jerome L. Rodnitzky has observed, "Okie from Muskogee" represents a direct rebuttal to the purported protests of the hippie counterculture by modifying "the simple unvarnished Guthrie-Seeger style... [to create] country-and-western topical ballads that appeal to the prejudices of older, middle-America."<sup>60</sup> The prejudices to which Rodnitzky alludes are clarified by Paul DiMaggio, Richard A. Peterson, and Jack Esco, Jr., in a 1972 article entitled "Country Music: Ballad of the Silent Majority," citing "Okie from Muskogee"'s "contrast [of] Godless, unclean,

---

<sup>59</sup> R. Serge Denisoff has characterized this type of protest as "rhetorical." As opposed to the "magnetic" protest song, which seeks to build consensus among listeners to undertake a concrete action, the "rhetorical" protest song is a song "which stressed individual indignation and dissent but did not offer a solution in a movement. The song was a statement of dissent which said, 'I protest, I do not concur,' or just plain 'damn you'" ("The Evolution of the American Protest Song," in *The Sounds of Social Change: Studies in Popular Culture*, eds. R. Serge Denisoff and Richard A. Peterson [Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1972], 18).

<sup>60</sup> Jerome L. Rodnitzky, "The Decline of Contemporary Protest Music," *Popular Music and Society* 1, no. 1 (Fall 1971), 46.

foul-mouthed, dope-taking, unconventional, educated, complex, urban youths with their virtuous small town counterparts....”<sup>61</sup>

While Haggard’s juxtaposition of urban and small-town values in “Okie from Muskogee” appealed to his conservative listeners (as evidenced by its four weeks at the top of the *Billboard* country charts), liberal commentators, including academics, journalists, and musicians like those in Austin, who perceived themselves as countercultural elements, were much less receptive. The most common critical response to “Okie” was informed by the ongoing civil rights conflicts in the American South and the alliance of Nashville’s country music establishment (of which Haggard was perceived to be a major part, despite being based on the West Coast) with the Republican Party and with perennial independent and ardent segregationist George Wallace.<sup>62</sup> As sociologist Jens Lund observed in 1972, songs like “Okie from Muskogee” underscored the tensions between the cultures associated with mainstream country music and with rock music: “The efforts of the peace marchers must have inflamed the ire of a number of country songwriters, because many of the Vietnam War songs refer to the demonstrators, and in such terms as ‘cowards,’ ‘bums,’ ‘beatniks,’ ‘traitors,’ and ‘scum.’”<sup>63</sup> While Haggard does not go to the lengths that Lund describes in “Okie from Muskogee” (nor did most country music reaching format radio airwaves, for that matter), such songs permitted the

---

<sup>61</sup> 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 McNally and Company, 1972), 46.

<sup>62</sup> Hemphill, 90-91.

<sup>63</sup> Jens Lund, “Fundamentalism, Racism, and Political Reaction in Country Music,” in *The Sounds of Social Change*, eds. R. Serge Denisoff and Richard A. Peterson (Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1972), 88. Among the songs Lund lists under this rubric are Pat Boone’s “Wish You Were Here, Buddy” and Stonewall Jackson’s “The Minute Men Are Turning in Their Graves.”

perpetuation of rural and Southern stereotypes that conformed to the images of backwoods “rednecks” broadcast on the evening news and transformed into Hollywood caricatures in films like 1969’s *Easy Rider*.<sup>64</sup> DiMaggio, *et al*, contend, however, that, although an interpretation of country music extrapolated from the imagery of songs like “Okie” must disregard more socially progressive songs by some of the same artists, such songs also wreaked untold havoc on country music by leading “popular commentators to see all country music as right-wing know-nothingness.”<sup>65</sup> Perceptions of country music that are drawn from outside observation, therefore, deny country artists a satirical or ironic voice. Simultaneously, these observations result in a sort of caricature of rural dwellers, conservatives, and Southerners that may be used as a symbol for the outsiders’ social progress.

The caricature of the conservative, reactionary Southerner proved to be a perfect foil for Austin’s cosmic cowboy generation as they ventured into the real rural spaces of Texas to realize their romanticized visions of pre-industrial society. While some members of the cosmic cowboy generation certainly attempted to live in rural Texas as they fled the middle-class, suburban environment within which they were raised, the

---

<sup>64</sup> Lund concludes the article by extending these stereotypes through the entire corpus of country music, noting, “In the United States, the rural and lower classes have traditionally been hotbeds of conservatism and reaction. Their music, both folk and commercial, has consistently reflected such themes. When not overtly expressed..., these traits have been manifested in the vocal and instrumental styles of their musical performance. Indeed, country music’s distinctive ‘sound’ reflects its conservative and discriminatory make-up, even when a given song has not overt political or religious message” (*Ibid*, 91).

Rodnitzky observes that songs like “Okie from Muskogee” and “The Fighting Side of Me” mark a significant change in the purpose of working-class protest songs: “It is perhaps logical that songs sung in the simple unvarnished Guthrie-Seeger style are now most often country-and-western topical ballads that appeal to the prejudices of an older, middle-America—songs like ‘Please Mr. Professor,’ ‘Welfare Cadillac’ [*sic*], and ‘Okie from Muskogee.’ These new protest songs on the right are destroying another folk-protest myth—*specifically, the legend that topical songs appealing to the discontented common ‘folk’ were almost by definition ballads sympathetic to social reform*” (Rodnitzky, 46 [emphasis added]).

<sup>65</sup> DiMaggio, *et al*, 44.



majority of Austin's youth population, preoccupied with the daily pressures of being university students, traveled to the country on the weekends, often in search of the country music performed in rural honky tonks. The cosmic cowboy's idealistic imaginings were often free of social conflict and focused on personal liberation. Unfortunately, many rural dwellers did not share in their beliefs. Rather, many rural Texans were, like Haggard's Okie, distrustful of the cosmic cowboys for a number of reasons, not the least of which were their shaggy appearance, their liberal political views, and, perhaps most importantly, their middle-class origins. While most encounters between the real "cedar choppers" or "rednecks" and Austin's youths resulted in nothing more than mere social discomfort, other occasions certainly proved violent as native rural dwellers challenged the legitimacy of the cosmic cowboy's presence in the rural social space of the honky tonk.<sup>66</sup> The cosmic cowboys, in their search for authentic rural experiences and country music, thus encountered firsthand the stereotypes defined in "Okie from Muskogee" and "The Fighting Side of Me." As a result, some Austin songwriters, most of whom were not signed to songwriting contracts in Los Angeles, New York, or Nashville, composed songs that used Haggard's Okie as a symbol of the challenges and dangers facing those who seek to realize their romantic regionalist visions.

One of the most frequently discussed and covered songs in this "Okie from Muskogee" song family is Ray Wylie Hubbard's 1972 composition "Up Against the Wall, Redneck Mother." Hubbard, a native of the Dallas area, purportedly wrote the

---

<sup>66</sup> Jan Reid, telephone interview by author, 20 April 2005. Reid recounted how Willie Nelson diffused a potential brawl upon learning that a group of his fans from Austin were planning to seek him out in a rural honky tonk. Nelson reportedly stopped the group in the parking lot and informed them that he would be playing in Austin in just a few days and that he would prefer to see them there.

song in response to an incident that occurred when he purchased beer at the D-Bar-D Bar in Red River, New Mexico, in which an older woman sitting at the bar challenged Hubbard's hair length and patriotic beliefs. Upon returning to his home (which he shared with bassist Bob Livingstone), he composed the first verse of "Up Against the Wall" and a rousing acrostic of the word "mother" in response to the "redneck mother" at the bar (Figure 2-12). The song's second verse, Hubbard claims, was composed over the telephone during a break in the recording session for Jerry Jeff Walker's *Viva Terlingua!* for which Livingstone was the bassist.<sup>67</sup>

The song falls into three distinct sections. First, the song's two verses caricature the redneck by building on the imagery of Haggard's "Okie." Hubbard's redneck "was born in Oklahoma," invoking Haggard's model directly in the very first line of the song. His decision to grant this line such structural significance represents a very clear attempt to tie the redneck to the Okie, and the subsequent linkage of the letter "H" in the acrostic with Haggard himself further underscores this message. Furthermore, when Willie Nelson's Family Band performed "Up Against the Wall" in its live sets, it was often paired with "Okie from Muskogee," featuring lead guitarist Jody Payne as the vocalist.<sup>68</sup> Hubbard grants the redneck the same type of sensitivity that the Okie grants "the hippies out in San Francisco," describing only the most superficial aspects of his character. His wife has an absurdly long name ("Betty Lou Thelma Liz"), and he drinks cheap beer and

---

<sup>67</sup> Ray Wylie Hubbard, telephone interview by author, 6 July 2005; Reid, *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*, 105-106; Rick Koster, *Texas Music* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2000), 43.

<sup>68</sup> Willie Nelson, *Austin City Limits* (17 October 1974) (author's collection); *idem*, Panther Hall, Fort Worth, Texas (26 February 1975) (author's collection); *idem*, Ebbets Field, Denver, Colorado (2 September 1975) (author's collection); Willie Nelson and David Allan Coe, KAFM-FM 92.5 Broadcast (1 July 1974) (author's collection). Ironic performance of "Okie from Muskogee" and "The Fighting Side of Me" was quite common in contemporaneous folk music circles, as well (Lund and Denisoff, 403-404).

cheap liquor, drives a fifteen-year-old pickup truck (probably out of necessity, not choice), and is a self-described “goat roper” who spends his free time in a honky tonk. While “Up Against the Wall, Redneck Mother” does not grant the redneck any real humanity, Hubbard’s use of stereotypes functions to underscore the distance between the outside observer and the threatening monster who is “kickin’ hippies’ asses and raisin’ hell” and, in some ways, represents the confrontation of stereotypes that must have characterized many initial meetings between cosmic cowboys and rural Texans.

*Verse 1:*  
He was born in Oklahoma.  
His wife’s name is Betty Lou Thelma Liz.  
He’s not responsible for what he’s doin’,  
‘Cause his mama made him what he is.

*Chorus:*  
And it’s up against the wall, redneck mothers,  
Mothers who have raised their sons so well.  
He’s thirty-four and drinkin’ in a honky tonk,  
Just kickin’ hippies’ asses and raisin’ hell.

*Verse 2:*  
He sure does like his Falstaff beer.  
He likes to chase it down with that Wild Turkey liquor.  
He drives a ’57 GMC pickup truck.  
He’s got a gun rack, a “Goat Ropers Need Love, Too” sticker.

*Chorus*

*Acrostic:*  
M is for the mudflaps you give me for my pickup truck.  
O is for the oil I put on my hair.  
T is for T-Bird.  
H is for Haggard.  
E is for eggs, and  
R is for... REDNECK!

*Chorus*

**Figure 2-12.** Ray Wylie Hubbard, "Up Against the Wall, Redneck Mother" (1972). As recorded on Jerry Jeff Walker, *Viva Terlingua!* (MCA 382).

This cultural distance is accentuated further still in the chorus, in which it is clear that the speaker is not in the immediate presence of the redneck, but is instead recounting a direct contact (which is supported by Hubbard’s recollection of the song’s genesis),

exacerbating the redneck stereotype, or both. In most performances of “Up Against the Wall, Redneck Mother,” including Jerry Jeff Walker’s initial 1973 recording and live performances by Willie Nelson guitarist Jody Payne, the chorus becomes a participatory free-for-all, in which the audience and sidemen alike can taunt the redneck and the redneck’s mother.<sup>69</sup> At the end of the chorus’s second line, which comments sarcastically that the mothers have “raised their sons so well,” everyone in the venue repeats “so well” at least three times in order to drive the criticism home; Willie Nelson’s band often traded the final “so well” for “so what?,” alluding to the futility of any efforts the mother might have made to groom a well-mannered young man. Furthermore, some live performances also added a participatory response to the chorus’s first line, adding the words “mean motherfucker” to indicate that the mother is just as ignorant and mean-spirited as her son.<sup>70</sup> It would have been imprudent for someone like Hubbard or any of his cosmic cowboy contemporaries to express such sentiments in a rural honky tonk, as it would have most certainly led to a physical altercation. Rather, as cultural critic Barbara Ching has theorized, such commentaries are indicative of the physical and cultural distance between the speaker and the object of his critique.<sup>71</sup>

The song’s narrative climax occurs in the song’s third section, an acrostic of the word “mother” that satirizes the sentiments of innumerable Mother’s Day greeting cards. Performed by most interpreters with a marked “hillbilly” accent, replete with excessively

---

<sup>69</sup> Jerry Jeff Walker, ¡Viva Terlingua! (MCA 382); Willie Nelson, *Austin City Limits* (17 October 1974) (author’s collection); *idem*, Panther Hall, Fort Worth, Texas (26 February 1975) (author’s collection); *idem*, Ebbets Field, Denver, Colorado (2 September 1975) (author’s collection); Willie Nelson and David Allan Coe, KAFM-FM 92.5 Broadcast (1 July 1974) (author’s collection).

<sup>70</sup> Note especially the performance at Panther Hall, Fort Worth (26 February 1975).

<sup>71</sup> Ching, 43.

imprecise pitch and overly exaggerated pronunciations, the acrostic originated as an improvisatory component of the song, as Hubbard has recalled, as each performance yielded a different set of items.<sup>72</sup> In Jerry Jeff Walker's commercial recording of "Up Against the Wall, Redneck Mother," the items signified by each letter of the word "mother" are limited to clear symbols of redneck stereotypes—mud flaps, oil for his hair, and Merle Haggard—but this performance represents a much tamer and more marketable take on the acrostic than found in other performances. When Jody Payne performed "Up Against the Wall" with Willie Nelson and the Family Band, references to the mudflaps, oil, and Haggard remained, but the letter "e" was often replaced with "enema," perhaps implying something that the redneck was perceived as needing. The acrostic represents, therefore, an extension of the taunting and torment of the redneck character that first emerged in the chorus, mocking the love the redneck has for his mother by lampooning sentimental emotions. Thus, Hubbard's "Up Against the Wall, Redneck Mother" may be read as resistant to the dominance of rural Texan and southwestern culture while still acknowledging the cosmic cowboy's marginality within that culture.

Hubbard and nearly all of the artists who performed "Up Against the Wall, Redneck Mother" further underscore the song's caricature of the redneck by turning the sounds of the rural Texas honky tonk against him. The honky tonk style of Hank Williams, Ernest Tubb, Webb Pierce, and other similar performers from the 1940s and 1950s are characterized by a light, two-beat metric pulse and twanging, naturalized vocal deliveries. But in performances of "Up Against the Wall, Redneck Mother," the sounds themselves are also caricatured as the bass and drums articulate a plodding two-beat

---

<sup>72</sup> Hubbard, 6 July 2005.

pulse, the guitarists bend and slide into pitches, and the vocalists exaggerate the twang almost to a point of absurdity. Moreover, whereas the participatory vocals and instrumental arrangements of Murphey and Clark's songs reflect the idealism of the cosmic cowboy, the exaggerated performances of Hubbard's song make the cultural division between "hippies" and "rednecks" abundantly clear.

Whereas Hubbard's "Up Against the Wall, Redneck Mother" pokes fun at the Okie stereotype from a distance, Kinky Friedman's 1975 recording of "They Ain't Makin' Jews Like Jesus Anymore" engages with him directly. Friedman, the only son of one of Austin's most prominent Jewish couples and leader of the Texas Jewboys,<sup>73</sup> first broke into the progressive country scene with his 1973 Vanguard release *Sold American*,<sup>74</sup> which introduced his sardonic wit in songs like his anti-Women's Liberation rant "Get Your Biscuits in the Oven and Your Buns in the Bed" and his light-hearted retelling of Charles Whitman's shooting spree from the University of Texas bell tower in "The Ballad of Charles Whitman."<sup>75</sup>

Reviews of his debut album and the subsequent supporting tour often remarked on Friedman's exaggeration of stereotypes to the point of absurdity. A *Variety* review of a 1973 performance at New York's Max's Kansas City, for instance, exclaimed that, while his "delivery is tongue-in cheek," Friedman "carries C&W images to illogical

---

<sup>73</sup> Reid, *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*, 179-186.

<sup>74</sup> Vanguard 79333.

<sup>75</sup> Responses to "The Ballad of Charles Whitman" were understandably negative, given the short amount of time that had passed between the event and the release of *Sold American*. Friedman defended his decision to write the song in a radio interview in June 1975, explaining: "I would like to leave it in the song format because it says it better than I could articulate it otherwise, except that what it really is, is a — just that if you get blown away out of 27,000 people, I mean your number is up, you know, I mean so you, your number's up" (Richard "Kinky" Friedman and Jeffrey Mark Friedman, interview by Art Young, KRMH-FM, 10 June 1975, Oral History Transcript, 17-19, Austin History Center, Austin Public Library, Austin, Texas).

extremes.”<sup>76</sup> Such extremes were the key element of Friedman’s songwriting and performances, as he worked purposely to expose and satirize the prevailing stereotypes and sacred icons of Texan, Jewish, and hippie cultures alike. As he explained in a 1973 interview with Chet Flippo, one of the primary reasons he felt compelled to challenge these cultures was his deep-seated discomfort with his own identity as a Texan Jew:

Texas Jews are nerds, basically. Texas people have an attachment to Texas, Jews have an attachment to Jewish shit, and both are as repellant as they can be to everyone else. I don’t dig country folks, don’t like hanging around the truck stop, but I don’t feel at home with the Jews either.<sup>77</sup>

Friedman observed further that a similar discomfort with his identity led many executives within the Nashville music industry to grant him expressive liberties that were not always afforded all emerging country artists because of his Jewishness:

What’s funny is that the people in Nashville are taking us extremely seriously. You know, like a Charlie Pride thing: Jewish kid trying to break through. Southern people just don’t know Jews; all they know is niggers. They regard Jews like Chinese: Give ‘em enough rope and they’ll start a rope factory.<sup>78</sup>

Despite the freedom that the Nashville establishment granted Friedman, he observed in April 1975, on the eve of the release of his eponymous ABC Records release, that Nashville’s culture was no more comfortable than Texan or Jewish culture:

I phased out of Nashville.... I realized *why* the other night watching the Country Music Association awards. I saw Johnny Rodriguez, the spic, Charlie Pride, the coon, so there was a place for me, a white Jew. But I didn’t want to be their pet Jew, basically. I might have had a safe shot there but it would have been bad because it’s not me, man, those aren’t my people.<sup>79</sup>

---

<sup>76</sup> “New Acts: Kinky Friedman,” *Variety* 270 (9 May 1973), 248.

<sup>77</sup> Chet Flippo, “Ride ‘Em Jewboy: Kinky Friedman’s First Two Premieres,” *Rolling Stone* 134 (10 May 1973), 20.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> Larry Sloman, “Kinky and the Money Changers: *Crawdaddy* (April 1975), 31.

Many of Friedman's collaborators have observed that his increasing discomfort with all aspects of American society have made it difficult to work with him. But it was Friedman's fundamental lack of self-confidence and contentment with himself that permitted him to challenge the redneck culture of rural Texas and the absurdity of the cosmic cowboy generation in one blow, as exemplified by "They Ain't Makin' Jews Like Jesus Anymore."

Like "Up Against the Wall, Redneck Mother," "They Ain't Makin' Jews Like Jesus Anymore" is a third-person narrative, reporting the speaker's encounter with the Okie-redneck stereotype (Figure 2-13). But, whereas Hubbard uses the verses of "Up Against the Wall" to recount the speaker's own biased perceptions of the redneck, Friedman permits him to speak for himself, utilizing the verses to convey the dialogue that took place. The redneck conforms to much of the imagery already laid out in "Up Against the Wall"; the speaker confronts "A redneck nerd in a bowlin' shirt / a'guzzlin' Lone Star Beer." But when this redneck is permitted the opportunity to speak, his exaggerated ignorance and racism is made very clear. He instigates an argument, positing, "They oughta send you back to Russia [pronounced "rue-sha"], boy, or New York City, one. / You just wanna doodle a Christian girl, and you killed God's only son!" Unlike Hubbard's speaker, Friedman's does not slink away to criticize the redneck from a distance. Instead, he replies to the redneck's charges by inverting the redneck's anti-Semitism, exclaiming, "We Jews believe it was Santa Claus that killed Jesus Christ!" Shocked at the outsider's brazenness, the redneck inflicts what he believes to be the greatest insult, comparing the Jewish speaker to an African American: "'You know, you don't look Jewish,' he said, 'near as I can figure [pronounced "figger"]' / I had you



lamped for a slightly anemic, well-dressed country nigger.”

This technique of reported dialogue has two primary narrative effects. It first eliminates some of the physical and cultural distance between the outsider and the redneck by describing an *actual* verbal exchange and implying that the outsider has transgressed social and physical boundaries by entering the rural honky tonk, a transgression that is not made clear in Hubbard’s version. Moreover, this reported speech represents what ethnomusicologist Aaron A. Fox has described as the tendency for country songs to utilize “full indirect discourse,” which involves not only representing the syntax of the original dialogue, but also its timbre, accent, pitch, and rhythm, as a way to capture the voice of the culture itself.<sup>80</sup> Full indirect discourse permits Friedman to capture the immediacy of the conflict, something lacking in both the romantic regionalist songs of Murphey and Clark and in the resistant songs of Clay, Hubbard, and others. But more importantly, Friedman’s caricature of reported speech also facilitates the type of intensely personal criticism to which he was most attracted. In reporting the dialogue using the timbre, rhythm, and accent of the redneck’s own voice, Friedman can attack not only the redneck’s words, but he can also expose his contempt for everything the “ethnocentric racist” represents.

---

<sup>80</sup> Aaron A. Fox, *Real Country: Music and Language in Working-Class Culture* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), 37-41.

*Verse 1*  
 Well, a redneck nerd in a bowling shirt was a-guzzlin Lone Star beer,  
 Talking religion and-uh politics for all the world to hear.  
 "They oughta send you back to Roosha, boy, or New York City, one.  
 You just want to doodle a Christian girl, and you killed God's only son."

*Verse 2*  
 I said, "Has it occurred to you, you nerd, that that's not very nice?  
 We Jews believe it was Santa Claus that killed Jesus Christ."  
 "You know, you don't look Jewish," he said. "Near as I could figger,  
 I had you lamped for a slightly anemic, well-dressed country nigger."

*Chorus*  
 No, they ain't makin' Jews like Jesus anymore.  
 They don't turn the other cheek the way they done before.  
 He started in to shoutin' and a-spittin' on the floor.  
 Lord, they ain't makin' Jews like Jesus anymore.

*Verse 3*  
 He says, "I ain't a racist but Aristitle Onassis is one Greek we don't need.  
 And them niggers, Jews, and Sigma Nus, all they ever do is breed.  
 And wops and micks and slopes and spics and spooks are on my list.  
 And there's one little Hebe from the heart of Texas. Is there anyone I missed?"

*Verse 4*  
 Well, I hits him with everything I had right square between the eyes.  
 I says, "I'm gonna gitcha, you son of a bitch ya, for spoutin' that pack of lies.  
 If there's one thing I cant abide, its an ethnocentric racist;  
 Now you take back that thing you said 'bout Aristitle Onassis."

*Chorus*

Figure 2-13. Kinky Friedman, "They Ain't Makin' Jews Like Jesus Anymore" (1975).<sup>81</sup>

Friedman's "They Ain't Makin' Jews Like Jesus Anymore" and Hubbard's "Up Against the Wall, Redneck Mother" illustrate the conflict between rural Texans and cosmic cowboys by caricaturing the "Okie" and lampooning Haggard's song. Gary P. Nunn's "London Homesick Blues" (1973), on the other hand, posits that, by self-consciously adopting the fashions and music of rural Texas, liberal observers might accidentally mistake the cosmic cowboys for Okies (Figure 2-14).<sup>82</sup> Nunn, the keyboardist for Jerry Jeff Walker's Lost Gonzo Band, posits that the cosmic cowboy's

<sup>81</sup> This transcription attempts to capture Friedman's exaggerated pronunciations.

<sup>82</sup> Jerry Jeff Walker, *Viva Terlingua!*.

progressive ideals were often misunderstood or ignored altogether because of his rural image. "London Homesick Blues," written in March 1973 while on a trip to London with Michael Murphey,<sup>83</sup> takes the form of a letter home to Austin, written by a young Texan tourist in London who is overwhelmed by the cultural insensitivity that the British show him. In the first verse, he observes that the people he encounters in London lack two integral cowboy traits: charity toward one's neighbor and a colorful sense of humor. Londoners immediately fail to meet the standards of the cowboy code of ethics, which demands that, among other things, every man be socially responsible and able to demonstrate his masculinity through the exchange of bawdy jokes and the telling of tall tales. It is noteworthy, therefore, that the Texan speaker is ready to leave London by the end of the first verse to return home to a more congenial and humane clime "just as fast as [he] can."

*Verse 1*  
When you're down on your luck and you ain't got a buck, in London, you're a goner.  
Even London Bridge is fallin' down and moved to Arizona. Now I know why.  
And I'll substantiate the rumor that the English sense of humor is dryer than the Texas sand.  
You can put up your dukes, you can bet your boots, but I'm leavin' just as fast as I can.

*Chorus*  
I wanna go home with the armadillo,  
Good country music from Amarillo and Abilene,  
The friendliest people and the prettiest women you ever seen.

*Verse 2*  
Well it's cold over here, and I swear, I wish they'd turn the heat on.  
And where in the world is that English girl I promised I would meet on the third floor?  
And of the whole damn lot, the only friend I've got is a smoke and a cheap guitar.  
My mind keeps roamin', my heart keeps longin' to be home in a Texas bar.

*Chorus*

*Verse 3*  
Well I decided that I'd get my cowboy hat and go down to Marble Arch Station,  
'Cause when a Texan fancies, he'll take his chances, chances will be taken, that's for sure.  
And 'em limey eyes, they were eyin' the prize some people call "manly footwear."  
And they said, "You're from down south, and when you open your mouth, you always seem to put your foot there."

*Chorus*

Figure 2-14. Gary P. Nunn, "London Homesick Blues" (1973).

---

<sup>83</sup> Kathleen Hudson, *Telling Stories, Writing Songs: An Album of Texas Songwriters* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 188.

In the last verse of “London Homesick Blues,” the speaker becomes aware that his discomfort is not solely the result of his own ignorance of British culture, but is compounded by British misunderstanding of his Southern heritage. He relates that he has encountered people who comment: “You’re from down South, and when you open your mouth, you always seem to put your foot there.” While the meaning of this statement is obvious, Nunn highlights its condescending tone by referring directly to Haggard’s “Okie from Muskogee.” In the line preceding the British condemnation of his apparent rural background, the speaker relates that “[them] Limey eyes, they were eyin’ the prize some people call ‘manly footwear.’” This passage invokes the third verse of Haggard’s song, in which the speaker slyly criticizes hippie fashion by noting that, in Muskogee, Oklahoma, “Leather boots are still in style for manly footwear. / Beads and Roman sandals won’t be seen.” As an Austin-based world traveler, however, Nunn’s speaker is neither a traditional Oklahoman cowboy in boots nor a member of the countercultural vanguard. He is instead one of the many people who occupy the grey area between the two extremes. He soon realizes, however, that in “tak[ing the] chance” of donning his cowboy hat during a sight-seeing trip, he immediately becomes an object of ridicule for values that he does not believe he holds. Because the British see his leather cowboy boots only as Haggard’s “manly footwear,” they believe that the speaker is equally conservative and provincial. When he “opens his mouth,” therefore, he is destined “to put [his] foot there” because he appears to be ignorant of or opposed to progressive social values. The Londoners in Nunn’s “London Homesick Blues,” seem to have interpreted Haggard’s Okie as a literal representation of the rural perspective on the hippie counterculture, and they use that exaggerated stereotype against the Texan traveler.

Additionally, they ignore subtle geographical distinctions that actually set the speaker apart from the Okie: the cowboy in Haggard's song is from Oklahoma, not Texas, and certainly not the South, but the Londoners (and probably many Americans from the north, as well) think they are all the same. The speaker senses this hostility and wishes to "go home [to] the Armadillo," the home of Austin's cosmic cowboy, where both his "Texan-ness" and his countercultural aspirations can be valued equally.

Criticism of the cosmic cowboy's idealism and naïveté extended beyond songs into other aspects of Austin's culture, demonstrating not only an aesthetic debate among Austin's singer-songwriters but a larger cultural debate concerning issues of Texan identity and authenticity. Joe Kruppa, a professor in the English department at the University of Texas at Austin, composed a speech for a public lecture at the Texas Union entitled "The New Hicks: Mellow, Righteous, Sincere," in which he castigates the cosmic cowboys for many of the same reasons as Friedman, Hubbard, and Nunn (Appendix 1).<sup>84</sup> The lecture is comprised of one hundred numbered sentences, but it is not a laundry list of charges against the New Hicks. Rather, it reads like a fairly unified and cohesive essay. Unlike many of the songs that treat the same topic, Kruppa's "The New Hicks" attacks the image of the cosmic cowboy at the height of its popularity in Austin, posing in the very first sentence that "the New Hicks are full of crap."<sup>85</sup> The evidence supporting this thesis is threefold: 1) the nostalgia and anachronism of cosmic cowboy imagery, 2) the absence of a direct rural pedigree for the cosmic cowboy, and 3) the

---

<sup>84</sup> Joe Kruppa, "The New Hicks: Mellow, Righteous, Sincere," Typescript, Archie Green Collection, Southern Folklife Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The typescript is undated, but Kruppa recalled that the lecture was given sometime in the early 1970s, although he was uncertain of the precise date (Joe Kruppa, "Re: The New Hicks: Mellow, Righteous, Sincere," 24 May 2006, personal email).

<sup>85</sup> Kruppa, "The New Hicks."

pseudo-religious aspects of cosmic cowboy gatherings.

Kruppa observes that “The New Hicks are an exercise in nostalgia” and finds evidence for this in at least two aspects of cosmic cowboy rhetoric and imagery.<sup>86</sup> The first of these is the obvious deference of the cosmic cowboy to cowboy imagery from both late nineteenth-century cowboy ballads and dime novels and mid-twentieth-century movie cowboys. But still more important to Kruppa, himself a product of the cultural revolutions of the late 1960s, was a nostalgia for the countercultural idealism of the previous decade. Kruppa notes: “The New Hicks have nothing to do with the Counter-Culture which is a nostalgic relic anyway.”<sup>87</sup> Later in “The New Hicks,” Kruppa poses several rhetorical questions, among them, “What is the likely outcome of a state of mind like that of the New Hicks? What are its possible social and political consequences? What does it suggest about the American Experience?”<sup>88</sup> In response to these questions, Kruppa even fabricates a perceptive scholarly summation of the New Hicks’ countercultural aspirations:

The conventional means of answering these questions are as follows: “The New Hicks represent a revolt against a mechanized, technological society, and a return to values in the American Experience. They incorporate forms of living and forms of music indigeneous [*sic*] to the American Experience, and put themselves in touch with native American traditions. They are questing for a new genuineness in human relationships, a new simplicity and sincerity in forms of expression, a mellow and righteous mode of living.” (from The New Hicks, ed. by Corn & Bull)<sup>89</sup>

The satirical nature of this definition is amplified by Kruppa’s citation of “Corn & Bull.”

---

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, sentence 83.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, sentence 3.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, sentences 75-77, emphasis in original.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, sentence 80.

Yet at the same time, the similarities between this statement and the songs of Murphey, Clark, and others demonstrate both the widespread acceptance of this perspective in Austin and elsewhere.

For Kruppa, the greatest problem resulting from the ubiquity of nostalgia among the New Hicks was the movement's lack of authenticity. To explore this issue in some depth, Kruppa contrasts the New Hicks with the same "rednecks" and "shit-kickers" described in the songs of Friedman, Nunn, and Hubbard, noting that whereas the New Hicks could adopt the imagery of rural Texas to articulate a countercultural perspective, the redneck population from which they borrowed was born into that culture. He observes, "New Hicks should not be confused with Rednecks who don't know any better. New Hicks would like to be Rednecks who don't know any better, but they're having a hard time pulling it off."<sup>90</sup> This statement implies that, if given the chance, rednecks would attempt to find a way to overcome their cultural pedigree and adopt the trappings of white middle-class respectability, and, because the cosmic cowboys valorized the rural way of life, they were completely unaware of this fact. The New Hicks' ignorance was, therefore, construed as only one of many signs of the movement's lack of cultural authenticity because, if they were really rednecks, they would have known that the conscious adoption of shit-kicker imagery ran counter to rural sensibilities.

By Kruppa's estimation, the New Hicks' musical choices also marked their inauthenticity. In the longest section devoted to any one line of reasoning (twelve sentences), Kruppa makes an extended comparison between progressive country music

---

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, sentences 7-8.

and Muzak in order to underscore what he perceived to be the faux emotions of the music in Austin during the early 1970s:

The New Hicks have managed to create a new musical genre: Marijuana Muzak. This Muzak is usually created by “solo” artists who have broken away from groups in order to realize their “creative potential.” Any number of ex-Byrds and ex-Burritos have created splendid examples of the New Muzak. Austin is trembling on the verge of becoming a center for the New Muzak. Country and Western Music lends itself beautifully to the creation of the New Muzak. The New Hicks have even made a creative breakthrough: Progressive Country Music. Poco. Maybe they’ll soon discover Third-Stream Country Music! Classical Country Music! Jazz Country! I’m only kidding, of course. Just kidding.<sup>91</sup>

Yet again, Kruppa proves to have been an astute observer of the progressive country movement in Austin, noting the influence of Californian country-rock music on local music and the anti-industrial rhetoric of many of Austin’s singer-songwriters who, by their own estimation, left California in search of a space in which they could explore their own identities and “creative potential.” Moreover, Kruppa implies that, no matter how much Austin’s concertgoers and record buyers might hope, country music can never be “progressive” because of its status as a signifier of the conservative and reactionary opposition to the counterculture. By positing further developments in Austin’s country music almost to the point of absurdity (“Third-Stream,” “Classical,” and “Jazz” country), Kruppa also hints at his own disrespect for country music and the redneck culture that creates it by claiming that, because it is created by a “regressive” culture, country music could most certainly never be “progressive.”

The final point in Kruppa’s argument against the New Hicks arises from their attempts to validate the cosmic cowboy’s cultural borrowings by attaching a sort of religious sincerity to their musical activities. As a professor of English, it perhaps not

---

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, sentences 32-43.



surprising that much of Kruppa's evidence for the sacralization of rural culture is taken from the New Hicks' vocabulary. He notes: "The New Hicks gather together in little clumps for ceremonial observances. These observances are often punctuated with utterances like 'far out,' 'down home,' 'mellow,' and 'righteous.' A New Hick offered me a 'righteous' chocolate chip cookie the other day."<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, "In the middle of Hickdom there is a comfortable home, and in a room in that home sits... You're probably wondering where this is leading. You're probably wishing that I would get to the point and sit down... A righteous bottle of Shiner Beer."<sup>93</sup> Later, Kruppa asks: "Does one have to enter the New Hickdom just to get a righteous bottle of beer? Do today's New Hicks still need righteousness? Obviously. Otherwise what would they be doing repeating that word over and over again?"<sup>94</sup> Kruppa here ascribes significance to an adjective that had been significantly redefined by the cosmic cowboys, removing the word's religious overtones. But the transformation of the adjective "righteous" into the noun "righteousness" adds a more serious tone to his satire. This conversion allows Kruppa to question the moral foundation of romantic regionalism in Austin, indirectly postulating that the New Hicks could adopt any cultural signifiers they desire because, as children of the white middle-class, their privilege granted them both a cultural and a moral superiority. By Kruppa's estimation, therefore, the New Hicks gather in "their own church: Armadillo World Headquarters" and revere the "pedal steel guitar... [as] a holy instrument" because they must assert their righteousness and sincerity to overcome

---

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, sentences 4-6.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, sentences 48-51.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, sentences 58-61.

their lack of cultural authority and authenticity.<sup>95</sup>

The issue of authenticity was central to the criticisms leveled against Austin's cosmic cowboys in the early 1970s. The reflections of Kinky Friedman, Gary P. Nunn, and Ray Wylie Hubbard provide insights into the challenges facing young people who sought to assimilate into rural Texan culture that were gleaned from their own personal experiences. Their songs thus stood as warnings to those who might wish to follow Murphey's cosmic cowboy into the rural Western hinterlands, providing counterpoints to romantic regionalist songs that painted those spaces not as liberating but as equally confining by carefully describing the confrontation of the cosmic cowboy and the redneck. Moreover, the objections raised by Clay and Kruppa arise from the perspectives of older and more detached observers. As such, their arguments against the romantic and idealistic visions of the cosmic cowboys are fraught with their own remembrances of the failed idealism of the 1960s and question the motivations of the legions of young people who rushed to Austin from around Texas and, later, from around the United States in the early 1970s. As the progressive country movement gained momentum in Austin and elsewhere, such questions of authenticity became more frequent and arose from more varied perspectives—even from those same musicians who constructed the romantic images in the first place. As singer-songwriters, audiences, and cultural observers alike approached the progressive country movement and the cosmic cowboy, therefore, each was required to negotiate and construct their own personal Texan identity.

---

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, sentences 9, 55.

## Conclusions

Although Wrobel has observed that most songs written about the American West may be divided into two categories—the romantic and the cynical—most of the western songs composed by Austin’s progressive country songwriters betray a degree of ambivalence that this bipartite model does not grant. Many of the songs composed by the more commercially-oriented songwriters like Murphey and Clark promoted an idealistic and romanticized portrait of Texas (and rural spaces, in general) that largely ignored generational, racial, gender, and class conflicts, while songs such as Murphey’s “Alleys of Austin” simultaneously present an image of the West as a depressed and depressing space filled with naïve and enthusiastic youths. Similarly, songs like Hubbard’s “Up Against the Wall, Redneck Mother” and Friedman’s “They Ain’t Makin’ Jews Like Jesus Anymore” depict rural Texas as a space filled with violent rednecks while also implying that, without the obstacle of the rednecks, the West could be the perfect home for the cosmic cowboy. Even Merle Haggard’s “Okie from Muskogee,” the song that inspired the work of Hubbard, Friedman, and others, offers the possibility of an ironic reading in which the Okie is not lauded for his conservative beliefs, but is instead caricatured for his anachronism.

Despite the ambivalence of progressive country songwriters toward the rednecks and the cosmic cowboys, the rhetoric of sincerity and honesty that was promoted in Austin lent itself to more literal readings of both progressive country songs and the songs of mainstream country music. As such, songwriters and local politicians alike criticized the idealism and naïveté of the cosmic cowboy generation, while those songs that resisted the cosmic cowboy stereotypes are equally naïve in their portrayal of rural culture. Many

of the songs of the cosmic cowboy cluster embody the psychological distance that existed between the speaker and the subject of the song and between many of the participants in Austin's progressive country music scene and rural and small-town Texan culture. This distance is perhaps best exemplified by the use of stock stereotypes, from the western landscapes of "B"-westerns in Murphey's "Cosmic Cowboy" to the exploitation of the "Okie/redneck" stereotype of Hubbard's "Up Against the Wall, Redneck Mother." These stereotypes permitted songwriters to tap into the extraordinary divisions in American society: divisions between "hippies" and "squares," between rich and poor, between black and white, between men and women, between North and South. It may be too much for a twenty-first-century observer to criticize songwriters for falling back on such stereotypes, but one cannot help but point out that their continued use may well have increased the tensions between these communities by constantly reopening old wounds. But, in spite of any criticisms that could be leveled in hindsight, the proliferation of stock imagery, landscape painting, and stereotypes in progressive country songwriting provides some indication of the challenges that were perceived by the cosmic cowboy generation: rapid urban-industrial growth that could be challenged by escaping to the rural countryside, a hippie counterculture thought to be either in its last throes or on the verge of its zenith, and a mainstream culture whose ignorance was seen as standing in the way of a countercultural utopia.

## CHAPTER 3

### “BOB WILLS IS STILL THE KING”: PROGRESSIVE COUNTRY MUSIC, WESTERN SWING, AND THE SEARCH FOR MUSICAL AUTHENTICITY

On 3 December 1973, 68-year-old western swing pioneer Bob Wills entered the Sumet-Burnet Studio in Dallas, Texas, to record an album for the California-based United Artists label. This project, which was organized by bassist and producer Tommy Allsup as “a homecoming for Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys,” reunited the gravely-ill Wills with former members of his legendary band, including steel guitarist Leon McAuliffe, pianist Al Stricklin, and drummer “Smokey” Dacus.<sup>1</sup> Also in attendance at this historic event was Ray Benson, the Philadelphia-born leader of the Austin-based band Asleep at the Wheel, a group that was modeled after Wills’s legendary ensemble. Benson and his bandmates traveled to Dallas at the invitation of United Artists, the label for which they recorded as well, with hopes of meeting Wills, talking with him about his music, and receiving his blessing for their own work.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, despite the auspicious occasion of this historic session, the day was marred by tragedy. After a long day in the studio, Wills began to feel ill. His wife, Betty, wheeled him past Benson and Asleep at the Wheel and returned him to his home in Fort

---

<sup>1</sup> Charles R. Townsend, *San Antonio Rose: The Life and Music of Bob Wills* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1976), 317.

<sup>2</sup> Ray Benson, interview with author, 31 May 2005.

Worth, where, later that night, he suffered a massive stroke that left him in a coma for the last eighteen months of his life.<sup>3</sup> For the gathered Playboys, this recording session marked the end of an era and a fitting tribute to Wills' independence and fortitude. As Wills biographer Charles R. Townsend, who was in the studio on that day, has explained:

This final session was more than just another session; it was part of the human story of a bandleader and his musicians who pioneered a new music. To the end of his career, Bob Wills refused to compromise his music with any other, regardless of how commercially attractive it might have been.... Music was not a way of life to him; music *was* life.<sup>4</sup>

For Benson and Asleep at the Wheel, on the other hand, this session signaled a new beginning. Motivated by a desire to “rediscover the roots of American music,” Benson and his cohort returned to Austin with a mission to bring western swing music, post-war rhythm and blues, and honky-tonk music to the city's progressive country audiences.<sup>5</sup>

Austin's progressive country music community was one greatly concerned with Texan and American history, and, as such, the performance of traditional Texan musics became increasingly important to the city's musicians and audiences alike. Moreover, participants in the progressive country movement were actively engaged in forging a place for themselves in Texan history. By taking up the mantle of western swing and honky-tonk music, musicians like Benson immersed themselves in the sounds of Texan music and worked diligently to establish themselves as important figures in their preservation. Furthermore, much as songwriters like Murphey and Clark constructed rural utopias in their songs, this quest to preserve and to recreate older Texan musical

---

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 318-321.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 320.

<sup>5</sup> Benson, interview with author, 31 May 2005. In 2005, Benson mounted a production of *A Ride with Bob*, a musical drama that retells Wills's biography and contemplates what might have transpired had he and Wills been able to speak to one another at the Dallas session.

traditions allowed Austin's musicians to escape into an idyllic, idealized, and more "authentic" Texan past.

### **Defining Western Swing**

By the time Ray Benson and Asleep at the Wheel made their pilgrimage to Dallas, western swing had a more than four-decade history in Texas, Oklahoma, and California. Emerging from the region's string band and fiddle traditions during the late 1920s, it combined traditional Texan fiddle breakdowns, contemporary popular songs, and the improvisatory and rhythmic practices of ragtime and early jazz.<sup>6</sup> Built at once on the performance practices of rural Texan and Oklahoman dance music and the ever-changing sounds of cosmopolitan popular music, western swing was a dance music that was popular both in the burgeoning urban centers of Fort Worth and Tulsa, both of which benefited from widespread rural emigration during World War I and the Depression, and in the many rural communities that dotted the landscape of Depression-era Texas.

Western swing's origins can be traced directly to the regional fiddle traditions of the Texas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas. The portable fiddle was a logical choice for the region's musicians, as many of them were itinerant farmers who traveled from one large farm to another to assist with the planting and harvesting of crops. Compared to the bulkier and more elaborate pianos and reed organs found in many late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century middle-class homes, the fiddle required little effort to transport and was relatively simple to repair, when necessary. A proficient fiddler was also much

---

<sup>6</sup> Breakdowns are dance tunes characterized by their fast tempo and florid ornamentation. See: Pauline Norton, "Breakdown," *Grove Music Online* (accessed 10 February 2007), <<http://www.grovemusic.org>>.

in demand to perform dance music for house parties and other social occasions in the agricultural Southwest. These dances provided a fertile training ground for aspiring young fiddlers, offering opportunities to apprentice with older, more experienced musicians. Because these dances often lasted several hours and because fiddlers were paid on the basis of the number of dance “sets” they accompanied, frontier fiddlers developed specialized techniques to reduce the amount of effort exerted while playing. These techniques included outlining the tune’s melody and rhythm and playing with a “shuffling” bow technique that limited the bow arms’ range of motion.<sup>7</sup>

At the same time that frontier dance fiddling proliferated in Texas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas, a more ornate style of fiddling developed for contests, requiring the fiddler to employ more complicated bowings and nuanced ornamentation. These social events, often held in public venues such as town squares or hotel lobbies, pitted one fiddler against another in a head-to-head competition. After taking in the performances of both fiddlers, the audience would vote for the fiddler that was most engaging, signaling their approval through the volume of their applause. The champion of such contests often received a cash prize and, perhaps more importantly, the reputation of being the town or region’s best fiddler. Of course, such a reputation was useful for the practicing fiddler, as it often yielded more dance engagements.<sup>8</sup>

By the late 1920s, the functional dance style and the more ornate contest style coalesced in western swing, resulting in a music that was heavily influenced by local and regional dance musics (including German and Czech schottisches and waltzes and

---

<sup>7</sup> Townsend, 38.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-22.



Mexican norteño music, among others) and featured intricate jazz-influenced improvisations.<sup>9</sup> Like the contemporaneous big bands that developed in New York, Kansas City, and Chicago, the musical style of western swing ensembles varied greatly depending on the bandleader's goals, the individual talents of their members, and the musical styles that were popular with the regional audiences they served.

The widespread influence of western swing and its similarity to other swing styles make it difficult to offer a conclusive summary of the characteristics that distinguish it from other contemporary swing variants, but it is possible to abstract some of the genre's key traits. The typical western swing band featured a rhythm section of bass, drums, piano, and either guitar or banjo and a front line consisting of a combination of fiddles, saxophones, trumpets, and, occasionally, trombones.<sup>10</sup> As swing bands elsewhere in the United States expanded their instrumentation during the 1930s and 1940s, western swing bands followed suit, featuring full complements of fiddles, saxophones, trumpets, trombones, and occasionally even strings. Like their national counterparts, western swing bands also featured a diverse musical repertoire, including not only regionally popular fiddle tunes and blues but also the latest popular songs composed by Tin Pan

---

<sup>9</sup> Joe W. Specht, "Put a Nickel in the Jukebox: The Texas Tradition in Country Music, 1922-50," in *The Roots of Texas Music*, eds. Lawrence Clayton and Joe W. Specht (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2003), 78.

<sup>10</sup> The 1930s witnessed a wholesale transformation of the rhythm section in swing bands across the United States as the banjo was slowly replaced by the acoustic guitar and, later, the electric guitar. Guitarist Richard Lieberston noted: "The jazz band of the twenties and early thirties employed a banjo rather than a guitar in its rhythm section, and practically all of the chordal guitarists cut their teeth on the four-string instrument. After hearing Eddie Lang's trailblazing work with Joe Venuti, Paul Whiteman, and others, plectrists en masse began to take up the fuller, mellower, six-string guitar. In this transitional period a number of banjoists took to performing on the four-string tenor guitar, tuned like the tenor banjo (C-G-D-A, low to high) or like the top four strings of the standard guitar (D-G-B-E). Others achieved a warmer tone by fitting the banjo's bridge with a metal mute. George Van Eps recalls that at first bandleaders put up a lot of resistance to the guitar, often forcing aspiring Lang-ites to stick to the banjo" ("Swing Guitar: The Acoustic Chordal Style," in *The Guitar in Jazz: An Anthology* [Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1996], 90).

Alley songwriters.<sup>11</sup> Improvisation was also a central component of the western swing aesthetic. The music was influenced by southwestern “contest” fiddling that required the demonstration of a fiddler’s virtuosity and by ragtime and jazz improvisation that demanded extraordinary melodic and rhythmic inventiveness. Many western swing bandleaders, therefore, showcased the improvisatory skills of their sidemen through “take-off” solos. For instance, as Townsend has observed of Wills’s music:

Improvisation is the heart, if not the soul, of jazz, and it was basic to the Bob Wills style. He even used it with frontier fiddle tunes. On such tunes Wills would begin either by playing the melody through on his fiddle or by leading his fiddle ensemble (himself and one or more other fiddlers) through the melody. He then called on another musician, often on two or three musicians, to take choruses before he came back to the melody. He followed essentially this same New Orleans style in all his music, regardless of what he played.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, the underlying rhythm of western swing was characterized by the so-called “swing beat,” a rhythmic practice in which the first subdivision of the beat is played slightly longer than the second. As ethnomusicologist Jean A. Boyd has explained, western swing bands were innovators in the development of the swing “feel”:

Swing jazz came into existence when musicians abandoned the 2/4 meter common in ragtime and Dixieland in favor of a looser, freer swing-four. Though they rarely receive any credit, southwestern jazz bands [i.e., western swing bands] participated in this rhythmic transformation.<sup>13</sup>

Western swing music, therefore, was characterized by musical traits drawn from both the southwestern frontier and contemporaneous popular music.

---

<sup>11</sup> Cary Ginnell, *Milton Brown and the Founding of Western Swing* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 26: “The key to the establishment of the genre [western swing] was repertoire, derivative at first, and then becoming increasingly self-rejuvenating and original.” See also: Stacy Philips, “The History of Western Swing Fiddling,” *Fiddler Magazine* 2, no. 2 (Summer 1995), 10.

<sup>12</sup> Townsend, 61.

<sup>13</sup> Jean A. Boyd, *The Jazz of the Southwest: An Oral History of Western Swing* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 12.

Western swing appealed to the thousands of rural émigrés who moved to Fort Worth, Tulsa, Los Angeles, and other major southwestern cities during the 1920s and 1930s because the music blended elements of rural Texan dance music and more cosmopolitan popular music styles, in search of secure employment in the region's burgeoning manufacturing, energy, and service industries. As southwesterners migrated from the country to the city (and sometimes back again) in search of secure employment in the region's burgeoning manufacturing, energy, and service industries, western swing reinforced regional identities in the dancehalls and honky-tonks where the music was performed by offering a safe space for these emigrés to gather.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, its similarities to and interactions with Tin Pan Alley and contemporaneous jazz offered them a connection to more cosmopolitan cities like New York. Western swing, therefore, embodied two conflicting cultural processes: 1) the preservation of distinct regional identities and folkways, and 2) their assimilation into "mainstream" American society. As western swing bandleaders increasingly transformed their repertoires, instrumentation, and performance practices to parallel developments in swing music in other parts of the United States, they created music that sharply juxtaposed its rural and urban influences and that paralleled the transformation of their fan base from rural emigrants into more cosmopolitan urbanites and suburbanites.

One of the first bands to perform this new musical hybrid of regional and cosmopolitan popular musics was the Light Crust Doughboys, featuring fiddle player

---

<sup>14</sup> Both Bob Wills and Milton Brown arrived in Fort Worth for this reason, and, as historian Gerald W. Haslam has explained, this same process of migration reinforced country music traditions already in place in California during the 1930s (*Workin' Man Blues: Country Music in California* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999]). See also Ginnell's discussion of post-World War I Fort Worth (Ginnell, 12-14).

Bob Wills, vocalist Milton Brown, and guitarist Herman Arspiger, and founded in 1931 by Pappy Lee O'Daniel, president of Fort Worth's Burrus Mills.<sup>15</sup> Performing daily on Fort Worth radio station WBAP, the string band—consisting of vocals, fiddle, guitar, and banjo—played fiddle tunes, contemporary popular songs, and sentimental songs composed by O'Daniel to elevate the moral quality of the program.<sup>16</sup> Wills and Brown each contributed a unique element to the musical mix. An itinerant laborer, medicine show musician, and son of a champion contest fiddler, Wills offered a wealth of experience as a dance fiddler and a wide variety of minstrel, “hokum,” and blues numbers.<sup>17</sup> Brown, on the other hand, offered a more genteel approach to music-making, having performed throughout his high school and young adult years with close-harmony vocal groups, often dressed in matching suits or tuxedos, at social events including Lions and Elks Club meetings.<sup>18</sup> Taken together, the contributions of Wills and Brown embodied the contradictions of the region's urban émigrés: rural and working-class by birth and cultural upbringing, yet looking forward to an urban, middle-class future. The merger of these two musical traditions, therefore, paralleled the cultural processes at work as these southwestern cities flourished in the early 1930s. Recent émigrés from rural Texas and Oklahoma certainly did not maintain all of their rural folkways, nor did

---

<sup>15</sup> Townsend, 68-87; Ginnell, 45-66; John Dempsey, *The Light Crust Doughboys Are on the Air: Celebrating Seventy Years of Texas Music* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2002); Jean A. Boyd, *“We're the Light Crust Doughboys from Burrus Mills”: An Oral History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003).

<sup>16</sup> Townsend, 70-73.

<sup>17</sup> Wills performed at his first West Texas ranch dance in 1915 at the age of ten, and he was a member of a traveling medicine show in 1929 (*Ibid.*, 36, 44-46). See also: Charles Wolfe, “Bob Wills, Fiddler,” in *The Devil's Box: Masters of Southern Fiddling* (Nashville and London: The Country Music Foundation Press and Vanderbilt University Press, 1997), 158.

<sup>18</sup> Ginnell, 15-27.

they wholly adopt the trappings of their new urban culture. Rather, they existed between these two worlds, and western swing, as a hybrid of rural regional musics and contemporary popular music styles, expressed this situation musically.

During the 1930s, Wills and Brown, as well as a growing legion of lesser-known musicians in the region, began to experiment with western swing, adding new instruments and borrowing heavily from contemporaneous popular and jazz styles. Like their contemporaries who performed swing music in New York, Chicago, and Kansas City, each western swing band's musical style and instrumentation varied slightly depending on the strengths of the bandleader, the demands of the venues in which they played, and the availability of skilled sidemen.<sup>19</sup> But one trait unified all of these groups: the continued expansion of the ensemble. This was a necessary result of the sustained growth of cities like Fort Worth and Tulsa as the manufacturing and oil industries continued to boom in spite of the Great Depression. Milton Brown left the Light Crust Doughboys in 1932 to form the Musical Brownies, a group of acoustic musicians consisting of Brown on vocals, his brother Derwood as rhythm guitarist, fiddlers Cecil Brower and Ted Grantham, pianist Fred Calhoun, and banjoist Ocie Stockard. He began to expand his organization around the year 1934 in order to be heard over the din of the increasing number of dancers attending the group's performances. Upon Grantham's departure in the fall of 1934, Brown searched for more new ways to increase the volume of his ensemble. While the rhythm section of banjo, guitar, and piano cut through the din, the lead fiddle was often inaudible. Brown discovered a solution to this problem in steel guitarist Bob Dunn, an Oklahoma-born musician who had developed a method to

---

<sup>19</sup> George T. Simon, *The Big Bands*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (New York: Schirmer Books, 1981), 4.

amplify his steel guitar, offering both a loud lead and a powerful accompaniment.<sup>20</sup>

Shortly after Brown added Dunn's electric steel guitar to the Musical Brownies, Bob Wills, who had left the Light Crust Doughboys in 1934 to form Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys, hired Leon McAuliffe to play the electric steel guitar and expanded his ensemble by adding a full complement of horns. By 1940, the Tulsa, Oklahoma-based Texas Playboys included five saxophones, two clarinets, and two trumpets in addition to the twin fiddles and full rhythm section. Not only did this expanded ensemble provide the increased volume necessary to be heard over the throngs of dancers attending Wills's dances, it also allowed the ensemble to perform in a wide variety of musical styles. As Townsend observes, Wills "had two 'front lines,' to use musicians' jargon. In most cases he still used fiddles or violins for lead instruments. But in Tulsa he added enough brass and reeds that he could use horns for the lead also."<sup>21</sup> Drawing upon the diverse timbres these two "front lines" offered, the Texas Playboys could perform traditional Southwestern fiddle music with the fiddle lead while also accommodating the latest hits from the contemporary hit parade.<sup>22</sup>

As these ensembles combined elements of string bands and contemporary big bands and began to incorporate more contemporary popular songs in their repertoires, the generic boundary between "hillbilly" music (the term commonly used to describe the string band music of the American Southeast) and jazz became increasingly murky.

---

<sup>20</sup> Ginnell, 108.

<sup>21</sup> Townsend, 151.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 151-152. Townsend notes that the Texas Playboys' recorded output between 1935 and the early 1950s includes blues selections, fiddle tunes, "ethnic" musicians (including Spanish, Hawaiian, and South American musics), country tunes, big band selections, and even arrangements of nineteenth-century classical music.

Although most jazz scholars have neglected western swing bands in their studies of the swing era in favor of the more cosmopolitan groups working in New York and Los Angeles, many western swing scholars insist that the music fits squarely within the context of the big bands of the 1930s and 1940s and defend it from any association with contemporaneous “hillbilly” music. For instance, as Boyd proposes:

The music [western swing musicians] made and continue to make belongs to the mainstream of swing jazz. They were and are in the same league with Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey, and many others, and not in the “hillbilly” category where they were assigned by record executives who could not decide how to classify improvisation played on string instruments. Western swing musicians have nothing against country music and in fact recognize country music as one of the many tributaries of their own music. But “country” is an inappropriate and misleading label for western swing.<sup>23</sup>

Similarly, Ginnell observes of Brown’s ensemble:

The Brownies’ repertoire deemphasized traditional country music in accordance with this jazz-oriented interplay between the musicians and the vocals; and with their focus on current popular numbers, classic city blues, and sophisticated jazz instrumentals, the band totally transformed hillbilly music in Texas.<sup>24</sup>

And country music historian Bill Malone notes:

Western swing musicians did borrow frequently from older and diverse folk resources; but they more often drew upon commercial music forms popular in their own day. Immersed in the popular culture of their time, such powerful music personalities as Milton Brown and Bob Wills forged a highly successful fusion of contemporary popular music and the rural music of their forebears.<sup>25</sup>

The argument for western swing’s inclusion in the jazz canon is, at its very core, based on its cosmopolitan outlook. Whereas hillbilly music was often associated with notions of an idyllic rural (and often highland) past, jazz’s association with urban areas

---

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, ix-x. See also *Ibid.*, 7-8, in which Boyd argues that record labels only applied the term “hillbilly” to western swing because of its string band instrumentation.

<sup>24</sup> Ginnell, xxii.

<sup>25</sup> Bill C. Malone, *Country Music, U.S.A.*, 2<sup>nd</sup> revised ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 159.

marked it as more modern and more respectable than hillbilly music.<sup>26</sup> As a result, many western swing musicians did not consider themselves “country” or “hillbilly” musicians; rather, they often point to contemporaneous jazz musicians as their inspiration.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, the repertoire and instrumentation of western swing ensembles became increasingly similar to their “big band” counterparts; by 1943, Spade Cooley, California’s most successful bandleader, even included harps in his ensemble.<sup>28</sup> By the end of World War II, therefore, western swing had been fundamentally transformed from a dance music built around regional fiddle music into one that paralleled the latest national trends. As such, this transformation paralleled the nationalization of American culture as radio networks blanketed the nation with broadcasts from their bicoastal headquarters in New York and Los Angeles. Moreover, as the fan base for western swing became more firmly established in their new urban environments, they too aspired to be part of this cosmopolitan culture.

The emphasis given in academic studies and oral histories to the “cosmopolitanism” of western swing raises several important questions. First, why is western swing still so closely associated with country music while jazz historians, almost without exception, neglect it? Second, if, as the national success of artists like Wills, Cooley, Tex Williams, and others indicate, western swing was an important component

---

<sup>26</sup> Archie Green, “Hillbilly Music: Source and Symbol,” *Journal of American Folklore* 78, no. 309 (July-September 1965): 204-228; Anthony Harkins, *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>27</sup> Fiddlers Bruner, Ashlock, and others, for instance, were heavily influenced by the styles of jazz violinists Joe Venuti and Stephane Grappelli, not by the region’s traditional fiddlers (Boyd, *The Jazz of the Southwest*, 40, 53). Similarly, Wills regularly hired musicians with professional experience with other horn-oriented swing bands (Townsend, 190-205).

<sup>28</sup> Rich Kienzle, *Southwest Shuffle: Pioneers of Honky-Tonk, Western Swing, and Country Jazz* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 6.



of the national swing music scene of the 1930s and 1940s, what factors led to its demise? Finally, how did Texans, including members of the progressive country scene in Austin, reclaim western swing as an identifiably “Texan” music?

The first two of these questions can be answered by examining the challenges that faced western swing musicians during and following World War II. First, the war placed a great strain on the large ensembles as tires and gasoline were rationed and band members were drafted for service. Even Wills, western swing’s greatest luminary, was forced to disband the Texas Playboys in December 1942 following his own induction into the Army.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, as musicians returned from the war, many of them formed small ensembles to play at the new dancehalls that sprouted in California to accommodate the new populations of GIs, finding it a more lucrative proposition than playing as a sideman in a large swing band.<sup>30</sup> Yet, at the same time, the amount of competition for musical employment on the West Coast (where many of the most successful Texan and Oklahoman bands settled in the late 1930s) grew increasingly stiff, forcing many musicians to return home to tour on the regional circuits there.<sup>31</sup> Finally, the decade following the end of World War II also witnessed significant changes in the landscape of American popular music as swing gave way to rhythm and blues and, later, rock ‘n’ roll. Many young people no longer spent their discretionary income to dance to big band music, choosing instead to dance to the small combo sounds of a new generation of musicians.

---

<sup>29</sup> Townsend, 225-234.

<sup>30</sup> Haslam, 87-94; Townsend, 235-237.

<sup>31</sup> Townsend, 236.

All of these factors conspired to bring an end to western swing's success in the years immediately following World War II. Yet they did not bring an end to it altogether; rather, western swing entered a period of retrenchment that helped to reestablish it as an organic outgrowth of the American Southwest. Throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s, many western swing musicians returned to Texas and Oklahoma, reduced the size of their ensembles, and made rigorous tours from one rural dancehall to another in order to remain solvent. At the same time, a new group of independent regional labels and lesser major labels began to record and distribute western swing music as the major labels—including Columbia, the label for which Wills recorded prior to World War II—began to withdraw their support for it following the war and the two American Federation of Musicians' strikes of the 1940s<sup>32</sup>. Furthermore, as the former sidemen of Wills, Cooley, and others struck out on their own to form their own groups, younger musicians were permitted an opportunity to apprentice with the older masters and to develop their musical talents in a professional setting. While most of the musicians who comprised this second generation of sidemen never started their own ensembles, they did continue to become some of the leading session musicians in Los Angeles, New York, and Nashville, bringing a western swing sensibility to mainstream popular music and, more importantly, commercial country music.

While western swing did not disappear during this period of postwar retrenchment, it had nearly vanished from the national consciousness by the late 1960s. That is, until the Country Music Association, a trade organization consisting of Music

---

<sup>32</sup> The Texas Playboys, for instance, recorded for MGM Records—a smaller major label—from 1947 until 1954 (Bob Pinson, "The Bob Wills Recordings: A Comprehensive Discography," in Charles R. Townsend, *San Antonio Rose: The Life and Music of Bob Wills* [Urbana and Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1976], 355-359).

Row insiders founded in Nashville in 1958, inducted Bob Wills into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1968.<sup>33</sup> This honor, one that he was quite proud of, established him in the pantheon of great country music stars, not the jazz artists with whom he had been so closely affiliated in the 1940s. Moreover, as the Country Music Association and the Hall of Fame constructed a history of country music that connected the pop-influenced “Nashville Sound” of country music in the 1950s and 1960s to regional musical traditions, western swing’s retreat from the national spotlight and industry made Wills a powerful choice for induction, as did his status as the most prominent exponent of the music.<sup>34</sup> Wills was not lauded as a sophisticated, cosmopolitan bandleader who had worked diligently to make the Texas Playboys and their music accessible to a larger public. Rather, he was celebrated as a “folk legend” that was responsible for the creation of a musical style that captured the essence of the region by combining rural musical traditions and the sounds of contemporary popular music, much as producers like Chet Atkins, Don Law, and Owen Bradley were doing in the contemporaneous “Nashville Sound” of country music.<sup>35</sup>

As a result, and despite its continued regional success in Texas and Oklahoma, western swing was also elevated to the status of “folk music,” canonizing it and, in effect, halting its development. No longer did audiences view western swing as the commercial

---

<sup>33</sup> Joli Jensen, *Nashville Sound: Authenticity, Commercialization, and Country Music* (Nashville and London: The Country Music Foundation Press and Vanderbilt University Press, 1998, 64-65.

<sup>34</sup> Townsend, 285: “Wills welcomed the honor of being voted into the Country Music Hall of Fame, but he had never thought he would be elected. By 1968 the distinction between his western swing and country music was blurred. Trade magazines, disc jockeys, record companies, and historians made little or no distinction between them. Bob Wills always made a distinction, and every member of his band made the same distinction. Not one of them thought their music should be categorized as country music.”

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 284.

popular music it had been during its heyday; rather, they saw it as an “authentic” folk music, an expression of a distant and idealized rural past. By the time progressive country music began to develop in Austin during the first years of the 1970s, therefore, western swing had become a definably and unquestionably Texan musical style, one that Austin’s young musicians eagerly sought in their attempts to carve their own place in Texan musical history. Between the emergence of the first western swing groups in the late 1920s and the beginnings of Austin’s progressive country movement in the early 1970s, western swing was transformed from a regional dance music into a national musical phenomenon, receded from the national spotlight and retreated to the American Southwest following World War II as rock ‘n’ roll emerged as the dominant popular music. It was with this notion of western swing as a unique regional “folk music” in mind that progressive country musicians sought to preserve and resurrect the music for their and future generations of Texans.

### **Enter the Progressives: Ray Benson, Alvin Crow, and Western Swing Revivalism**

As progressive country music began to develop in Austin during the early 1970s, many of the early pioneers of western swing from the 1930s were still alive and were also relatively active as performers throughout Texas. Yet, because western swing no longer maintained a national profile, many of the young people who came to Austin during this period erroneously viewed the music as a dead or dying folk art expressive of a historically distant, rural Texan utopia that had been destroyed by the onslaught of “progress.” Like the cosmic cowboy’s rural paradise, western swing offered young progressive country musicians an opportunity to make a meaningful connection with an

idyllic and idealized Texan past. By inserting themselves directly into the living practice of western swing music, collaborating with its older practitioners, recording new versions of classic songs, and composing new songs in the style of old recordings, Austin's neo-western swing musicians strove to bring western swing to the attention of the city's youth and to make it relevant to the younger generation.

At the forefront of this movement were two bandleaders, Ray Benson of Asleep at the Wheel and Alvin Crow of the Pleasant Valley Boys. Born in 1950 and 1951, respectively, neither Benson nor Crow were alive to witness western swing's heyday in the 1940s. Rather, they were born on the cusp of the rock 'n' roll era. Yet, both Benson and Crow made a conscious choice to specialize in western swing and, more broadly, country music, despite having other musical options available to them. Crow, for instance, had a long association with the Oklahoma Symphony in Oklahoma City, with which, according to his recollection, he had played the violin from age five.<sup>36</sup> By his teenage years, Crow was involved in a wide variety of musical activities:

By the time I was about 15 or 16, I was playing in the symphony, was the fiddler in someone's country band, fronted my own rock & roll band, and had a folk act going. My family was very supportive of me. Before I could drive, they'd load up the station wagon and take us to gigs—my parents were roadies! The only time they weren't supportive was when we'd practice in the garage and the cops would come. Which was pretty regularly.<sup>37</sup>

Benson's recollections of his musical upbringing are quite similar, as, like Crow, his

---

<sup>36</sup> Margaret Moser, "The Whole Bow: Alvin Crow Plays It His Way, Always Has," *The Austin Chronicle* (12 November 2004), <<http://www.austinchronicle.com/gyrobase/Issue/story?oid-oid%3A237280>> (accessed 14 August 2006). Furthermore, Crow's paternal grandfather was a studio musician in Dallas during the 1930s, and his aunt, Shirly Fae Crosby, was a singer of great renown in West Texas, the Texas Panhandle, and Oklahoma around the turn of the twentieth century.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

“parents were very much of the mind that a well-rounded kid should have music.”<sup>38</sup>

Initially learning to play the guitar, Benson’s first public performances came at age ten with The Four G’s, a folksinging group comprised of Benson and his sister. Performing regularly at local hootenannies and folk sings, the group sang the music of the Carter Family, Woody Guthrie, and contemporary pop-folk groups like the New Christy Minstrels. Concurrent with these early performances, Benson also attended a Quaker summer camp outside of Philadelphia where he became acquainted with old-time fiddle tunes by providing a guitar accompaniment for square dances. In high school, he was actively involved in his high school band, playing tuba and string bass in his school bands. Furthermore, he began developing his talents as a songwriter, performing in venues like Philadelphia’s Second Fret.<sup>39</sup> While the opportunities for Benson to parlay his tenure in the marching band into a full-time career as a musician were certainly few, this experience allowed him to develop an understanding of wind instruments that would be integral to his understanding of western swing, and it introduced him to the cosmopolitan big band sounds of the 1930s and 1940s.

While Crow and Benson’s early musical experiences were quite similar in their stylistic breadth, their reasons for playing country music had even more in common. Much as it had during the era of western swing’s ascendancy, country music still signified conservatism and reactionism to many young people at the second half of the 1960s. As sociologist Jens Lund observed in 1972:

---

<sup>38</sup> Benson, interview with author, 31 May 2005.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* Benson’s early experiences as a folk musician allowed him to meet songwriter Townes Van Zandt at Philadelphia’s Second Fret in 1967. Van Zandt later became an acclaimed songwriter associated with a new wave of literary songwriting in Nashville and with the cosmic cowboys in Austin during the 1970s.

In the United States, the rural and lower classes have traditionally been hotbeds of conservatism and reaction. Their music, both folk and commercial, has consistently reflected such themes. When not overtly expressed..., these traits have been manifested in the vocal and instrumental styles of their musical performance. Indeed, country music's distinctive "sound" reflects its conservative and discriminatory make-up, even when a given song has not overt political or religious message.<sup>40</sup>

Yet, in spite of this widely accepted understanding of country music as the voice of the conservative opposition, Crow and Benson saw in it the power to bridge cultural divisions in Texas and, more ambitiously, nationwide. Crow was certain that the country music he had been immersed in his entire life had the power to transcend the "wall between hippies and rednecks," which, by his estimation, was "100 miles high back then."<sup>41</sup> Similarly, Benson remembers that, although he could "hear the incredible beauty and craftsmanship and poetry in this music [country music]..., kids who grew up with their father loving this music couldn't because of the sociological stuff."<sup>42</sup> Benson, who was not immersed in country music culture as a child, recalled his first real experience with country music marked a transformative moment in his musical development. Upon hearing the music of Hank Williams for the first time in 1967 or 1968, he discovered that, despite his previous bias against country music, "country music can be really cool stuff."<sup>43</sup> This initial encounter with Williams's music prompted him to begin exploring other varieties of what he describes as "roots music," a category that included everything from the contemporaneous Bakersfield Sound of Merle Haggard and the banjo styles of

---

<sup>40</sup> Jens Lund, "Fundamentalism, Racism, and Political Reaction in Country Music," in *The Sounds of Social Change*, eds. R. Serge Denisoff and Richard A. Peterson (Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1972), 91.

<sup>41</sup> Moser, "The Whole Bow."

<sup>42</sup> Benson, interview with author, 31 May 2005.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

Charlie Poole and other string band musicians who flourished in the North Carolina Piedmont during the 1920s and 1930s to the riff-based Kansas City swing of Count Basie and the rhythm and blues of Fats Domino.<sup>44</sup> While this body of musical styles is certainly a diverse one, Benson perceived a single unifying trait: in his (somewhat mistaken) estimation, Americans had forgotten these “roots musics” and, by extension, forgotten their personal roots.<sup>45</sup> Although country music may have been perceived by most young people in the late 1960s as the “voice of the Silent Majority,” then, Benson and Crow, believing that the music could unlock the mysteries of the American past and unite a nation divided, set out to dedicate their lives to researching and re-presenting country music to Austin’s young people and to offering new interpretations of this music to its most dedicated (and most conservative) fans.

In constructing their autobiographies, Benson and Crow both devote significant attention to the dangers they faced as they initiated this project. Much like the naïve cosmic cowboys presented in Ray Wylie Hubbard’s “Up Against the Wall, Redneck Mother” and Kinky Friedman’s “They Ain’t Making Jews Like Jesus Anymore,” these young bandleaders were confronted by often hostile patrons at the honky-tonks and dancehalls where they performed and were often criticized for the outward symbols of their “hippie-ness,” especially their long hair. After forming the Pleasant Valley Boys in 1969, Crow and his group traveled across rural Texas and Oklahoma, performing western swing and honky-tonk music. As he has recalled:

I used to play honky-tonks with wire in front of the bandstand and bouncers. Places that if you didn’t want to participate in a free-for-all fight, then you left

---

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*



before the bartender called last call. The Cotton Club in Lubbock was that way. The Real Last Mile in East Texas. People would stand up at the drop of a hat and pop the person next to them. It was a tradition of violence you don't see today.<sup>46</sup>

Benson, whose group Asleep at the Wheel was formed not in Texas but in West Virginia, describes similar circumstances in the Shenandoah Valley. Their base of operations was the Sportsman's Club in Paw Paw, West Virginia. Benson recollected that the patrons had "probably not seen any long-haired hippies until we came along" and remembered a least a few occasions in which he was required to demonstrate his masculinity through violence.<sup>47</sup>

While the early musical efforts of both the Pleasant Valley Boys and Asleep at the Wheel took place primarily in rural and small-town honky-tonks, they also worked to develop a younger, more urban fan base for their music, as well. Crow, for instance, draws special attention to the fact that, during the Pleasant Valley Boys' tours between 1969 and 1973, he "moved in both hippie and redneck circles."<sup>48</sup> While it is unclear what direct connections Crow had to the hippie scene besides his youth, Asleep at the Wheel's are much clearer. In 1971, while the band was still residing in West Virginia, noted San Francisco-based hippie leader Wavy Gravy brought a caravan of hippies through town on their way to a rock festival in Washington. Upon hearing Asleep at the Wheel, he asked the group to participate in the festival alongside Hot Tuna, Alice Cooper, and Commander Cody and His Lost Planet Airmen, providing them one of their first opportunities to play country music before an audience they resembled. Following their

---

<sup>46</sup> Moser, "The Whole Bow."

<sup>47</sup> Benson, interview with author, 31 May 2005. Benson noted that the primary motivation for his move from Philadelphia to Paw Paw was the prospect of free rent; he and the band could squat in a two-hundred-year-old cabin in the orchard of a friend's father there.

<sup>48</sup> Moser, "The Whole Bow."

successful debut in Washington, Commander Cody, whose group served as a model for Asleep at the Wheel, invited the band to relocate to Berkeley, California, in order to become more involved in the counterculture. Encouraged by the offer, the group headed to the West Coast in 1972. While in California, Asleep at the Wheel recorded their first album, *Comin' Right at Ya*, but it did not sell well, even among the countercultural crowd they had hoped to reach. Searching for other opportunities, the group found work as the road band for a legion of mainstream country artists, including Stony Edwards and Connie Smith, performing in numerous small towns across the United States for stereotypical country fans.<sup>49</sup>

By 1973, both Alvin Crow and the Pleasant Valley Boys and Asleep at the Wheel had come to cater to hippie audiences and Middle American country fans alike, and Austin seemed to be a favorable site to continue their attempts to transgress the boundaries between these two groups. Crow explains that his decision to move to Austin in 1973 was influenced by the cultural exchange he witnessed at the 1972 Dripping Springs Reunion, a three-day country music festival held just a few miles west of Austin that brought together some local country artists and several national stars. He reported that he saw

Hank Snow, Charley Pride, Loretta Lynn, Roy Acuff, as well as Willie Nelson, Billy Joe Shaver, Waylon Jennings. Kenneth Threadgill was there with Bill Neely, doing "Coming Back to Texas," and yodeled in harmony. It bowled me over. I thought, "If a guy like that can make a living in Austin with that kind of country music, I'm getting my ass back to Austin."<sup>50</sup>

Similarly, following their lack of success on the West Coast, Asleep at the Wheel

---

<sup>49</sup> Benson, interview with author, 31 May 2005.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

relocated to Austin in 1974 at the behest of Willie Nelson and Sir Douglas Quintet leader Doug Sahm, both of whom were then enjoying significant success at the Armadillo World Headquarters and the Soap Creek Saloon. Despite the boundary crossing already underway in Austin, Benson has remembered that Asleep at the Wheel was a special case: “We were the only band in Austin that could play the Armadillo and the Soap Creek Saloon—the hippie joints—and then go out and play all the redneck dancehalls.”<sup>51</sup>

While it seems that Benson may have overstated the role that Asleep at the Wheel played in bridging the cultural divide between the hippies and the rednecks in Austin, the emphasis that he places on this act of transgression indicates that it was precisely this kind of interaction that motivated the band’s musical efforts. Because Austin was populated by thousands of young Texans, most of whom had certainly heard country music while growing up in the Lone Star State, the sight of a group of long-haired young people playing country music must have been a powerful one. In effect, these performances demonstrated to Austin’s cosmic cowboys that, although country music may have symbolized the conservative Silent Majority of their parents’ and grandparents’ generations, the music and the culture from which it emerged were not solely the property of their forebears.<sup>52</sup> At the same time, just as the cosmic cowboys in the songs of Murphey, Clark, and others often perceived rural Texas as a welcoming environment for idealistic hippies, Benson and Crow appear to have viewed their performances of country music in much the same way. By demonstrating their facility as country

---

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Richard Nixon first used the term “Silent Majority” in a 1969 speech to characterize white, middle-class suburbanites who did not wish to protest for racial desegregation or for Women’s Liberation and who instead sought to preserve their own middle-class security (Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006]).

musicians, they believed that they could convince honky-tonk patrons in central Texas that the hippies were not fundamentally bad people. Although their comments regarding the violence they faced in rural honky-tonks undermines such romantic visions of country music's power to bridge the generation gap, both Benson and Crow arrived in Austin with the goal of uniting Texans around their shared musical culture.<sup>53</sup>

*Bridging the Gap: Collaboration and Covers*

Alvin Crow and Ray Benson arrived in Austin in 1973 and 1974, respectively, with lofty goals. Both musicians wished to break down the cultural barriers that divided hippies from Middle America by adopting and adapting the sounds of western swing and honky-tonk music and presenting it to audiences from both groups. At the same time, they also became authorities on the history and stylistic nuances of these musical styles, striving to, in Benson's words, "rediscover the roots of American music" before they passed from the nation's, and especially the region's, collective memory.<sup>54</sup> Through careful study of source recordings, collaboration with the pioneering musicians of western swing and honky-tonk music, and the composition of new songs in the style of the old hits, Crow and Benson worked to bring Texan musical traditions to Austin's progressive country music scene and to guarantee that the music would survive for future generations.

---

<sup>53</sup> Archie Green, "Austin's Cosmic Cowboys: Words in Collision," in *Torching the Fink Books & Other Essays on Vernacular Culture* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 78. Green observes that, by the early 1970s, "the richest single setting for musical convergence was Austin."

<sup>54</sup> Benson, interview with author, 31 May 2005.

Artist	Title	Label/Catalog No.	Date	Playboy Collaborators
Asleep at the Wheel	<i>Comin' Right at Ya</i>	United Artists 0598	1973	Johnny Gimble
Alvin Crow & the Neon Angels	<i>Alvin Crow &amp; the Neon Angels</i>	Big Wheel BW1003	1973 <sup>55</sup>	None
Asleep at the Wheel	<i>Asleep at the Wheel</i>	Epic KE 33097	1974	Johnny Gimble
Asleep at the Wheel	<i>Texas Gold</i>	Capitol ST-1441	1975	Johnny Gimble
Asleep at the Wheel	<i>Austin City Limits</i>	Episode #101	1975 <sup>56</sup>	Leon McAuliffe Eldon Shamblin Unknown others
Alvin Crow & the Pleasant Valley Boys	<i>Alvin Crow &amp; the Pleasant Valley Boys</i>	Long Neck LN-001	1976	Jesse Ashlock
Asleep at the Wheel	<i>Wheelin' and Dealin'</i>	Capitol ST-11546	1976	Johnny Gimble Tiny Moore Eldon Shamblin
Alvin Crow & the Pleasant Valley Boys	<i>High Riding</i>	Polydor PD-1-6102	1977	Al Stricklin

**Figure 3-1. Collaborations between Western Swing Revivalists and Former Texas Playboys (1973-1977).**

One of the most important benefits of working in central Texas was the opportunity to interact with and to learn directly from the pioneers of western swing. The majority of the former Playboys, while not based in Austin, lived nearby and were available for collaborations, jam sessions, and lessons, and Jesse Ashlock, one of the pioneering Wills fiddlers, actually did live in Austin in the early 1970s.<sup>57</sup> Although neither Crow nor Benson had the opportunity to work directly with Bob Wills, they did, as Benson recalled, “get to know all of the Playboys.”<sup>58</sup> Some of the most public

---

<sup>55</sup> Released in 1978.

<sup>56</sup> This episode was aired in 1976 as *Austin City Limits*' first syndicated broadcast (Clifford Endres, *Austin City Limits* [Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987], 21-23; “PBS—Austin City Limits,” <<http://www.pbs.org/klru/austin/artists/program292.html>> [accessed 10 February 2007]).

<sup>57</sup> Marcia Ball, interview with author, 18 January 2007. The Texas Playboys also reunited at the Kerrville Country & Western Jamboree in 1976 (“Happy Birthday America! With Good Old Country Music,” press release, from the Southern Folklife Collection Festival Files, 1936-2005 #30007, Southern Folklife Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill).

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* As a collaborator, Wills himself had no direct impact on the music of either Crow or Benson. Rather, both artists claim a degree of authenticity through missed connections and degrees of separation. While Benson uses the story of his trip to Wills's last session in Dallas to connect to the history of western swing, Crow's connection is less dramatic. He has been a fixture at the Broken Spoke, a dancehall in South Austin at which Wills performed at least three times between 1966 and 1968, since he

expressions of the relationships between the former Texas Playboys and the younger generation of revivalists may be found in the commercial recordings and television broadcasts made by Asleep at the Wheel and Alvin Crow (Figure 3-1). These musicians were incorporated in such recording sessions in two ways. In some instances, like Asleep at the Wheel's *Comin' Right at Ya* (1973), former Playboys were invited to be session musicians, augmenting the ensemble for the entire album. In other, less common, instances, former Playboys were showcased on only one or two songs, playing take-off solos or offering solo vocals on a signature composition and allowing the "host" artists to pay tribute to the pioneers of western swing.

Such prospects offered clear benefits for students and teachers alike. For the students, firsthand contact with former Playboys Jesse Ashlock, Al Stricklin, and Johnny Gimble not only allowed them to learn new musical techniques and to discover details about the history of the music they loved; it also imbued their own performances with a degree of authenticity that earlier generations of folk revivalists had not been able to achieve through the study of recordings alone. The teachers, on the other hand, earned some extra money and guaranteeing that their role in western swing's development would not be forgotten by future generations. As memory of the older generation of western swing musicians was beginning to dwindle, therefore, Benson and Crow established relationships that positioned themselves as heirs to this musical tradition and that secured the legacies of their teachers.

The first type of these collaborations can be best understood by examining the relationship between Asleep at the Wheel and former Playboy fiddler and mandolinist

---

arrived in Austin in 1973. Moreover, Wills's widow, Betty, once told James White, owner of the South Austin dancehall the Broken Spoke, that "Alvin played the fiddle like Bob Wills more than anyone else" (Moser, "The Long Bow").

Johnny Gimble. Signed to a series of mid-level and major labels including United Artists, Epic, and Capitol over the course of the decade, Asleep at the Wheel went to Nashville for all of their recording sessions in the 1970s, and there they first encountered Gimble.<sup>59</sup> A native of the east Texas town of Tyler, he joined the Texas Playboys in 1949 and worked with Wills until 1951. Following several years of service as a session musician in Dallas, Waco, and Springfield, Missouri, Gimble relocated to Nashville in the late 1960s to become a session musician on Music Row.<sup>60</sup> As one of the most sought after session musicians in Nashville, it is no wonder that he accompanied Asleep at the Wheel on all of their sessions between 1973 and 1976. Although Gimble does not appear on every cut of these albums, the fact that he does play on more than half of them indicates that his primary purpose on Asleep at the Wheel's albums was to fill a specific studio role. Gimble's performances, therefore, are not marked as special occasions, a notion that is reinforced by listing his contributions alongside the names of the other band members on the album jacket. Instead, they are cast as the result of the everyday practices of the Nashville studio system.

At the other end of the spectrum are those recordings made by Asleep at the Wheel and Alvin Crow & the Pleasant Valley Boys that feature former Playboys as honored guests. While these recordings form only a very small component of the groups' recorded output, these occasions permit listeners to be primary witnesses to the transmission of a musical culture. In 1976, Alvin Crow & the Pleasant Valley Boys

---

<sup>59</sup> Benson, interview with author, 31 May 2005. Benson observed that traveling to Nashville was a necessity because Austin had only one recording studio, which he deemed to be inadequate for recording a major-label project.

<sup>60</sup> Kevin Coffey, "Johnny Gimble," in *The Encyclopedia of Country Music*, ed. Paul Kingsbury (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 203.

featured former Playboy fiddler Jesse Ashlock on their Austin-recorded eponymous album.<sup>61</sup> Ashlock, who apprenticed with Milton Brown and the Musical Brownies between 1932 and 1934 before joining Bob Wills in 1935,<sup>62</sup> was influenced greatly by the fiddle style of jazz musician Joe Venuti and, as such, was instrumental in bringing “hot” improvisational techniques into western swing.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, with the addition of Ashlock to the Texas Playboys in 1935, Wills was able to incorporate the twin-fiddle style that Ashlock had developed alongside former Brownie Cecil Brower and that would later be considered an integral component of western swing music.<sup>64</sup> By asking Ashlock, one of the oldest Playboys, to perform on their 1976 sessions, Alvin Crow & the Pleasant Valley Boys earned cultural capital in Austin and in rural Texan dancehalls, positioning themselves as engaged culture bearers of western swing and, more broadly, Texan musical traditions.

Unlike *Asleep at the Wheel*'s work with Johnny Gimble, Crow's collaboration with Ashlock is marked by several important differences that emphasize the importance of his appearance on the record. First, Ashlock is featured on only two compositions: Ashlock's composition “When I Stop Loving You” and Jesse Winchester's song “That's a Touch I Like.” These cuts appear on the album's second side as the seventh and eighth cuts from the album (Figure 3-2). Much like guest appearances in a live performance, therefore, the album first presents the Pleasant Valley Boys as the featured musicians,

---

<sup>61</sup> Long Neck LN-001.

<sup>62</sup> Ginnell, 70, 96-97; Townsend, 55.

<sup>63</sup> Kevin Coffey, “Jesse Ashlock,” in *The Encyclopedia of Country Music*, ed. Paul Kingsbury (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 18.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*



and, after the group has established a rapport with the audience, the guest artist is introduced to change the pace of the concert. The album then concludes with two more songs featuring the Pleasant Valley Boys, further establishing the group as the featured act. Ashlock’s performance on the album, therefore, is constructed almost as a coincidental appearance and as a rare opportunity to witness the collaboration between a local star, which Crow certainly was by 1976, and one of his musical heroes.

Side 1	Side 2
Fiddler’s Lady (A. Crow)	Dynamite Diana (A. Crow)
Chains on Me (A. Crow)	<i>When I Stop Loving You (J. Ashlock)</i>
Rearview Mirror (B.E. Smith)	<i>That’s a Touch I Like (J. Winchester)</i>
I Just Dropped By to See the Show (J. Clark)	Foolish Faith (L. Simonds)
Nyquil Blues (H. Steiner)	All Night Long (B. Wills/J. Gimble)

**Figure 3-2. Alvin Crow & the Pleasant Valley Boys (1976) Song Order.**

In conjunction with the placement of the songs on the album, the two songs that showcase Ashlock as a featured performer are more reflective of his distinctive musical style than the other cuts on the album. “When I Stop Loving You,” for instance, is the first of only two songs on the album to feature a twin-fiddle duet, one of the two innovative techniques for which Ashlock was responsible (Figure 3-3). As is typical of many western swing songs, the recording begins with a legato duet between Crow and Ashlock in which they play the final eight measures of the song’s melody accompanied by Herb Steiner’s pedal steel guitar harmonics and a four-beat shuffle rhythm in the bass and drums. After Crow sings the entire 32-bar song, Ashlock and Crow again play the opening twin-fiddle duet. Crow then sings the bridge and concluding A section, and the song concludes with a four-measure coda that repeats the last four bars of the melody.

The second Ashlock feature number focuses on Ashlock’s improvisatory skills. “That’s a Touch I Like” is a jump blues number that serves as an excellent vehicle to showcase individual improvisation. After Crow sings the entire song, harmonica player

Roger Crabtree is featured in a twelve-bar chorus, followed by a twelve-bar solo by Ashlock. Crow introduces both soloists when each begins to play, shouting “Brother Roger” and “Take it away, Jesse” in much the same way that Bob Wills called on soloists in the Texas Playboys. While twelve measures might seem like a fleeting opportunity to solo, especially in the era following the extended psychedelic jams of the late 1960s and the progressive rock epics of the early 1970s, Ashlock would have certainly been prepared to develop a significant solo in this brief span of time. Most early western swing recordings showcase soloists for between eight and twelve measures, in large part because these performances were limited by the time constraints of 78-rpm records, and later recordings continued to adhere to that format, even following the advent of the long-playing (LP) record format.<sup>65</sup>

<b>Section</b>	<b>Length</b>	<b>Description</b>
Introduction (A')	8 mm.	Ashlock-Crow twin fiddle duet, accompanied by pedal steel harmonics and four-beat shuffle rhythm in bass and drums.
A	8 mm.	Crow vocals. Four-beat shuffle continues. Harmonically open (V).
A'	8 mm.	Crow vocals. Four-beat shuffle continues. Harmonically closed.
B	8 mm.	Crow vocals. Four-beat shuffle continues.
A'	8 mm.	Crow vocals. Lyrics as at A. Harmonically closed.
Interlude (A')	8 mm.	Repeat of Introduction.
B	8 mm.	Crow vocals. Four-beat shuffle continues.
A	8 mm.	Crow vocals. Lyrics as at A. Harmonically closed.
Coda (A')	4 mm.	Repeat of last four measures of Introduction

**Figure 3-3. Structural layout of "When I Stop Loving You" (Ashlock).**

---

<sup>65</sup> This arranging practice may also be found in Asleep at the Wheel's 1976 recording of "Blues for Dixie," written by Bob Wills's former business manager O.W. Mayo. The recording features three former Playboys: Gimble, electric mandolinist Tiny Moore, and rhythm guitarist Eldon Shamblin (only Gimble and Moore take solos). The solo sections begin after all of the lyrics have been presented, and Benson also introduces the soloists in the style of Bob Wills. Moreover, this song concludes the first side of the record, just as Ashlock's solos with the Pleasant Valley Boys appear in the middle of the record.

Many people, including the revivalists, their collaborators, and record label executives, were involved in the decision to invite collaborators into the recording studio with Austin's western swing bands, and an examination of the industrial forces at work in these collaborations sheds light on the nature of these temporary partnerships. For instance, the collaboration between Ashlock and the Pleasant Valley Boys is noteworthy because, unlike the *Asleep at the Wheel*-Johnny Gimble projects, *Alvin Crow & the Pleasant Valley Boys* was recorded in Austin for a local label. Moreover, Alvin Crow & the Pleasant Valley Boys are listed on the album jacket as the album's producers. It may be surmised, therefore, that all of the creative decisions regarding the songs recorded, the arrangements performed, the way the album was recorded, and the design of the physical album were made by the group. As such, the decision to include Jesse Ashlock, an elder statesman of western swing who would die just a few months following these sessions, may be interpreted as an attempt to position themselves securely within the western swing tradition.<sup>66</sup> On the other hand, because *Asleep at the Wheel* was signed to major labels, was produced by former Buddy Holly sideman Tommy Allsup and Nashville songwriter Norro Wilson, and recorded in Nashville, the decision to include musicians like Johnny Gimble on their sessions was likely influenced more by his role as a Nashville session musician than by his Playboy pedigree.<sup>67</sup> While Gimble's performances on *Asleep at the Wheel*'s albums grant a degree of authenticity to their work as revivalists, they do not convey to listeners the sense that they are witnessing the transmission of a unique musical culture in the same way as the Pleasant Valley Boys'

---

<sup>66</sup> Ashlock died on 9 August 1976. Coffey, "Jesse Ashlock," 18.

<sup>67</sup> Allsup produced *Comin' Right at Ya*, *Texas Fold*, and *Wheelin' and Dealin'*; Wilson produced the group's 1974 eponymous release.

collaboration with Jesse Ashlock.

The inclusion of pioneering western swing musicians on the studio recordings of revivalist groups like Alvin Crow & the Pleasant Valley Boys and Asleep at the Wheel authenticated the efforts of Austin's young musicians during the 1970s. At the same time, these groups certainly had a higher profile in Austin than did the former Playboys, who were no longer touring as a group. The Playboys' presence on albums by local and regional stars also endowed the older generation of musicians with cultural cachet among Austin's young people. This discourse of authenticity is, as ethnomusicologist Mark Slobin reminds us, one of the key characteristics of the folk revivalism of the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>68</sup> But, as Robert Cantwell has posited, the greatest beneficiary of this type of exchange is the revivalist who finds validation through the work of the folk:

The idea of the folk is noble, finally, as the type of that which is eminently worthy and indubitably excellent, that which scorns whatever is base, mean, unworthy, or cheap. The principle of nobility thereby achieves a kind of consummation in the idea of the folk, for here it strips itself of the outward conditions of birth or fortune, discovering what is surpassingly fine among the lowly and least favored, thereby validating itself at the deepest levels.<sup>69</sup>

While the former Texas Playboys were, in fact, commercial musicians of great renown in their heyday, they were transformed into folk musicians by western swing revivalists like Benson and Crow, both of whom sought to discover the mythical "roots" of American music.

At the same time that Benson and Crow's groups were collaborating with the pioneering musicians of western swing in the recording studio, they were also seeking to

---

<sup>68</sup> Mark Slobin, *Subcultural Sounds: Micromusics of the West* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), 21.

<sup>69</sup> Robert Cantwell, *When We Were Good: The Folk Revival* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 38.

position themselves as heirs to the legacies of western swing and honky-tonk by performing authentic reconstructions of these musical styles. These artists were concerned, to varying degrees, with recreating the specific details of instrumentation and performance practice that shaped the early recordings of artists like Milton Brown and the Musical Brownies, Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys, Ernest Tubb, and Hank Williams. The collaborative projects with the musicians who made those recordings certainly must have provided invaluable information, but the Austin-based revivalists more commonly utilized the recordings themselves as primary texts for their study of Texan dance music. Tommy Goldsmith, a guitarist who, among other gigs, performed with Alvin Crow in the mid-1970s, recalled that Crow insisted that his band members study the source recordings carefully in order to comprehend and recreate the rhythmic intricacies and idiosyncrasies of early western swing musicians.<sup>70</sup> Many of the source recordings utilized for this purpose, such as the popular double-LP *The Bob Wills Anthology*, released by Columbia in 1973, had only recently been made available on LP reissues,<sup>71</sup> while still others were 78-rpm recordings collected by enthusiasts and revivalists.<sup>72</sup> By looking to these recordings in their research, Austin's revivalists could base their work on evidence gleaned from the primary sonic sources.

The influence of early western swing recordings is most evident in the repertoires of the Pleasant Valley Boys and Asleep at the Wheel. While Alvin Crow and Asleep at

---

<sup>70</sup> Tommy Goldsmith, interview with author, 23 May 2005. Marcia Ball recalls that, when Freda and the Firedogs began performing country music in 1970, they, too, mimicked the source recordings of Loretta Lynn, Tammy Wynette, and other contemporaneous Nashville country artists (Marcia Ball, interview with author, 18 January 2007).

<sup>71</sup> Columbia KG 32416.

<sup>72</sup> Benson, interview with author, 31 May 2005. One of Benson's earliest forays into folk revivalism was to establish a sizeable 78-rpm record collection.

the Wheel guitarist Leroy Preston were both talented songwriters, both groups also included several cover versions of earlier hits. In his three albums—*Alvin Crow and the Neon Angels* (1973/1979), *Alvin Crow and the Pleasant Valley Boys* (1976), and *High Riding* (1977)—Crow included several Wills standards from the 1930s and 1940s, including “San Antonio Rose,” “Faded Love,” and “Maiden’s Prayer,” as well as “All Night Long,” a song that, unlike the others, Wills only recorded once during a 1964 Dallas session.<sup>73</sup> Many of the covers on *Asleep at the Wheel*’s albums are also culled from the Wills catalog, but the band also included several songs that are representative of Benson’s broad conception of “roots music.” Their debut album, *Comin’ Right at Ya*, features Wills’s signature “Take Me Back to Tulsa,” as well as honky-tonk classics such as “Drivin’ Nails in My Coffin,” made famous by Texan Ernest Tubb’s 1946 recording, and Hank Williams and Fred Rose’s “I’ll Never Get Out of This World Alive,” a hit record from late 1952. By their second album, however, the band had begun to draw upon genres outside of western swing and country music, performing Louis Jordan’s “Choo Choo Ch’Boogie” and Count Basie’s “Jumpin’ at the Woodside.” Just as western swing music itself borrowed from a variety of musical sources from pioneer fiddle practices to contemporaneous popular songs, so too did Austin’s western swing revivalists borrow from the sources available to them. Yet Wills, Brown, and other pioneering western swing musicians were not attempting to demonstrate their cultural authority over these styles; rather they were concerned with creating a hybrid music that could appeal to the widest possible audience and that would facilitate dancing. Austin’s musicians, however, were almost inextricably bound up in a display of their authority, as

---

<sup>73</sup> Pinson, 364.

they were working diligently to demonstrate the importance of musical traditions that they believed were either on the verge of death or that were already long forgotten. By performing and recording the music of Bob Wills, Ernest Tubb, and Hank Williams, therefore, Asleep at the Wheel and Alvin Crow were trying to make this music relevant to Austin's cosmic cowboys.

While the performance of the standard repertoire of western swing, honky-tonk, and other "roots" musics was an important element in demonstrating the cultural authority of Austin's western swing revivalists, the artists created an additional element of authenticity through the use of period instrumentation. Benson recalled that, when Asleep at the Wheel went to Mercury Custom Studios in Nashville to record their debut album *Comin' Right at Ya*, many of the session musicians and recording technicians were surprised that steel guitar player Reuben "Lucky O" Gosfield chose to perform on both the pedal steel guitar, the preferred steel guitar in Nashville, and the older lap steel guitar. Benson observed that the musicians were not surprised that Gosfield was technically proficient on both instruments; in fact, Nashville's studio musicians were also capable of performing on both. Rather, as Benson observed, the Nashville establishment "wanted to forget their hillbilly roots,"<sup>74</sup> and the lap steel guitar, which was first electrified by Musical Brownie Bob Dunn around 1935,<sup>75</sup> became a symbol of Asleep at the Wheel's "authenticity."<sup>76</sup> For revivalists like Benson, who harbored the belief that mainstream country music was forsaking its roots, the lap steel stood as a weapon in their battle to

---

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> Ginnell, 108-113; Kevin Coffey, "Bob Dunn," in *The Encyclopedia of Country Music*, ed. Paul Kingsbury (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 156. The first recordings of an electrified lap steel guitar were made by Milton Brown and the Musical Brownies in 1935.

<sup>76</sup> Benson, interview with author, 31 May 2005.

preserve western swing and honky-tonk music, and, as such, it validated both the artists and the audiences who paid to see them in person or to obtain their recordings.

Another element of western swing performance practice borrowed directly from Wills's recordings is his trademark holler. Wills was not a singer, but, as the bandleader and master of ceremonies, he often offered a lilting falsetto holler to signify his approval of a band member's take-off solo, to comment on the lyrics of a song, or to call on a specific soloist. In the fourth verse of the 1941 Texas Playboys recording of "Take Me Back to Tulsa," for instance, Tommy Duncan explains, "We always wear a great big smile. / We never do act sour," to which Wills replies, "Nah," in a lingering falsetto. As Townsend explains, Wills was likely introduced to this practice as a child in west Texas and continued to use them in his performances to encourage band members and to build interest among the audience:

Wills' hollering and wisecracking came from two sources. His "ah haas" and elongated folk yells he learned as a very young boy. At the ranch dances in West Texas, his father, grandfather, and the cowboys, too, would give them out if the spirit of the music (or the whisky) so moved them. This wisecracking and talking to his musicians also came from his youth, from his relationship with black musicians who were constantly bantering while they performed. Their free and uninhibited spirit had been part of him since childhood; it was not something he adopted later.... Bob's musicians loved his hollering, talking, and urging them on as they sang and played.<sup>77</sup>

As a sonic signature of the Texas Playboys, Wills's vocalizations also offered the Austin revivalists a clear signifier of western swing tradition through which to connect to Wills. In Asleep at the Wheel's 1973 recording of "Take Me Back to Tulsa," for instance, Benson is featured on a take-off guitar solo. As the band's emcee, he, like Wills, is also responsible for calling out the names of the soloists for the benefit of the

---

<sup>77</sup> Townsend, 107.



album's listeners or, as in the live performances that this and Wills's recordings attempt to simulate, the physical audience. Unlike Wills's recordings, in which take-off solos were almost always performed by someone other than Wills, Benson must call out his own name. To resolve this conflict, Benson turns to comedy, commenting after a few notes of his solo, "That sounds like me.... It *is* me!" While there is no regulation that requires that the bandleader introduce the soloists, either in the recording session or on stage, the challenges that arise when Benson and Asleep at the Wheel's attempt to recreate what they heard on the early Wills recordings demonstrate further that the recordings offered a wealth of musical options that, when added to a revivalist performance, provide clear evidence to listeners that the performers have, in fact, studied the available sources carefully. As such, the borrowing of such clear signifiers from the recordings of Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys indicates to informed and uninformed audiences alike that the Austin revivalists deserve to be recognized as members of the western swing community.

Crow and Benson's use of western swing signifiers drawn from early recordings was not, however, merely a matter of inserting them liberally throughout a recording. Rather, the decisions they made concerning what elements of a source recording to preserve in their recreation and which ones to omit reveal important details regarding the relationship between Austin's revivalists and early western swing and honky tonk recordings. For these musicians, the recordings were not considered to be fixed representations of a performance that should be reproduced faithfully in subsequent performances. Rather, source recordings served as a compendium of musical resources from which Austin's revivalists could freely borrow. In other words, the revivalists were

engaged in a dialogue with the source recording that allowed them to interpret the standard repertoire of western swing and honky tonk music in an idiomatic manner. Like jazz musicians basing their solos on the improvisations of earlier artists and “early music” specialists looking to performance practice treatises to learn how to embellish a baroque sonata, Austin’s revivalists borrowed freely from the recordings of Bob Wills, Milton Brown, Ernest Tubb, and Hank Williams while infusing their own performances with their personal musical aesthetic.

Section	Bob Wills (1945)	Alvin Crow (1973)
A	Roly Poly, eatin’ corn and taters, Hungry every minute of the day.	<i>Roly Poly, scrambled eggs for breakfast, Bread and jelly twenty times a day.</i>
A’	Roly Poly, gnawin’ on a biscuit. Long as he can chew it, it’s ok.	Roly Poly, gnawin’ on a biscuit. Long as he can chew it, it’s ok.
B	He can eat an apple pie and never even bat an eye. He likes everything from soup to hay.	He can eat an apple pie and never even bat an eye. He likes everything from soup to hay.
A’’	Roly Poly, daddy’s little fatty. Bet he’s gonna be a man someday.	Roly Poly, daddy’s little fatty. Bet he’s gonna be a man someday.
C	Roly Poly, scrambled eggs for breakfast, Bread and jelly twenty times a day (ahh haa).	Roly Poly, scrambled eggs for breakfast, Bread and jelly twenty times a day.
C’	Roly Poly, eats a hearty dinner. It takes a lot of strength to run and play.	<i>Roly Poly, gnawin’ on a biscuit. Long as he can chew it, it’s ok.</i>
D	Pulls up weeds and does the chores, and he runs both ways through all the stores. He works up an appetite that way.	Pulls up weeds and does the chores, and he runs both ways through all the stores. He works up an appetite that way.
A’’	Oh Roly Poly, daddy’s little fatty. Bet he’s gonna be a man someday.	Oh Roly Poly, daddy’s little fatty. Bet he’s gonna be a man someday.

**Figure 3-4. Comparison of lyric structure of Bob Wills’s and Alvin Crow’s recordings of “Roly Poly.”**

Alvin Crow and the Neon Angels’ 1973 recording of “Roly Poly,” Bob Wills’s postwar ode to his infant son James Robert Wills II, offers an interesting example of this process at work (Figure 3-4). Wills’s recording, made with the Texas Playboys in Hollywood on 26 January 1945,<sup>78</sup> is comprised of two verses, each of which is in standard AABA song form, that describe to the point of hyperbole the energy and resulting appetite of his young son. There is not, however, a narrative thread that would necessarily require that any one of the eight-measure A-section lyric phrases follow

---

<sup>78</sup> Pinson, 347.

another; rather, each phrase makes a complete observation independent of the surrounding phrases. Alvin Crow uses this to his advantage in his 1973 recording of “Roly Poly,” interpolating the first phrase of Wills’s second verse into the first phrase of the first verse in his recording. Furthermore, in the second verse, Crow repeats his new first verse, but with the bridge from the second verse of Wills’s 1945 recording.



Figure 3-5. “Roly Poly” Introductory Motive.



Figure 3-6. “Roly Poly,” Shared opening phrase of guitar solo.

In addition to the reconstruction and reshaping of the lyrics in Crow’s “Roly Poly,” Crow and the Neon Angels also used melodic material from the Wills recording as the basis for their own improvisations. Both recordings begin with an eight-bar introduction that spins out a melodic sequence on scale degrees 5-4-3 (Figure 3-5). In the Wills recording, this motive is performed twice by one guitarist, and is then repeated twice more as a duet between the two lead guitarists, Cameron Hill and Jimmy Wyble. The introduction to Crow’s performance, however, is arranged and executed with much less precision than the Wills recording, with Crow simply repeating the figure three times using a very loose bow, making the performance sound more like the older contest fiddling styles of Eck Robertson and other pre-Wills fiddlers than the fiddle styles of

Jesse Ashlock, Johnny Gimble, and other Wills sidemen. Moreover, in both recordings, the lead guitarist takes a sixteen-measure solo following the completion of the first verse. Rick Crow bases his take-off solo on the opening notes of the guitar solo from Wills's 1945 recording, which was performed by either Cameron Hill or Jimmy Wyble (Figure 3-6).<sup>79</sup> After playing this brief fragment, his solo diverges from the original source. Whereas the soloist in Wills's recording plays a descending melodic sequence in thirds on the B and upper E strings of the guitar, Crow offers a less active descending lick built around a glissando on the B string.

Within the western swing tradition, the changes that Crow and the Neon Angels made would not be noteworthy. In fact, as a living musical tradition in the dancehalls of Texas and Oklahoma, western swing musicians were expected to transform compositions to feature their individual musical talents and to cater to the tastes and demands of local dancers. Yet the similarities between Crow's recording and the 1945 Wills recording indicate that Austin's revivalists were responsible for a standardization of the western swing repertoire and performance practice. While musicians like Wills often demanded that their sidemen "never copy anyone" and improvise new and innovative solos with each performance, Austin's revivalists clearly reproduced elements of the source recordings both as a way to gain competence as western swing and honky tonk musicians and to demonstrate their immersion in the music's history. Like young musicians in a variety of musical traditions, Alvin Crow, Ray Benson, and their bandmates meticulously studied western swing source recordings, learning both the nuances of the style and its key solos as a way of becoming competent to perform in the idiom. Furthermore, such

---

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

study helped make their music relevant to both the cosmic cowboy audience and the patrons of rural dancehalls. For their audiences in Austin, their mimicry educated the cosmic cowboys, transmitting previously unknown solos to a new generation. At the same time, by demonstrating idiomatic mastery, Austin's revivalists could placate the patrons of the rural Texan dancehalls he frequented, demonstrating that, despite their long hair and residence in Austin, they were performing western swing with a clear understanding of its musical and cultural heritage.

Such careful study of the primary sources of western swing and honky-tonk music and collaboration with the musicians who made the original recordings also facilitated creative decisions that would not have been possible without the depth of knowledge that Benson, Crow, and others gleaned from recordings and their collaborations with older musicians. As the previous examples illustrate, source recordings served as a launching pad for creative decisions that allowed the revivalists to demonstrate their cultural authority, their musical *bona fides*, and their interpretive prowess. Moreover, because these musicians worked so diligently to learn and to promote western swing and honky-tonk music, they positioned themselves as heirs to the legacies of earlier Texan musicians and, in the process, established themselves as "Texan."

### **Conclusions**

The rhetoric of preservation put forth by Austin's revivalists certainly appealed to some segments of the progressive country music scene in Austin. As Archie Green has explained, for instance, many of the young people who were relocating to Austin during the 1970s either to begin their academic careers or to become part of the city's growing

local music scene were ambivalent toward their Texan heritage, at once wishing to distance themselves from the Texan-ness of their parents while searching for roots in more “authentic” representations of Texan identity.<sup>80</sup> By attending live performances by Austin’s revivalist bands, Austin’s youth could eschew the Texas of their parents’ generation by associating themselves directly with the music and imagery of their grandparents’ generation. Moreover, western swing emerged in Texas and Oklahoma in the 1930s as the region’s rural farmers began to migrate to cities like Fort Worth, Dallas, Tulsa, and Oklahoma City in search of upward socioeconomic mobility. As a result, it was connected musically and socially to both rural and urban Texas, drawing on pioneer fiddling practices and contemporary popular music. As many of Austin’s youth sought a sort of downward mobility, therefore, their affinity with western swing and honky-tonk music also permitted them to bridge the gap between their primarily middle-class upbringings and their desire to get “back to the land.”

The western swing revivalists who were active in Austin’s progressive country movement, like the cosmic cowboy songwriters with whom they coexisted, therefore offered an alternative definition of Texan-ness to a population that actively sought exactly that. By building upon the musical foundations of modern Texas, the western swing revivalists offered a more historically-informed Texan identity than did the cosmic cowboys. Yet, at the same time, through their attempts to reconstruct and resurrect a musical culture that had flourished more than three decades before the progressive country scene, the revivalists engaged in a similar sort of idealism by proposing that the

---

<sup>80</sup> Green, “Austin’s Cosmic Cowboys,” 78.

performance of western swing and honky tonk music could bridge the generational and cultural divisions between young Austinites and older generations of Texans.

## CHAPTER 4

### *WANTED!: THE OUTLAWS:* AUSTIN, NASHVILLE, AND THE EXPORTATION OF PROGRESSIVE COUNTRY MUSIC

Despite their independent and regionalist rhetoric, many of the musicians who performed in Austin's progressive country scene maintained close contact with musical communities in other parts of the United States, especially the national music industry centers of Los Angeles and Nashville. These interactions are not surprising, as many of Austin's most prominent musicians had enjoyed moderately successful careers as songwriters and session musicians in those cities during the 1960s. Many of these artists, including Michael Murphey, Kinky Friedman, Jerry Jeff Walker, Bobby Bridger, Steven Fromholz, B.W. Stevenson, Asleep at the Wheel, and Alvin Crow & the Pleasant Valley Boys, continued to record material for major national labels like RCA, A&M, ABC, Capitol, and MCA throughout the 1970s, in large part because Austin was home to only one professional quality recording studio and no major record labels.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, several artists who lived and worked in Nashville collaborated with Austin's musicians and contributed important songs, session work, and production for their recording projects.

The interaction of Austin's progressive country musicians and musicians in Nashville also permitted the exportation of progressive country's valuable Texan imagery

---

<sup>1</sup> Austin's Odyssey Sound was the only professional recording studio in Austin, and even this studio did not meet national label standards.



and independent rhetoric to Nashville. While Texas had been long part of Nashville's country music imagination and was regularly manifested in the cowboy hats and boots donned by the stars of the Grand Ole Opry, Nashville's gaze in the late 1960s and early 1970s fixed on the Southeast, not the Southwest.<sup>2</sup> Journalist Dave Hickey explained in a January 1974 article for *Country Music* titled "In Defense of the Telecaster Cowboy Outlaws" that a group of Texan-born country musicians, including Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings, among others, were beginning to articulate a self-consciously "Texan" musical aesthetic and to dress and act like "outlaws." As Hickey observes, however, the primary difference between these "outlaws" and the rest of Nashville was that "these guys... were born country on the west side of the Mississippi and often forget to go watery in the knees at the mention of Jeff Davis."<sup>3</sup> As his reference to Confederate president Jefferson Davis indicates, Nashville carried the burden of the Old South's legacy, becoming something of a symbol of whiteness in the era of the Civil Rights Movement. While the racial issues in Nashville were certainly more complicated than Hickey describes, they are symbolic of a much larger problem that faced liberal country musicians: the tightly knit "good-ole-boys" networks of the Nashville studio system. Texas, therefore, represented an alternative to Music Row and stood as a significant threat to Music City's status quo.

The challenge that progressive country's idealism and Texan chauvinism posed to Nashville was heartily welcomed by a growing contingent of Texan-born Nashville

---

<sup>2</sup> Richard A. Peterson, *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 81-94.

<sup>3</sup> Dave Hickey, "In Defense of the Telecaster Cowboy Outlaws," *Country Music* (January 1974), 90.

recording artists who, after working there for several years, wished to acquire some artistic autonomy from Music Row. Throughout the decade of the 1970s, Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings drew heavily upon the Texan imagery and pastoralism of progressive country music and the countercultural energy of Austin's flourishing youth culture. At the same time, these artists did not eschew the production and distribution practices of Nashville's Music Row. Rather, they merged the youthful idealism of progressive country and the highly refined production systems of Music Row to reinvigorate their careers and to market their music to a growing liberal country audience.

One of the richest sites of inquiry into the exportation of the "Texan-ness" and independence of Austin's progressive country music movement to Nashville is the record album. In the hands of Nashville's artists and producers, the record album was put to different uses, from tribute albums to concept albums to marketing samplers. As a distribution medium developed and refined by the mainstream popular music industry, of which Nashville's Music Row was an integral component, the record album had been used extensively since the mid-1950s to market country artists, to tap into new musical communities, and to define and redefine the sound of contemporary country music. In the hands of Nelson and Jennings, who had both witnessed these processes firsthand as recording artists on Music Row in the 1960s, the record album became a powerful tool in their attempts to distance themselves from commercial control of Music Row, to redefine their public images and musical aesthetics, and to market their new images and sounds to a liberal audience. As nationally recognized recording artists exploiting the practices of the national music industry, Jennings and Nelson, as Texan "outlaws" working within the production networks of Nashville, conveyed the musical, social, and ideological values of

Austin to a national market, at once solidifying Austin's place within the national music scene and threatening to undermine its stability.

### **The Role of the Album in the Nashville Sound Era**

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Nashville was a regional outpost of the nation's major record labels, including RCA Victor, Columbia, and Decca. Music Row, located on Music Square in Nashville, was home to most of the record labels, the recording studios, publishing houses, and booking agents involved in the production and dissemination of country music during the 1950s and 1960s. Because of its significant connections to the mainstream popular music industry, Music Row both borrowed heavily from and contributed new ideas to the aesthetic and marketing paradigms of their home offices in New York and Los Angeles.<sup>4</sup> In addition to the sonic influences of mainstream popular music, including the introduction of string orchestras and the ascendance of smooth, resonant vocals in country music, record executives in Nashville also began to experiment with the long-playing recording technologies developed in New York, exploring ways to combine songs with a particular theme on a single album as a marketing concept.<sup>5</sup> The introduction of the LP to the world of country music did not, however, lead Nashville producers to begin creating longer compositions. As journalist

---

<sup>4</sup> Joli Jensen has demonstrated that the association between Nashville and the mainstream popular music industry resulted in a conflict between the "downhome" traditions of country music and the "uptown" pop aesthetics and marketing procedures promoted by the home offices, a tension manifested most clearly in the use of string orchestras on country records and the ascendance of singers with polished and resonant vocal styles. See: Joli Jensen, *The Nashville Sound: Authenticity, Commercialization, and Country Music* (Nashville and London: The Country Music Foundation Press and Vanderbilt University Press, 1998), 21-37; *idem*, "Creating the Nashville Sound: An Interpretive Approach to Culture Production," Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1984, 46-83.

<sup>5</sup> Jensen, *The Nashville Sound*, 45.

Colin Escott has observed, despite the increased playing time made available by the LP, country music held fast to the idea of the three- to four-minute single standardized during the era of the 78-rpm disc:

Long-playing records were introduced [to the entire music industry] in 1948, and they had a gradual effect on the way most forms of popular music were composed and played.... Adult popular music remained singles-driven into the fifties, rock & roll was singles-driven until the mid- to late sixties, but country music remained singles-driven into the era when singles as such had almost ceased to exist.<sup>6</sup>

But some Nashville producers, most notably RCA's Chet Atkins and Columbia's Don Law, began to explore ways to coerce record buyers to purchase the same recording twice, using the 45-rpm single as a promotional tool for a longer album. These producers also began to use the LP to construct an artist's public persona and to market that image to the record-buying public. Furthermore, as historian Robert W. Butts argues, some country artists and producers also began to "to see [in the long-playing record] the possibilities for expanding stories, themes, or ideas in related songs," as well as the potential for extended narratives and a return to pre-phonographic ballad traditions.<sup>7</sup>

Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson both arrived in Nashville at the height of the Nashville Sound era in country music, and, as a result, their early work was strongly influenced by the recording, distribution, and marketing practices developed when the LP

---

<sup>6</sup> Colin Escott, "The Talking Machine: How Records Shaped Country Music," in *The Encyclopedia of Country Music*, ed. Paul Kingsbury (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 468. See also: Philip Miller and Morton Lee, "The New Victor Jewel Box," *Notes* (2<sup>nd</sup> series) 6, no. 2 (March 1949): 263-264; Earl Walker, Philip L. Miller, and Morton Lee, "Recording Symposium," *Notes* (2<sup>nd</sup> series) 7, no. 3 (June 1950): 363-371; Alec Robertson, "A New Age in Recorded Music," *The Musical Times and Singing-Class Circular* 94, no. 1323 (May 1953): 207-209; Reebee Garofalo, "From Music Publishing to mp3: Music and Industry in the Twentieth Century," *American Music* 17, no 3 (Autumn 1999): 318-354.

<sup>7</sup> Butts, 90.

was adopted in the 1950s. A survey of their early recorded work reveals that they were involved in a number of musical projects that explored the various possibilities afforded by the long-playing record. First, in their earliest days as recording artists for RCA Victor, both Jennings and Nelson recorded albums that sought to establish their country music pedigrees and to position themselves squarely within the Music Row community. Second, Jennings recorded a series of albums under a marketing rubric conceived by executives at RCA Victor that were designed to sell Jennings's music and his public image to the countercultural folk music audience of the mid-1960s. Third, both artists recorded albums that featured a thematically unified body of songs, allowing these apprentices to witness firsthand the compositional possibilities that the long-playing album afforded. Careful examination of the songs to be included on each album, the albums' jacket photographs, and the sleeve notes reveals that, in the hands of Music Row, the record album was a powerful marketing tool. As astute up-and-coming recording artists, Jennings and Nelson learned from these models and applied them directly to their recorded output in the 1970s as they worked to distance themselves from the Nashville industry that had supported them through the 1960s.

One of the most efficient ways in which the LP was used to sell a new artist was for the artist to record a "tribute" album to an established country artist. Such projects functioned as subtle advertising tools, indicating to prospective record buyers that, if they like the artist to whom homage is being paid, they might very well like the artist who is paying tribute. It should not be surprising, therefore, that this was one of the first projects Jennings undertook in Nashville. Recorded on 24 May and 1 June 1966, *Waylon Sings Ol' Harlan* is a tribute album featuring twelve songs by one of the most popular

Nashville songwriters of the day, Harlan Howard.<sup>8</sup> Released in March 1967, *Waylon Sings Ol' Harlan* was, as his fourth RCA release and his fourth in twelve months, a well-timed statement of Jennings's artistic lineage and connection to the Music Row scene. But unlike earlier iterations of the tribute album, *Waylon Sings Ol' Harlan* is a tribute to a living, but hidden member of the Nashville music industry: a contemporary songwriter. The full-color photograph on the front of the record jacket (Figure 4-1) shows Jennings dominating the right side of the photograph and holding a twelve-string resonator guitar, while Howard, only partially visible in the lower left quadrant of the cover, kneels at Jennings's feet, approving of Jennings's performance. This photograph inverts the typical relationship of the tribute album, in which the artist performing the tribute is presumably the one who has "learned at the feet of the master." But it also mirrors the status of both Jennings and Howard on Music Row: Jennings was a public face of country music and the enactor of Howard's songs as his voice was featured on records, on radio, and in live performances, while Howard's role as a songwriter did not grant him a similar public profile.

While the cover photograph of *Waylon Sings Ol' Harlan* may reflect Jennings's and Howard's public images, Howard's sleeve notes, appearing on the reverse side of the album jacket, indicate that his activities in the studios and backrooms of Music Row had granted him more authority and power than the cover photo indicates. As Howard remarks in the opening paragraph:

One of my greatest pleasures in being a part of the country music scene is knowing and working with many talented artists on their way up and perhaps at times even helping them with songs, advice, and, if needed, encouragement. Almost anyone could have foreseen that Patsy Cline, Bobby Bare and Buck

---

<sup>8</sup> RCA LPM/S-3660. See Jennings with Kaye, 138-139.

Owens were going to make it, so I was not alone in my predictions; and I am far from alone when I say that Waylon is going to be one of country music's greatest stars. When someone has a great voice with tremendous feeling, good looks, fine stage presence, innate ambition, plus "Chit [*sic*] Atkins" and RCA Victor going for him, what else does he need?<sup>9</sup>

Howard's statement establishes his position as an insider of "the country music scene" and as someone whose ability to evaluate the potential of fledgling artists grants him the role of gatekeeper. Furthermore, as Howard explains, his status on Music Row also permitted him to witness firsthand the development of some of country music's biggest stars—Cline, Bare, and Owens, among many others—adding weight to his assessment of Jennings's abilities and establishing him within the lineage of country superstardom. While *Waylon Sings Ol' Harlan* is not a typical tribute album, it is an homage to Music Row, the Nashville Sound, and the songwriting of Harlan Howard, which formed one of the pillars of the country repertory during the 1950s and 1960s.



Figure 4-1. Front cover of *Waylon Sings Ol' Harlan* (1966; RCA LPM/S-3660).

---

<sup>9</sup> Harlan Howard, sleeve notes for *Waylon Sings Ol' Harlan* (RCA LPM/S-3660).

Willie Nelson's *Country Willie: His Own Songs*, his debut release on RCA in 1965, stands, like Jennings's tribute to Howard, as an album celebrating the career of an influential, but hidden, figure of Music Row.<sup>10</sup> But unlike *Waylon Sings Ol' Harlan*, *Country Willie* reveals Nelson himself as one of the figures responsible for the country music they already enjoy. Nelson, who moved from Texas to Nashville in 1960 to seek a career in country music, enjoyed a great deal of success as a country songwriter, penning hits for Patsy Cline ("Crazy"), Billy Walker ("Funny How Time Slips Away"), and Faron Young ("Hello Walls").<sup>11</sup> As a recording artist, however, Nelson had not enjoyed the same success, recording two albums for the midlevel Liberty Records label in the early 1960s, both of which received mixed reviews and enjoyed limited distribution. As his first album for a national record label, therefore, *Country Willie: His Own Songs* achieves similar ends as *Waylon Sings Ol' Harlan*, presenting both the voice of a new artist and the music of a songwriter whose role within the music industry had been hidden from view. But the concept that producer Chet Atkins created for *Country Willie* was more dramatic than that of *Waylon Sings Ol' Harlan* because it reveals that the artist and the songwriter are the same person.<sup>12</sup> As the album's sleeve notes observe:

---

<sup>10</sup> RCA LPM/S-3418.

<sup>11</sup> Bob Allen, "Willie Nelson," in *The Encyclopedia of Country Music*, ed. Paul Kingsbury (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 375.

<sup>12</sup> Chet Atkins observed of his work with Nelson: "When we signed Willie on RCA I remember somebody at a meeting saying, 'Willie has got to be big. He's got style and he's different and he's a great songwriter and his time is going to come now, damn it. Just like Roger Miller, Willie's time has got to come.'

"I said, 'Well, he sounds great in Texas. What we've got to do is spread him out of Texas.' So that was going to be our thing—promote the hell out of Willie and sell his records all over the country. But we didn't do it." (Qtd. in Willie Nelson with Bud Shrake, *Willie: An Autobiography* [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988; reprint ed., New York: Cooper Square Press, 2000], 178).



He [Nelson] writes the songs... You make them into hits. And the connecting link—the singers who record his music—have included everybody from Ernest Tubb to Julie London, and Governor Jimmie Davis to Damita Jo.

Look at that list of titles! They recall stars like Faron Young (Hello Walls), Johnny Tillotson, Perry Como and Billy Walker (Funny How Time Slips Away), Ray Price and Doris Day (Night Life) and Como again (My Own Peculiar Way). But after going through this album, start to finish, you're going to have just one star in mind—Willie Nelson—'cause, friend, he sings 'em like he writes 'em: great!<sup>13</sup>

The photograph of Nelson on the album's cover also brings his country authenticity into sharp focus (Figure 4-2). The potential record buyer sees Nelson, dressed in denim overalls and a white t-shirt, scrawling the title of the album on the dark blue, denim-esque boards of a barn. The rusticity of the cover photograph underscores the “country-ness” of the LP's musical content. Furthermore, the title presents this record as an unmediated and, therefore, more “authentic” communication between the songwriter and his listeners, emphasizing that Nelson will not be singing the music of another songwriter, nor will another artist be interpreting his songs; instead the composer will sing “*his own* songs.” Indeed, the liner notes also emphasize the “direct farm-to-market road” Nelson took in the making of *Country Willie*, proposing that Nelson sought to communicate directly with his fan base, “personally recording for you his hits, and several hits-to-be.”<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Sleeve notes to *Country Willie: His Own Songs* (RCA LPM/S-3418).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

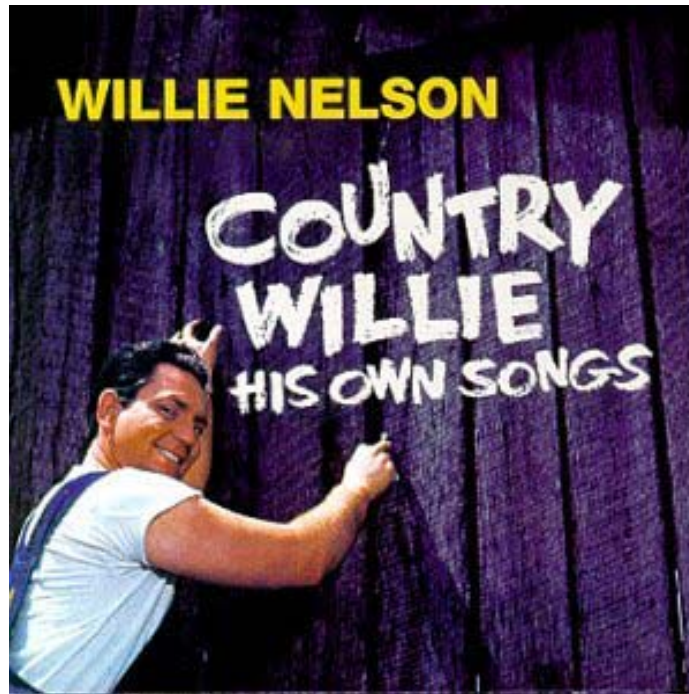


Figure 4-2. Cover of Willie Nelson, *Country Willie: His Own Songs* (1965; RCA LPM/S-3418).

The tribute albums that Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings recorded during the initial years of their RCA contracts (1965-1966) indicate that Music Row labels made use of the long-playing 33-1/3-rpm record to attract audiences for their artists. While these albums were certainly important statements regarding the identities and pedigrees of the relative newcomers Jennings and Nelson, their full potential to build audiences had been first realized in Jennings's first album for RCA, entitled *Folk-Country*.<sup>15</sup> Released in March 1966 and recorded over the course of four sessions between March and July 1965,<sup>16</sup> the album began as part of a marketing idea designed to promote a roster of five artists, all of whom were recording music for RCA that producer Chuck Glaser has described as a “crossover... not between country and rock but between country and folk”:

John D. Loudermilk, George Hamilton IV, Bobby Bare, John Hartford, and Waylon

---

<sup>15</sup> RCA LPM/S-3523.

<sup>16</sup> Jennings with Kaye, 109-110. According to Jennings, the session dates were 16 March, 18 March, 19 March, and 28 July 1965.

Jennings.<sup>17</sup> As Jennings biographer R. Serge Denisoff has noted, the country market around 1966 was beginning to fragment as country artists like Johnny Cash, who was contracted to Columbia Records and was also Jennings's roommate, were enjoying crossover success among an increasingly youthful population interested in the commercial folk music of Bob Dylan; Peter, Paul, and Mary; and Ian & Sylvia.<sup>18</sup> Journalist Peter Doggett has argued that the establishment of "Folk-Country" was prompted by the success of a school of Canadian singer-songwriters that included Ian & Sylvia (whose "Four Strong Winds" had achieved significant crossover success), Gordon Lightfoot, and Joni Mitchell, and who were brought to Atkins's attention by Canadian and RCA recording artist George Hamilton IV.<sup>19</sup> In addition to the commercial folk songwriters recruited for the "Folk-Country" project, Jennings recalled the influence of contemporaneous rock music:

The other side of my new record [single] is a song from England, by the Beatles. Chet was playing it on the guitar one day, and asked me had I heard it, and I told him, "You bet. I bought their album just to hear that one song." "Do you like it?" Chester asked. "Yes," I told him. "Why don't you record it?" he asked, and we both laughed. Well, I said I would, and I did it—did it country, too [for the soundtrack to *Nashville Rebel*]. There are some Rolling Stones, Beatles and Donovan songs that can be done country, and I figure that turnabout is fair play. If they can do "Act Naturally," then we can do some of theirs, country.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Qtd. in R. Serge Denisoff, *Waylon: A Biography* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983), 122.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>19</sup> Peter Doggett, *Are You Ready for the Country: Elvis, Dylan, Parsons and the Roots of Country Rock* (New York: Penguin, 2000), 301-302.

<sup>20</sup> Qtd. in *Ibid.*, 302. "Act Naturally" (John Russell/Voni Morrison) was recorded by Buck Owens in 1963. Released as the A side of Capitol 4937 in November 1963, the song reached number one on the *Billboard* country chart.

Atkins and Jennings were keenly aware of the cultural trends shaping American youth culture and the changing tastes of the record-buying public. Atkins and his colleagues along Nashville's Music Row—most notably Don Law, who was the mastermind behind Cash's success on Columbia Records in the mid-1960s—sought to redevelop the face of country music as the Baby Boomers matured into young, politically engaged adults. In his study of the development of the rock concept album, David Montgomery argues that the LP constituted the ideal format for the emerging hippie generation, because it required listeners to purchase a record for a single, like "Mr. Tambourine Man" or "Subterranean Homesick Blues," and to listen to the entire album, exposing the listener to multiple social messages in a single listening session.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, concepts like Atkins's "Folk-Country" could, by joining folk, country, and rock music in a single collection, articulate a unifying statement in a socially fragmented time, proposing that rock, country, and folk all share similar origins, fan bases, and sentiments.

Concerning Jennings's ability to tap into the burgeoning country-folk crossover market, Denisoff cites an interview with Atkins's assistant producer Felton Jarvis, who recalled, "Usually we record a new artist on single discs, see how those sell and eventually put the artist on an album. But Chet felt so sure that Waylon would become one of the biggest stars and biggest talents in *the* country—the biggest discovery since Johnny Cash—that he didn't fool around putting the kid on singles."<sup>22</sup> By creating the marketing label "Folk-Country," Denisoff asserts, "Atkins hoped record store owners

---

<sup>21</sup> Montgomery, 178-179.

<sup>22</sup> Maggie Wilson, "Waylon Jennings—The New Nashville Sound," *Arizona Days and Ways Magazine* (3 April 1966), 11; qtd. in Denisoff, 122, 124.

would put the LP into their pop as well as their country bins.”<sup>23</sup> The cover photograph for Jennings’s *Folk-Country*, as with the tribute albums discussed above, also promulgated an image of Jennings as a crossover artist by combining signifiers of rusticity and the folk revival, placing him in front of a pile of rough-cut lumber and holding a twelve-string acoustic guitar—one of the most important instruments of the folk revival scene (Figure 4-3).<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, the sleeve notes, written by songwriter Don Bowman, whose work features prominently on the album, exclaims that Jennings “can sing a country song or a folk song. You might say he brought country to folk, folk to country and ‘country-folk’ to all folks!”<sup>25</sup>

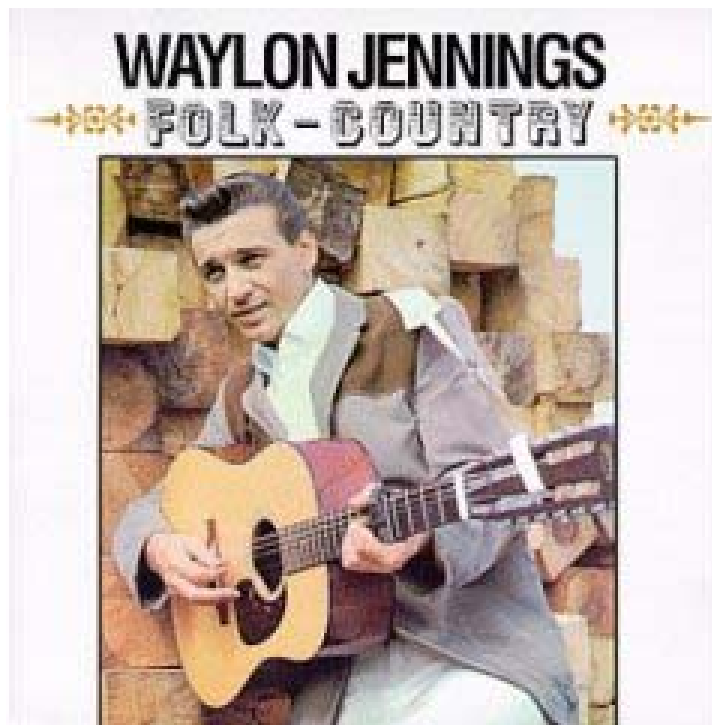


Figure 4-3. Cover of Waylon Jennings, *Folk-Country* (1966; RCA LPM/S-3523).

---

<sup>23</sup> Denisoff, 125; Jennings with Kaye, 109.

<sup>24</sup> Denisoff, 126.

<sup>25</sup> Don Bowman, sleeve notes to *Folk-Country* (RCA LPM/S-3523).

<i>Song Title</i>	<i>Songwriter(s)</i>
Another Bridge to Burn	Harlan Howard
Stop the World (and Let Me Off)	Carl Belew/W.S. Stevenson
Cindy of New Orleans	Waylon Jennings
Look into My Teardrops	Don Bowman/Harlan Howard
Down Came the World	Bozo Darnell/Waylon Jennings
I Don't Mind	Harlan Howard/Richard Johnson
Just for You	Don Bowman/Jackson King/Jerry Williams
Now Everybody Knows	Don Bowman
That's the Chance I'll Have to Take	Jackson King
What Makes a Man Wander	Harlan Howard
Man of Constant Sorrow	Traditional
What's Left of Me	Harlan Howard

Figure 4-4. Songs recorded on Waylon Jennings, *Folk-Country* (1966; RCA LPM/S-3523).

Although the “Folk-Country” concept was created to include as broad a variety of styles as possible, Jennings’s *Folk-Country* album represents a more restrictive interpretation of the idea (Figure 4-4). All but two of the songs Jennings recorded for his March 1966 release were composed by major Nashville songwriters, including Harlan Howard and Don Bowman. Moreover, at least one song, “Stop the World (and Let Me Off),” was already an established country hit, having been recorded by Patsy Cline, Johnny & Jack, and Rose Maddox by the time Jennings recorded it. The only song on the album that clearly attempted to reach the folk music audience is “Man of Constant Sorrow,” a traditional Appalachian ballad that was part of the standard repertoire of most urban folksingers.<sup>26</sup> The Nashville-focused repertory Jennings recorded for *Folk-Country* in some ways, therefore, contradicts the stated purposes of Atkins’s “Folk-Country” concept. It was refined somewhat for Jennings’s second release under the “Folk-Country” concept, his October 1966 release *Leavin’ Town*,<sup>27</sup> which included Rod

---

<sup>26</sup> Denisoff, 125.

<sup>27</sup> RCA LPM/S-3620.

McKuen's "Doesn't Anybody Know My Name," Delbert McClinton's "If You Really Want Me To I'll Go," and Gordon Lightfoot's "(That's What You Get) For Lovin' Me." But the "Folk-Country" concept proved largely unsuccessful in part because of the difficulties associated with marketing an album to a crossover audience. Furthermore, by the end of 1966, the folk revival scene had shifted its emphasis from an acoustic, roots-based sound to one rooted in the sounds of rock music, in effect rendering the "Folk-Country" concept obsolete.<sup>28</sup>

The long-playing album certainly played an important role in the early, major-label recording careers of Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings, and the impact of these early albums proved significant both in terms of fan reception and in later constructions of the artist's autobiographical narratives. As artists seeking to break through as major Nashville recording artists on RCA, one of only four major country labels of the day alongside Decca, Columbia, and Capitol, both Jennings and Nelson stood at the mercy of the label's producers. Music Row producers experimented with different types of songs, accompaniments, and public images to find a combination that would appeal to the largest possible segment of the record-buying population. For these reasons, the marketing concepts created to introduce Jennings and Nelson to country music and crossover audiences represent the sort of trial and error that accompanies the emergence of most new artists and the definition of new identities for well-established artists.

With the benefit of hindsight, many journalists and scholars, as well as the artists themselves, have described these attempts to market Nelson and Jennings as an example

---

<sup>28</sup> Atkins eventually came to deny that he signed Jennings for his "Folk-Country" concept, commenting to Denisoff that he "signed Waylon as a country artist and wasn't thinking about any other idiom at that time" (Denisoff, 125-126).

of how Music Row's elaborate corporate machinations deliberately constrained or restricted the artists' expression and artistic visions. As country music historian Bill C.

Malone has observed:

Waylon Jennings, the quintessential Outlaw of country music, has been associated with the great corporate giant, RCA, ever since 1965—and both the singer and the business have prospered greatly because of the relationship. The association, however, was often a stormy one, with Jennings struggling to gain control over the choice of material and the manner in which it was recorded. Chet Atkins first groomed Jennings to be a “folk-country” performer (with songs like “Man of Constant Sorrow” and “Scarlet Ribbons”), and he periodically supplied him with pop-country material such as “Love of the Common People” and “MacArthur Park.” Jennings could perform any type of song, but he resisted all efforts to push him into any type of mold. His ascent to superstardom came when he was given free rein to record anything he desired, and in the rock-influenced country style that gave him access to listeners far beyond the normal country audience.<sup>29</sup>

Similarly, journalist Noel Coppage noted in a 1976 feature article in *Stereo Review*:

Man Fights City Hall; Man Wins. Now there's the kind of news we Americans are always looking for, and—since what we mean by Bureaucracy and what we mean by Plastic aren't that far apart—we'll gladly take the variation that has Man fighting a decent skirmish against Modern Times. Charlie Chaplin is still collecting royalties on just that, we made a hero of John Henry for whipping a machine (knowing all the time that in the long run he didn't), and now we are honoring Waylon Jennings for messing up the works of the Nashville Sound. Not for whipping a machine, exactly, but for fighting it instead of joining it.<sup>30</sup>

And as Nelson himself recounted in a 1976 *Rolling Stone* interview with journalist Ed

Ward:

“I couldn't get anybody on the executive end of [RCA] interested in promoting me as an artist,” Nelson recalls. “They might have been hoping that one of my records might accidentally do something on its own without their having to spend a lot of money promoting it.” An executive from RCA says, “We did all we could.”<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Malone, *Country Music, U.S.A.*, 399-400.

<sup>30</sup> Noel Coppage, “Crossing Over with Waylon Jennings,” *Stereo Review* 37 (October 1976), 104.

<sup>31</sup> Ed Ward, “Willie Nelson: Breakthrough of a Lone-Star Legend,” *Rolling Stone* 204 (15 January 1976), 18.



It is instructive to note that these narratives did not emerge in conjunction with the release of Nelson's and Jennings's first RCA albums. Rather, the notion that Jennings and Nelson chafed against the rigid studio productions and elaborate marketing concepts of Music Row during the middle to late 1960s did not begin to circulate until well after Nelson became an established figure in Austin's progressive country movement, and both he and Jennings had gained enough prestige to be permitted unrestricted studio time to explore their own production ideas. Furthermore, the rift between Jennings and RCA that Malone has described did not exist until September 1972 at the earliest, when RCA released *Ladies Love Outlaws*.<sup>32</sup> That album, constructed around rough vocal tracks that Jennings recorded on 16 May 1973, was finished by RCA producers in July and August 1973 as Jennings was recovering from a severe case of hepatitis.<sup>33</sup>

To apply such narratives of rebellion and "outlaw" behavior to the initial Jennings and Nelson RCA albums, therefore, erases the artists' complicity in attempts to market them to specific audiences or even just to market their music at all. Rather, it is more accurate to characterize Nelson and Jennings's relationship to RCA as a type of apprenticeship. While Jennings was certainly more of a novice to the ways of Music Row than Nelson when they began recording for RCA in 1965, both artists stood to learn

---

<sup>32</sup> RCA LSP-4751. Don Cusic, "The Outlaws Album and Movement: 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Retrospective," Panel Discussion, 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual International Country Music Conference, Belmont University, Nashville, TN, 26 May 2006.

<sup>33</sup> Denisoff, 184. Jennings's ire about this incident is evident in his 1996 autobiography: "RCA celebrated my hospitalization by releasing *Ladies Love Outlaws* in September. It was a pretty good album, all things considered...."

"The only problem was that it wasn't finished.

"Most of the tracks on there had only scratch vocals, which is the way you sing when you're concentrating on the band getting a good track. Sometimes they come out sounding all right, but more often you need to do them over, so you can concentrate on your performance. They just put it out. I still cringe whenever I hear myself singing Hoyt Axton's 'Never Been to Spain.' It sounded like I'd never even been to Cleveland" (Jennings with Kaye, 183-184).

volumes about recording, producing, and distributing records from Chet Atkins, whose role as a session musician, a record producer, and the head of RCA's Nashville offices permitted interested artists to witness the entire production process firsthand. Nelson and Jennings both took advantage of their education with significant success during the 1970s as Jennings began recording his own material at the Glaser Brothers' "Hillbilly Central" studios in Nashville and Willie Nelson convinced Columbia Records to release an album that he recorded in his home studio, the 1975 album *Red Headed Stranger*. Moreover, the late 1960s and early 1970s were a time of great experimentation in Nashville, as a new generation of producers, session musicians, and songwriters rose to prominence and offered new visions for the sounds of contemporary country music.

One of the key lessons from this period of apprenticeship was the need for a marketing concept, and Jennings and Nelson, along with a group of artists connected to the Nashville-Los Angeles-Austin network known as "the Outlaws" and a savvy group of producers, exploited the album models employed by Chet Atkins and his teams of producers at RCA in conjunction with those being perfected by their rock colleagues to bring the spirit of progressive country music to a national audience.

### **The Album, the "Outlaw" Movement, and the Nationalization of Progressive Country**

Albums that collected a body of loosely-related songs were an important component of Music Row's marketing strategies during the 1950s and 1960s. These collections of songs permitted producers and aspiring country artists to engage in a form of market testing, exploring how artists and audiences react to various "brands": musical genres, repertoires, affiliated artists, and even fashions. The practice of distributing this

type of album continued well into the 1970s, but their significance to Music Row's marketing practices diminished steadily throughout the decade as developments within rock circles led many country artists to demand more freedom within Nashville's studio system and led producers to consider ways to reduce the obviousness of the industry's role in connecting artists and audiences.

The Beatles' late albums, especially *Revolver* and *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, had a significant influence on country artists who wished to declare their independence from Music Row. Prior to the release of these albums, popular musicians were expected to record songs that could be reproduced exactly in live performance, but The Beatles proved that a band could exist solely as recording artists. The success of this model first began to trickle through the ranks of both jazz and rock music producers and artists as musicians ranging from Jimi Hendrix to Miles Davis also began to see the studio as a way to extend their musical creativity. Moreover, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* demonstrated how the LP might be used to create musical and narrative unity beyond the limitations of the industry-standard three-minute single. As musicologist Edward Macan has explained, these "concept albums" were completely unified—musically, narratively, and rhetorically:

Clearly, the Beatles intended this first concept album to be a *Gesamtkunstwerk* (a "unified" or "complete art work") in which music, words, and visual art are all combined to convey a specific concept or program (it is again useful to point out that rock musicians of the late 1960s and 1970s used the term "concept" in exactly the same sense that nineteenth-century composers used the term "program").<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> Edward Macan, *Rocking the Classics: English Progressive Rock and the Counterculture* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 58. Similar critical reactions appeared almost immediately after the album's release. As Jack Kroll noted in a 26 June 1967 article for *Newsweek*: "'Sgt. Pepper' is such an organic work (it took four months to make) that it is like a pop 'Façade,' the suite of poems by Edith Sitwell musicalized by William Walton. Like 'Façade,' 'Sgt. Pepper' is a rollicking, probing, language-and-sound vaudeville, which grafts skin from all three brows—high, middle, and low—

Similarly, musicologist Allan F. Moore has observed that concept albums are defined by “a unity greater than that of the individual, self-contained utterance.”<sup>35</sup> Moreover, musicologist Wilfrid Mellers, in his 1971 study of the Beatles, noted that the concept album is a literary form as much as it is a musical one:

No longer do the Beatles offer us a miscellany of songs; we rather have a sequence of intricately related numbers, forming whole and performed without break. The verses, though still composed “orally,” by trial and error, are printed on the record sleeve, so that we may go back and read them again, “like a book”: just as on a disc we may repeat bits of the music, as one cannot in a live (especially in part improvised) performance.<sup>36</sup>

As one of the defining works of the genre, therefore, *Sgt. Pepper’s* stood as an exemplar of the new generation of concept albums in which the artist(s) could create a unified narrative of their own songs, rather than relying on producers to assemble albums of thematically- or topically-related songs by other songwriters.

The executives on Music Row had long been paying close attention to developments within the national music industry, adapting (maybe too slowly) to the folk music boom of the mid-1960s and, earlier in the decade, blurring distinctions between the

---

into a pulsating collage about mid-century manners and madness” (Jack Kroll, “It’s Getting Better...,” *Newsweek* [26 June 1967], 70; qtd. in David Brackett, ed., *The Pop, Rock, and Soul Reader: Histories and Debates* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2005], 181).

<sup>35</sup> Allan F. Moore, *Rock: The Primary Text: Developing a Musicology of Rock* (Buckingham and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1993), 84.

<sup>36</sup> Wilfrid Mellers, *Twilight of the Gods: The Beatles in Retrospect* (London: Faber & Faber, 1973), 86-87. *Sgt. Pepper’s* was certainly not the first instance in which the lyrics and other supporting material were printed on the accompanying sleeve notes. Montgomery observes that Woody Guthrie’s *The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti*—which was intended for release as a three-disc collection of 78s in 1947 but was not released until 1960—was released in two versions: “a single LP with a twelve-page insert, and a box set with the same LP but an even larger booklet. Both packages included a photocopy of Guthrie’s original lyric sheets, and an added song, written and performed by Pete Seeger called ‘Sacco’s Letter to His Son’” (85). See also: Ed Cray, *Ramblin’ Man: The Life and Times of Woody Guthrie* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2004), 299-300. The literary aspects of *Sgt. Pepper’s* has led musicologist James Borders to contend in his examination of the music of Frank Zappa that “the sequence of related songs that became known as the ‘concept album’ had [by 1968] revealed itself as a literary rather than a musical form” (James Borders, “Form and the Concept Album: Aspects of Modernism in Frank Zappa’s Early Releases,” *Perspectives of New Music* 39, no. 1 [2001], 125).

sweet vocal styles of Nashville Sound country and the pop sounds of the day. It is not surprising, therefore, that the relationship between country producers and performers would undergo a significant transformation in the early 1970s. In conjunction with such shifts in the industry and the increasing influence of rock production practices on country music, many country artists, led by Jennings and Nelson, began to explore new ideas of the concept album that expanded it beyond a collection of songs driven by marketing. Using *Sgt. Pepper's* as a model, Jennings, Nelson, and other country artists who recorded in Nashville but who maintained large fan bases in Austin and elsewhere used the album to develop extended musical and dramatic narratives and to address major philosophical questions and social problems with a degree of nuance not permitted by the typical three-minute country single. By redefining the album to achieve this purpose, country artists, long seen as puppets of the Music Row industrial machine, could present themselves to the record-buying public as countercultural figures bucking the restrictions of the industrial system, communicating directly to their audience without the interference of industrial mediators, and engaging directly with the question that shaped the progressive country movement in Austin and Nashville alike: what does it mean to be countercultural Texan and/or Southern at a time when “Texan-ness” and “Southern-ness” were thought to stand in the way of social progress?

But Nelson, Jennings, and their cohorts did not abandon the old album models completely. Rather, they used the album in three ways during the 1970s: 1) as collections of songs by a single songwriter (modeled after albums like *Waylon Sings Ol' Harlan*); 2) as marketing concepts that grouped artists with similar aesthetics and/or public personae; and 3) as musically- and dramatically-unified concept albums. These

albums exploited the marketing techniques perfected by Nashville's Music Row producers during the 1960s, the anti-industrial sentiments fomenting among America's countercultural youths, and the emergence of the idea of the rock musician as artist, bringing the romantic imagery of Austin's progressive country music scene to a national audience.

*Waylon Jennings's Texan Manifesto: Honky Tonk Heroes (1973)*

*Honky Tonk Heroes* featured the songwriting of Texan Billy Joe Shaver, who Jennings had met as early as 1971 and who had been struggling to gain a presence in Nashville since 1966. The album, released in July 1973, brought together Jennings's recordings of two Shaver songs from 1971 and 1972 with new recordings of seven additional Shaver compositions as well as Donnie Fritts and Troy Seals's "We Had It All."<sup>37</sup> Like *Waylon Sings Ol' Harlan*, then, *Honky Tonk Heroes* drew attention to the work of a lesser-known Nashville-based artist—in this case, a songwriter, not a singer—by associating his work with that of an established artist. Furthermore, *Honky Tonk Heroes* articulated a secondary concept that proposed the emergence of a new Texan aesthetic in mainstream country music.

The validation of Shaver's songwriting in *Honky Tonk Heroes* begins, as in many concepts of this variety, with a discovery narrative. The sleeve notes, written by mutual friend of Jennings and Shaver and Nashville disc jockey Roger "Capt. Midnite" Schutt,

---

<sup>37</sup> The two previously recorded selections included on *Honky Tonk Heroes* were "Low Down Freedom," recorded on 31 August 1971, and "Black Rose," recorded on 16 May 1972 (John L. Smith, "Discographies," in Serge Denisoff, *Waylon: A Biography* [Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983], 339, 347).

explain how Shaver had languished in Nashville since his 1966 arrival and describe his frequent travel between Nashville and Texas:

Billy Joe Shaver is Waylon's friend and his friend has a talent for songwriting. And this town that a lot of folks call Music City, U.S.A. . . . , well it just hasn't treated Billy Joe right. He's been here for six years, off and on—hooking it back to Texas every now and again because it was easier to choke down a day job outside of music and away from Nashville.

A few people had cut songs written by Billy Joe Shaver but nothing seemed to happen. . . no one really seemed to notice. Waylon knew that Billy Joe wrote great songs. And it bothered him that others didn't realize it too.

It was out of all this that HONKY TONK HEROES came into being. Waylon had the idea some time ago to do an album of new cowboy songs. Billy Joe came to him one day with a song he had just written about a close mutual pal named Willie Nelson. As Waylon listened to "Willy the Wandering Gypsy and Me" [*sic*] it all came together—Billy Joe Shaver was the only one to write those modern day cowboy songs.

He was. And he did.<sup>38</sup>

As is the case with most promotional materials in the world of popular music, including sleeve notes, Capt. Midnite's notes to *Honky Tonk Heroes* are a tendentious amalgam of aesthetic manifesto and salesmanship. As such, they cannot be regarded as cold, hard fact but instead should be viewed as a tool in the construction of an artistic identity. For this reason, it becomes necessary to scrutinize the narratives promulgated in such liner notes through comparison with autobiographical statements and oral histories that often highlight contradictions in narratives and underscore the constructedness of an artist's public persona.

The emphasis that Capt. Midnite's places on the poor treatment Shaver had received in Nashville deserves scrutiny, for it is rare that the Nashville establishment completely dismiss any artist who receives an opportunity to work for a major recording label like RCA. Like many rising stars, Shaver had experienced his fair share of

---

<sup>38</sup> Roger "Capt. Midnite" Schutt, sleeve notes to Waylon Jennings, *Honky Tonk Heroes* (RCA LSP-0240).

difficulties while building his career. Despite a fifty-dollar-per-week songwriting contract with Bobby Bare's publishing firm Return Music,<sup>39</sup> Shaver's frustration had forced him to reconsider his place in Nashville many times. As he explained in his 2005 autobiography:

The truth is, I quit Nashville about as many times as I quit [my wife] Brenda. I didn't know anybody there and didn't have any money, so I went back and forth to Texas all the time. I could make more money in Texas, it seemed, plus I got to see Brenda and [my son] Eddy in Waco. But I kept receiving signals that Nashville was where I was supposed to be. For example, I once fell off a scaffolding while I was carrying a bundle of shingles and fell two stories to the ground. I kept the job for six more weeks until the pain got too much and a chiropractor realized I crushed two vertebrae in my back.... Still, writing songs seemed like easy work compared to that.<sup>40</sup>

The contract between Shaver and Bare may not have been extraordinarily lucrative for Shaver and probably necessitated frequent returns to central Texas, but Shaver's 2005 statement reveals that Nashville was not the only source of Shaver's early troubles.

Rather, he appears to have been conflicted about whether songwriting was a respectable way to earn a living at all. Songwriting, it seems, removed Shaver from his working-class Texan roots and placed an uncomfortable distance between them.

As Shaver grew more committed to his songwriting career, his reputation in Nashville also grew. In 1971, Kris Kristofferson, then a rising superstar among Nashville's countercultural set, included Shaver's "Good Christian Soldier" on his Monument Records release *The Silver Tongued Devil and I*,<sup>41</sup> which led to their

---

<sup>39</sup> Billy Joe Shaver, *Honky Tonk Heroes* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 29.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 30-31. "Good Christian Soldier" is credited to Shaver and Bare, but as Shaver has explained, "Bobby had changed the song's title [from 'Christian Soldier'] to 'Good Christian Soldier'—he just added the 'good'—and given himself a co-credit for making a change that I didn't even want. That cost me a bunch of money over the years, but I was so glad to be on Kris's record that I didn't care at the



collaboration the same year on a recording project that would showcase Shaver’s talents as both a songwriter and a performer. The Kristofferson-produced album *Old Five and Dimers Like Me* featured eleven Shaver compositions. Monument purchased the album, but despite the financial gain that the association with Kristofferson promised to bring, the album remained in the vaults for more than a year. Shaver has suggested that Monument may have “bought it just to sit on it. They knew another record company would buy it, and they didn’t want it out there competing with Kris’s record [*The Silver Tongued Devil and I*].”<sup>42</sup> *Old Five and Dimers Like Me* contained four of the songs that would later be included on Jennings’s 1973 *Honky Tonk Heroes* (Figure 4-5), but the album was not released until a few months after Jennings’s album, most likely as an attempt to tap into the buzz around *Honky Tonk Heroes* and to increase cash flow in the days immediately preceding Monument’s bankruptcy.<sup>43</sup> While it is clear that the *Old Five and Dimers* project resulted in much frustration for Shaver, his increasing prominence in Nashville permitted him to interact with important figures on Music Row, including the artist who would boost his career to an all-time high: Waylon Jennings.

<i>Old Five and Dimers Like Me</i>	<i>Honky Tonk Heroes</i>
“Black Rose” *	“Honky Tonk Heroes”
“Old Five and Dimers Like Me” *	“Old Five and Dimers (Like Me)” *
“L.A. Turnaround”	“Willy the Wandering Gypsy and Me” *
“Jesus Christ, What a Man”	“Low Down Freedom” *
“Played the Game Too Long”	“Omaha”
“I Been to Georgia on a Fast Train”	“You Ask Me To”
“Willy the Wandering Gypsy and Me” *	“Ride Me Down Easy”
“Low Down Freedom” *	“Ain’t No God in Mexico”
“Jesus Was Our Savior and Cotton Was Our King”	“Black Rose” *
“Serious Souls”	“We Had It All”

**Figure 4-5. *Old Five and Dimers Like Me* and *Honky Tonk Heroes*: Common Songs (asterisked).**

time” (31).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

Because *Honky Tonk Heroes* was Jennings's project, it is perhaps no wonder that he claimed credit for discovering Shaver's songwriting, but as Jennings and Shaver have both acknowledged in their autobiographies, Shaver was his own advocate. After hearing Shaver perform "Willy the Wandering Gypsy and Me" in a backstage area prior to the 1972 Dripping Springs Reunion outside of Austin, Jennings reportedly promised to record an album of Shaver's songs.<sup>44</sup> But, as Shaver recalled:

Waylon forgot about his promise as soon as he made it, but it was about the only thing I had going for me. I chased him around town [Nashville] for about six months. I'd leave messages at his office and he wouldn't call back, or I'd call and they'd say he was on the other line—I knew damn well he only had one line.

I finally caught him late one afternoon when he was recording with Chet Atkins in Studio A at RCA.... Anyway, a disc jockey friend of mine named Captain Midnight [Midnite] got me into the studio....

I stayed there for hours knowing there was no way Waylon could dodge me—there was only one way out.<sup>45</sup>

As might be expected, Jennings was suspicious:

He could've been killed there and then by some of my friends lining the walls, but I took Billy Joe in a back room and said [,] "Hoss, you don't do things like that. I'm going to listen to one song, and if it ain't no good, I'm telling you goodbye. We ain't never going to talk again."

Billy played me "Old Five and Dimers," and then kept on going. He had a whole sackful of songs, and by the time he ran out of breath, I wanted to record all of them.<sup>46</sup>

Both Jennings and Shaver have acknowledged Shaver's role as the primary catalyst in the *Honky Tonk Heroes* project, but the contradictions between these autobiographical reflections and the more purpose-driven sleeve notes of Capt. Midnite demonstrate how important the thematic album was for these artists, especially the

---

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-33.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-34.

<sup>46</sup> Jennings with Kaye, 201-202. Shaver recalled opening with "Ain't No God in Mexico," followed by "Honky Tonk Heroes" and "Old Five and Dimers Like Me" (Shaver, 34).

songwriters, as they established an artistic pedigree in Nashville. Like Harlan Howard's sleeve notes for *Waylon Sings Ol' Harlan*, the established artist is positioned as the gatekeeper to the insular Nashville culture. Moreover, as a kind of sampler, the album presents an unknown musician's work to a wider and previously inaccessible audience.

Contemporaneous observers of Billy Joe Shaver and his songwriting noted that one of his greatest talents was the ability to capture the syntactical and rhetorical characteristics of Southern working class speech in song. This organicism is one of the qualities most remarked upon by the musicians who were enamored of Shaver's work. Jennings observed, "Billy Joe talked the way a modern cowboy would speak, if he stepped out of the West and lived today. He had a command of Texas lingo, his world as down to earth and real as the day is long, and he wore his Lone Star birthright like a badge. We all did."<sup>47</sup> And, as Shaver himself explained, he intended the realism of his songs to stand in opposition to what he perceived as the urbanity of contemporaneous Nashville songwriting. He noted that the years around 1970 were

the heyday of the [Grand Ole] Opry, and the top singers were guys like George Jones, Faron Young, and Webb Pierce, and their records had what they called the 'Nashville Sound.' They were heavily produced with orchestras and strings and shit you'd never find in a honky tonk. They didn't know anything about real life—they were just guessing at it, and it showed. I'd worked my entire life, and I knew what the hell I was talking about."<sup>48</sup>

The most prevalent rhetorical element in "Honky Tonk Heroes" is the rhetorical question, of which three appear in the song (Figure 4-6). All three rhetorical questions may be read as reactions to indisputable truths about human nature and, more specifically, the weakness of the speaker's own physical and psychological constitution.

---

<sup>47</sup> Jennings with Kaye, 202.

<sup>48</sup> Shaver, 31.

Low down leaving sun,  
 Done did everything that needs done.  
 Woe is me!  
**Why can't I see**  
**I'd best be leaving well enough alone?**  
 Them neon light nights—  
 Couldn't stay out of fights—  
 Keep a-haunting me in memories.  
 There's one in every crowd.  
**For crying out loud,**  
**Why was it always turning out to be me?**

**Where does it go?**  
 The good Lord only knows.  
 It seems like it was just the other day  
 I was down at Green Gables  
 Hawkin' them tables  
 And generally blowing all my hard-earned pay.  
 Piano roll blues—  
 Danced holes in my shoes.  
 There weren't another other way to be.  
 For loveable losers and no account boozers  
 And honky tonk heroes like me.

**Figure 4-6. Billy Joe Shaver, Rhetorical Questions (marked in bold) in "Honky Tonk Heroes" (1973).**

In Verse 1, for instance, the speaker asks, “Why can’t I see / I’d best be leavin’ well enough alone?” This question acts rhetorically as a statement of fact; that is, the speaker recognizes that, regardless of any motivations he might have to reform his rowdy lifestyle, his sinful nature will always place him back where he started. Such a perspective on human nature, represented in this question as well as in the one that concludes Verse 1—“Well there’s one in every crowd. / For cryin’ out loud, / Why was it always turnin’ out to be me?”—is endemic to country music and to the rural culture of East Texas. The “Saturday night/Sunday morning” duality arises from the Calvinist religious traditions of the rural South and Texas which contend that, while the inner

person may seek spiritual reform, the outer (or fleshly) person will continue to sin and, following sanctification, the sinner will grow increasingly aware of this duality.<sup>49</sup>

The realism and overt rurality of Billy Joe Shaver's lyrics is underscored by the musical settings that Jennings, co-producer Tompall Glaser, and Shaver crafted for Jennings's 1973 album *Honky Tonk Heroes*. Shaver was mildly irritated by the sounds of country music during the late 1960s and early 1970s, as indicated in his observation that the "Nashville Sound" was populated with sounds "you'd never find in a honky tonk."<sup>50</sup> Similarly, Jennings recalled that he was working toward a new musical aesthetic that was rooted in the sounds of the honky tonk and built around the talents of Jennings's road band, the Waylors, during the *Honky Tonk Heroes* sessions:

[The music of *Honky Tonk Heroes*] was so ragged, with mistakes and bad notes, that it hardly sounded finished; but it was as simple and to the point that I could make it. There was no mistaking what the songs were about. On "Ain't No God in Mexico," there wasn't more than three instruments. You didn't need a twenty-piece orchestra. It was all there. The song was true to itself. You could feel what was happening inside it.<sup>51</sup>

The orchestrated strings characteristic of much Nashville Sound country music presented the most conspicuous foe for Jennings, Shaver, and Glaser. In fact, the only appearance of strings on *Honky Tonk Heroes* occurs on the final cut, "We Had It All," which was composed not by Billy Joe Shaver but by Donnie Fritts and Troy Seals and was included on the album only because Chet Atkins wished to release it as the album's first single.<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup> Bill C. Malone has discussed this duality in country music in Chapters 4 and 5 of *Don't Get Above Your Raisin': Country Music and the Southern Working Class* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 89-148.

<sup>50</sup> Shaver, 31.

<sup>51</sup> Jennings with Kaye, 202.

<sup>52</sup> Shaver, 34.



**Figure 4-7. Walking bass figure from strummed acoustic guitar, "Honky Tonk Heroes" (0:00-0:08).**

Situated as the first cut of the album, “Honky Tonk Heroes” stood poised not only to introduce the new realism of Shaver’s lyrics but also Jennings’s stripped-down musical aesthetic. Jennings’s recording begins with a single, steel-stringed acoustic guitar in a lilting 12/8. The alternations between the heavily picked bass runs and the lighter strumming of the full chords removes all of the trappings of contemporaneous commercial country music (Figure 4-7). This distinctive guitar sound is, in fact, one that harkens back to the music of one of country music’s first superstars: Jimmie Rodgers, whose distinctive “blue yodel” was often accompanied in a similar fashion. As “Honky Tonk Heroes” continues, more instruments are added to the mix, but at no time in the first eighty seconds are more than three instruments sounding simultaneously (Figure 4-8). The sparse textures of the opening eighty seconds create a degree of intimacy that the string-laden and reverb-drenched Nashville Sound records could not; alert listeners can hear the pick scraping the strings of the guitar and the intricate timbral shifts emanating from fiddler Tommy Williams’s bowing.

Time	Instruments Present	Structural Feature
0:00-0:08	Acoustic guitar	Introduction
0:09-0:25	Acoustic guitar	Verse 1 (I-V)
0:26-0:44	Acoustic guitar; fiddle	Verse 1 (V-I)
0:44-1:01	Acoustic guitar; fiddle; bass	Verse 2 (I-V)
1:02-1:20	Acoustic guitar; dobro; bass	Verse 2 (V-I)

**Figure 4-8. Instrumental arrangement of "Honky Tonk Heroes" (1973) (through 1:20).**

If we hear the opening eighty seconds of “Honky Tonk Heroes” as an homage to early country music, the song’s second half represents the sound of country music to come. At the conclusion of the song’s second (and final verse), a trebly Fender Telecaster guitar enters, changing the character of the song from a jaunty Rodgers rounder song to a raucous dancehall number (Figure 4-9). The rhythmically sloppy Telecaster creates an improvisatory feel in the recording’s second part as the guitar articulates the downbeat of the solo on what sounds like the fourth beat of the transition. This inaccuracy likely results from a tape splice and fade-in, which obscures the actual performed phrase. Following the Telecaster transition, the drums enter for the first time as both the snare drum and high-hat cymbals take a prominent role in the mix and the bass drum accompanies the bass guitar’s emphasis of beats one and three. The reverberance and resonance of the mostly acoustic instruments heard in the recording’s first half are noticeably absent from the second part of “Honky Tonk Heroes” as the drums and Telecaster are recorded and processed in such a way as to emphasize only the punch of each note’s articulation, adding a degree of energy and grit to the song.

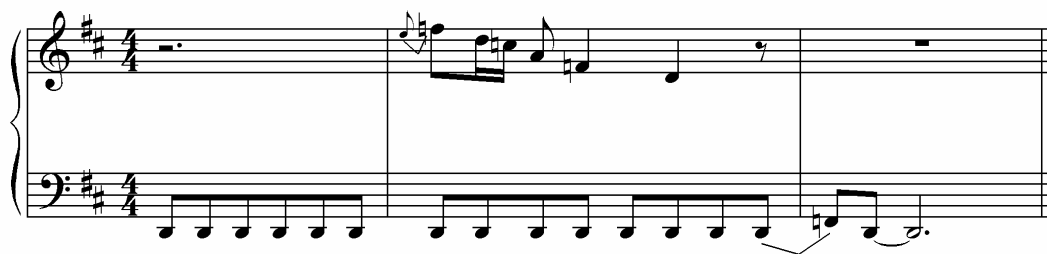


Figure 4-9. Telecaster introduction to second half of "Honky Tonk Heroes" (1:20-1:24).



Figure 4-10. Cover of Waylon Jennings, *Honky Tonk Heroes* (RCA APL-0240; 1973).

The loose, improvisatory feeling of the music and the conversational tone of the lyrics of “Honky Tonk Heroes” make several powerful statements about country music in the early 1970s. References to early country music and to dancehall culture ground Shaver and Jennings in the tradition and geography of country music and place them in direct opposition to the generally cosmopolitan sounds coming out of Nashville’s country music industry. By showcasing the musical creativity and preserving the mistakes of the Waylors in the released recording, “Honky Tonk Heroes” allows listeners to believe that they are witnessing the events of the recording studio firsthand and adds a deeply personal touch that many artists, journalists, and listeners thought to be absent from most mainstream country. This attitude is bolstered by the cover photograph, which features the musicians relaxing at a bar in the recording studio (Figure 4-10).



In spite of the anti-Nashville stance articulated and implied by Jennings and Shaver and the looseness of “Honky Tonk Heroes,” the entire album was, in fact, carefully calculated and bears the stamp of different but equally opinionated producers. Jennings recalled that, while the record sounds cool and relaxed compared to those of his contemporaries, everyone involved with the project constantly searched for perfection, leading to great anxiety within the studio:

Billy Joe was all up in the air. I was “messin’ with the melodies,” he told me, “screwin’ around the tune.” Anybody else wouldn’t have said anything to me, because they would’ve been scared I wouldn’t cut the song, but Billy Joe just did whatever he took a notion to do. He never had anything like this happen to him, somebody performing a whole album of his songs and showcasing him as a writer. He was so unusual, and the songs were great; but he just couldn’t calm down.

I was probably a little nervous as well. It was very nearly the first time I was in RCA without a producer, and everybody was on edge. The engineers would call upstairs every half-hour to Jerry Bradley, who’d ask what I was doing. “He’s high,” they’d say. Hell, yes, I was high. Loving every minute of my newfound freedom.<sup>53</sup>

Shaver recalled the *Honky Tonk Heroes* sessions similarly:

We went into the studio in a couple of weeks [after the sessions were approved]. Those sessions were tense. Contrary to popular belief, there was little drinkin’ and druggin’. Waylon had stuck his neck out so far he knew he couldn’t afford to screw this up. I’ve never been easy to deal with in the studio, and I wasn’t then either, even though I didn’t know the first thing about recording. But I felt like Waylon kept messing up my melodies, so I’d have to play the songs for him over and over until he could get the phrasing down. Other than that, the sessions went pretty smoothly.<sup>54</sup>

The primary catalyst for the tensions in the studio recounted by Jennings and Shaver was a fear that the project would not be successful and that the risks these musicians (and especially Jennings, as an established artist at RCA) took to create the album would come

---

<sup>53</sup> Jennings with Kaye, 199-200.

<sup>54</sup> Shaver, 35.

to nothing. Deliberately eschewing the standard practices of the Nashville system and the proven successes of RCA producers Chet Atkins, Danny Davis, and Jerry Bradley, Jennings's *Honky Tonk Heroes* represented a marketing concept conceived by Jennings himself, and, as such, all responsibility for the project ultimately fell on Jennings. Moreover, Shaver's career also depended on the success of the *Honky Tonk Heroes* project; his *Old Five and Dimers Like Me* remained in the vaults as the *Honky Tonk Heroes* sessions were underway. The success of *Honky Tonk Heroes* had the potential to open doors for Shaver, and, in fact, they did, for Monument Records released his collaboration with Kristofferson just a few months after the May 1973 release of Jennings's album.<sup>55</sup> The concept of *Honky Tonk Heroes* therefore established Shaver as a serious songwriter in Nashville while heralding a new direction in Jennings's career, much as *Waylon Sings Ol' Harlan* had done only eight years earlier.<sup>56</sup>

The *Honky Tonk Heroes* concept also validated Texan music. The Texan outlaw attitude of Shaver's songs had an analogue in the sonic landscape constructed in *Honky Tonk Heroes*, a landscape as sparse and empty as the West Texas plains. The album's spare instrumentation stood in stark contrast to the lush orchestrations of the Nashville Sound, and it also permitted Jennings to explore new ways to process his vocal tracks and to frame his voice. In the first two verses of "Willy the Wandering Gypsy and Me," for instance, only a lightly strummed steel-string acoustic guitar and electric bass downbeats accompany Jennings's voice. The vocal track is panned across both the left and right

---

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>56</sup> Chet Flippo, "Country Music: The R&R Influence," *Rolling Stone* 150 (20 December 1973), 16: "Shaver is such a perfect example of the 'overnight' success story that it's tempting to think a screenwriter dreamed him up. He rose to prominence at the age of 34 after a decade of trying with tightly constructed songs that were considered 'too deep' for the country audience. After hearing that for years, he thought a cruel joke was being played on him when opportunity finally knocked."

stereo channels with a slight amount of reverberation added to increase the depth of the track and the presence of the vocals. This reverberation also situates the vocal track within an imagined landscape at once filled with the reflective surfaces necessary to reflect the sounds and completely empty.

These aural signifiers have great precedence in recorded popular music, as Peter Doyle has explained. He asserts that associations between boundless space and reverberation trace back to the sonic representation of scenery in “B” western films and to the “unnatural” echoes of sounds in the open plains.<sup>57</sup> In “Willy the Wandering Gypsy and Me,” as well as “You Ask Me To” and “Ride Me Down Easy,” Jennings exploits reverberation to construct such an affective space, simulating the idea of boundless Texan spaces sonically and placing the lonesome speaker in the middle of this barren environment.<sup>58</sup>

Yet another technique employed to evoke a sense of space in *Honky Tonk Heroes*, and that later became a staple in Jennings’s sound of the 1970s, is overdubbing Jennings’s voice as a high harmony on the song’s “hook.” These overdubs resulted from

---

<sup>57</sup> Peter Doyle, *Echo & Reverb: Fabricating Space in Popular Music Recording, 1900-1960* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2005), 117.

While many scholars of recording practice—including Doyle, Mark Katz, Albin J. Zak III, David M. Huber, Robert E. Runstein, and Thomas Porcello, among others—argue that the use of reverberation in popular music recordings provides listeners with a sense of the space in which the song was recorded, it also has the power to create new affective spaces that are not contingent to the recording space. See: Doyle, 42ff; Albin J. Zak III, *The Poetics of Rock: Cutting Tracks, Making Records* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 76-77; Mark Katz, *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 95-97; David M. Huber and Robert E. Runstein, *Modern Recording Techniques*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Carmel, IN: SAMS, 1989), 256-257; Thomas Porcello, “Music Mediated as Live in Austin: Sound, Technology, and Recording Practice,” in *Wired for Sound: Engineering and Technologies in Sonic Cultures*, eds. Paul D. Greene and Thomas Porcello (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2005), 103-117.

<sup>58</sup> This is not to say, however, that all uses of post-production or natural reverberation represent this same affective space. Rather, these sonic manipulations must be interpreted in the individual contexts in which they are employed.

multitrack recording, a technique used in most popular music recordings made since the widespread adoption of multitrack magnetic tape in the mid-1950s.<sup>59</sup> As Guy A. Marco has explained, multitracking is “a technique of studio recording in which microphones are placed close to each instrument or group of instruments; in the control room the engineer mixes all the outputs to achieve a desired balance.”<sup>60</sup> The technique of multitrack recording permits artists to create sonic landscapes that would be nearly impossible to recreate in live performance; as Marco elaborates, “multitrack recording is employed whenever the artistic intent is to create a ‘new reality’ that does not exist (either conveniently or at all) in real time and space... It gives the producer and performers, therefore, the ability to ‘bend reality’ to suit their art.”<sup>61</sup>

Jennings used multitrack recording in *Honky Tonk Heroes* to evoke a constructed reality that, like his use of reverberation, recalled the scenery of “B” western films and the imagined spaces of the Texas plains. In “Ride Me Down Easy,” for instance, Jennings overdubbed his voice on the chorus’s antecedent phrase: “Ride me down easy, Lord, / Ride me on down. / Leave word in the dust where I lay” (Figure 4-11). The lead vocal track is foregrounded in the mix and panned across both the left and right stereo

---

<sup>59</sup> The first experiments with multitrack tape recording were undertaken by Les Paul in 1949, when he added an extra recording head to his Ampex 300 series tape machine. The first commercial multitrack (2-track) tape recorders were not available until 1954. See: “History of Record Production,” <<http://www.music.columbia.edu/cmc/courses/g6630/recordproduction1.html>> (accessed 14 February 2007); Katz, 41; Zak, 14-15.

<sup>60</sup> Guy A. Marco, ed., “Multitrack Recording,” in *Encyclopedia of Recorded Sound in the United States* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1993), 450. For more information concerning significant technological advances in multitrack recording, please consult Thom Holmes, “Multitrack Recording,” in *Encyclopedia of Recorded Sound*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Frank Hoffman, Vol. 2 (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), 712.

<sup>61</sup> Guy A. Marco, ed. “Recording Practice,” in *Encyclopedia of Recorded Sound in the United States* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1993), 576. This article appears with new paragraphing as Tom Streichler, “Recording Practice,” in *Encyclopedia of Recorded Sound*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Frank Hoffman, Vol. 2 (New York and London: Routledge, 2005).

channels, while the overdubbed harmony track, sounding consonant counterpoint to the melody, is located much farther in the background and is couched in reverberation. This overdub occurs at a major structural crossroads, the moment at which the hook is stated (at the beginning of the chorus, 0:54 into the song). It draws the listener’s attention to the significance of the moment by dramatically altering the texture, which to this point had been relatively sparse. Moreover, Jennings’s high vocal increases the dramatic tension of the moment as his vocal cords strain to reach the D-sharp in the fifth measure.

The image displays a musical score for the song "Ride Me Down Easy" in 3/4 time, key of D major. It features two vocal parts: a lead vocal and an overdubbed vocal. The lead vocal line is written in treble clef with a soprano range, and the overdubbed vocal is in the same clef but lower. The lyrics are: "Ride me down eas - y, Lord. Ride me on\_ down. Leave word in the dust where I lay." The overdubbed vocal provides a harmonic counterpoint to the lead vocal, often using sustained notes and a more rhythmic pattern.

Figure 4-11. "Ride Me Down Easy," overdubbing of vocal harmony (0:54-1:04).

Finally, and most significantly, the overdub connects “Ride Me Down Easy” and the other songs that utilize these recording tropes on *Honky Tonk Heroes* to the tradition of musical landscape painting made popular by the singing cowboy groups of the 1930s and 1940s—the groups that inspired much of Jennings’s personal fascination with cowboys.<sup>62</sup> By situating the overdubbed track deeper in the stereo mix than the lead vocals, Jennings achieved the same spatial effects as those on the Sons of the Pioneers’

<sup>62</sup> Jennings with Kaye, 24-26.

“Cool Water,” which employed off-mic recording—that is, placing the microphone several feet from the performer during the recording process—to create echoic effects. Here, because of the availability of multitrack recording, Jennings sings a duet with a distant, alternate version of himself as the speaker passes from his corporeal form to the spiritual realm. Located off in the distance but synchronized perfectly to the “real” Jennings of the foregrounded lead vocal, the harmony vocals of “Ride Me Down Easy” constructs an unrealistic yet believable representation of the dying cowboy, passing on the dusty Texas Plains.

Writers often herald *Honky Tonk Heroes* as the beginning of the “Outlaw” movement in Nashville, a movement including Jennings, Shaver, Nelson, Kristofferson, Glaser, Jessi Colter, Bobby Bare, and others who articulated a decidedly Texan worldview and who publicly eschewed the standard practices of Nashville’s Music Row. But while *Honky Tonk Heroes* exhibited a more improvisatory or conversational mode of speech in its lyrics and evoked Texan spaces through exploitation of multitrack recording and sparse textures, the album also inherited the legacy of Music Row’s marketing practices and earlier experimentation with the long-playing record album. Much like *Waylon Sings Ol’ Harlan*, *Honky Tonk Heroes* brought Billy Joe Shaver into the public consciousness and launched a new phase of Jennings’s career by promulgating a coherent message of Texan-ness. Furthermore, *Honky Tonk Heroes* exploited the packaging potential of the twelve-inch long-playing record sleeve to promote Jennings and Shaver’s music as a collective effort created in a relaxed environment, an image that stood in direct opposition to the widely accepted perception of Nashville as a tightly controlled creative environment. The album positioned this new musical style as an antidote to modern

musical sounds, as an “antimodern” music. *Honky Tonk Heroes* came to embody a new direction in country music, capturing much of the Texas chauvinism of Austin’s progressive country scene and bringing that imagery and rhetoric to a national audience.

### *Willie Nelson and the Concept Album*

Whereas Waylon Jennings was directly involved in the production and creative networks of Nashville’s Music Row even as his anti-industrial rhetoric reached an apex, Willie Nelson had removed himself from Nashville by the late 1960s and had already become a symbol of the Austin progressive country movement by the time Jennings’s *Honky Tonk Heroes* hit the airwaves in 1973. When Nelson relocated to Texas, the music scene in Austin was focusing on two distinct, but overlapping, musical styles: one founded in the spirit of the 1960s folk and folk-rock scenes and based primarily in the Ghetto community and at Threadgill’s, and another exploring the latest psychedelic rock sounds at the Vulcan Gas Co. and the Chequered Flag. These two musical strains, blues and ballads on the one hand and contemporary rock on the other, merged in Nelson’s recorded output during the early 1970s and continued well through the first half of the decade as Nelson began to explore the compositional possibilities afforded by the concept album. Unlike Jennings’s mastery of the album as an aesthetic manifesto, Nelson found in the concept album a means to create narratives and characters with more nuance than the industry standard three-minute single would permit. Uniting the compact songwriting structures that had characterized his earlier work and the extended narrative forms afforded by the post-*Sgt. Pepper’s* concept album, Nelson created characters who, faced

with a rapidly changing cultural climate, find themselves pushed out of mainstream society and struggling to reassert their place within it.

In 1971, Nelson became one of the first country artists to begin experimenting with the compositional and story-telling possibilities of the post-*Sgt. Pepper's* concept album, and he was certainly the first among the progressive country scene to do so. *Yesterday's Wine*, Nelson's last studio recording for RCA, reveals Nelson's ambitions for the format. Whereas his rock contemporaries often created their concept albums in home project studios or were granted large amounts of studio time by their record labels, Nelson did not have that kind of freedom while working in RCA's studios, nor did he experiment with new recording techniques in a home studio. Rather, as a contracted employee of RCA, Nelson and producer Felton Jarvis appropriated the standard practices of Nashville's studio system to create a musically and conceptually innovative record that introduced Nelson's songwriting and singing to the rock audience. *Yesterday's Wine* was recorded in only three sessions over the course of two days (3 and 4 May 1971) and featured performances by many of Nashville's "A-list" session players, including pianist Hargus "Pig" Robbins and fiddler Buddy Spicher (Figure 4-12). Thus, just as Nelson strung together the compact vignettes of mainstream country music to create an extended plot in *Yesterday's Wine*, he also exploited the musicianship and engineering experience of Nashville's top producers, engineers, and musicians not to create an exact replica of the rock concept album, but to articulate a distinctly country vision of this format.



Session Date	Songs Recorded	Personnel
3 May 1971	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Medley: Where’s the Show/ Let Me Be a Man”</li> <li>• “In God’s Eyes”</li> <li>• “Medley: These Are Difficult Times/ Remember the Good Times”</li> <li>• “Summer of Roses”</li> <li>• “December Day”</li> <li>• “Yesterday’s Wine”</li> </ul>	Willie Nelson: vocals Chip Young: guitar David Kirby: guitar David Zettner: guitar Weldon Myrick: steel guitar Junior Huskey: bass Jerry Carrigan: drums
4 May 1971	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “It’s Not for Me to Understand”</li> <li>• “Me and Paul”</li> </ul>	Willie Nelson: vocals Chip Young, guitar David Zettner, guitar Herman Wade, Jr.: guitar Weldon Myrick: steel guitar Buddy Spicher: fiddle Hargus “Pig” Robbins: organ/piano Junior Huskey: bass Unknown: drums (Jerry Carrigan)
4 May 1971	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Family Bible”</li> <li>• “Goin’ Home”</li> </ul>	Willie Nelson: vocals David Kirby: guitar Chip Young: guitar David Zettner: guitar Weldon Myrick: steel guitar Bobby Thompson: banjo Jerry D. Smith: piano Charlie McCoy: harmonica Junior Huskey: bass Jerry Carrigan: drums

Figure 4-12. *Yesterday’s Wine* sessions, 3-4 May 1971.

As an “Editor’s Note” in the margins of the album’s jacket indicates, Nelson saw the potential to create a musical *Bildungsroman* on a single twelve-inch LP:

This album is the story of a man from birth to death. Each song recalls different incidents of his life—gathering around the *Family Bible* as a child... a *Summer of Roses*, of love, followed by a *December Day*... the bitterness of reflecting, *Yesterday’s Wine*... and finally, full cycle—back to God—a time for *Goin’ Home*.<sup>63</sup>

*Yesterday’s Wine* is, as the “Editor’s Note” indicates, essentially a series of brief vignettes depicting the emotional state of the protagonist at various stages of his life. This vignette approach was not unfamiliar to Nelson; he had, in fact, established his reputation in Nashville as a songwriter who was capable of creating vivid characters by

---

<sup>63</sup> “Editor’s Note,” sleeve notes to *Yesterday’s Wine* (RCA LSP-4568).

depicting the immediacy and volatility of their emotions.<sup>64</sup> But, unlike his early vignettes, which were written as self-contained units for the singles-driven country music industry, the songs comprising *Yesterday's Wine* were intended from the start to be components of a larger, album-length project, and thus represent a significant shift in Nelson's compositional thought from one focused on small-scale works to one recognizing the potential of larger complexes of songs.<sup>65</sup> Not surprisingly, therefore, the narrative possibilities of the concept album stood among the primary reasons that attracted Nelson to the format. Particularly informative is the definition Nelson offered for the term "concept album" in his 1988 autobiography: "an album that tells a story."<sup>66</sup>

One of the greatest challenges in the creation of a concept album is the construction of a believable connection between the songs on the album, some of which had been composed long before the album was conceived, and the narrative imposed on them. One of most common ways that this unity is asserted is through the record's sleeve notes. This method is employed twice on *Yesterday's Wine*: in the above-mentioned "Editor's Note" and in a lengthy commentary on the record jacket written by songwriter Dee Moeller (Figure 4-13). If these prose summaries captured the attention of the potential record buyer, the album's opening cut foreshadowed the entire journey after the listener placed the record on the turntable. Titled simply "Intro—Willie Nelson and

---

<sup>64</sup> Examples of this emotional intensity and immediacy may be found in such early Nelson songs as "Hello Walls" and "Three Days."

<sup>65</sup> Nelson with Shrake, 166. During his stay at the Happy Valley Dude Ranch in Bandera, Texas, during Winter 1969-1970, Nelson "started working on the *Yesterday's Wine* album, though I wasn't ready to record it then."

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

Band,” the opening cut features a conversation between Nelson, God, and an unknown spirit in which the three discuss the reason that Nelson must be born:

*GOD:* You do know why you’re here....

*NELSON:* Yes. There’s great confusion on Earth, and the power that is has concluded the following: perfect man has visited Earth already, and his voice was heard; the voice of imperfect man must now be made manifest, and I have been selected as the most likely candidate.

*GOD:* Yes. The time is April, and therefore, you—a Taurus—must go.

*UNKNOWN SPIRIT:* To be born under the same sign twice adds strength.

*GOD:* And this strength, combined with wisdom and love, is the key.<sup>67</sup>

Whereas the purpose of Nelson appears to be quite aware of his earthly purpose in the introductory track, the track that follows, “Where’s the Show,” betrays the uncertainty of human existence. Nelson asks God:

Explain again to me, Lord, why I’m here.  
I don’t know.  
I don’t know.  
The setting for the stage is still not clear.  
Where’s the show?  
Where’s the show?<sup>68</sup>

“Where’s the Show” ends with a half cadence, emphasizing the uncertainty that faces Nelson as he embarks on his journey, but it also serves as a transition to the next cut “Let Me Be a Man,” in which Nelson pleads with God to “let me be a man, / And I’ll give it all that I can. / If I’m needed in this distant land, / Please Lord let me be a man” (Figure 4-14).<sup>69</sup>

---

<sup>67</sup> “Intro—Willie Nelson and Band,” *Yesterday’s Wine* (RCA LSP-4568).

<sup>68</sup> “Where’s the Show,” *Yesterday’s Wine* (RCA LSP-4568).

<sup>69</sup> “Let Me Be a Man,” *Yesterday’s Wine* (RCA LSP-4568).

the story of man—from birth to death...

GOD...it all starts with you  
the giving of life, each individual is imperfect in its own way. You lay the plan and stage the show and a boy knows his role is to become a man, not understanding how, but trying to see it through Your eyes, reaching to learn; the family that lives and loves together, trying to teach, guiding the child, gathering around the table to read the Word

difficult times... eyes of the child lose the vision of black and white, it changes to coloured hues, now there is... gray... patterns of blocks and squares become circles and triangles, misshapen images confuse and distort, and always, trying to hold on to the good times that somehow are becoming fewer.

love...summer roses; such a fleeting thing, reach out and catch it, hold tight, roses only last a short season, too soon it's a december [sic] day.

remembering sets in...reflecting starts, bitterness settles with the dregs of wine, yesterday's wine, but how could you have know the good times if there were no bad times, how could you feel love it you were incapable of pain, without a hurt the heart is hollow, to follow an even line is to exist, to have highs and lows is to live, so drink the wine and bless the memories; there are

friends... to share it all with, to be there close enough to touch, to know through everything there is... Paul

the thread... the line that runs through a life span is sometimes hardly visible, it eludes us, although its presence is felt and we search for it, but age... seems to bring it all into focus, reflecting now, the pattern becomes clear, it enables us to say, that is where i've been... this is where i am, now it's altogether. full cycle it all comes back to You, God... it's time for another going home.

dee moeller

**Figure 4-13. Dee Moeller, sleeve notes to *Yesterday's Wine*.**

	<b>“Where’s the Show”</b>	<b>“Let Me Be a Man”</b>
<b>Narrative</b>	Nelson asks God the purpose of his journey.	Nelson implores God to help him to do what is right and to make a difference in society.
<b>Key</b>	A	E
<b>Final cadence</b>	Half	Authentic

**Figure 4-14. Narrative and Musical Connections in "Medley: Where's the Show/Let Me Be a Man."**

While the opening cuts provide a interpretive framework for the remainder of the album, Moeller’s sleeve notes imply that the songs that comprise *Yesterday’s Wine* may also be divided into several distinct life stages, including childhood, adolescence, early adulthood, middle age, and death. Using this framework as a guide, therefore, it becomes clear that Nelson explores each of these stages of life, with the exception of death, through two thematically related songs (Figure 4-15). For instance, he captures the naïveté of childhood in “In God’s Eyes,” in which Nelson innocently explains that

mankind should “never think evil thoughts of anyone” and “lend a hand, if you can, to a stranger,” while an older Nelson reflects on the early moral education in “Family Bible.” Like the pairing of “In God’s Eyes” and “Family Bible,” these song pairings are studies in contrasts, capturing both the pleasures and hardships of life as “imperfect man.” Furthermore, the relationships between the constituent parts of these song pairings are also cemented through musical unities. For instance, both “Summer of Roses” and “December Day,” the two songs that treat early adulthood and Nelson’s first romance, feature a relaxed tempo, a jazz-inflected hollow-body electric guitar accompaniment, and chromatic and extended jazz harmonies, an accompaniment that appears at no other time on the album. While the superimposition of a narrative umbrella on any concept album poses a difficult challenge to both composer and listener, Nelson strove to create a high level of narrative and musical unity within *Yesterday’s Wine*.

Songs	Life Stage
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Intro: Willie and Band”</li> <li>• “Medley: Where’s the Show/Let Me Be a Man”</li> </ul>	Gestation and Birth
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “In God’s Eyes”</li> <li>• “Family Bible”</li> </ul>	Childhood
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “It’s Not for Me to Understand”</li> <li>• “Medley: These Are Difficult Times/Remember the Good Times”</li> </ul>	Adolescence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Summer of Roses”</li> <li>• “December Day”</li> </ul>	Early Adulthood
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Yesterday’s Wine”</li> <li>• “Me and Paul”</li> </ul>	Middle Age
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Goin’ Home”</li> </ul>	Death

Figure 4-15. Song pairings and narrative in *Yesterday’s Wine*.

<i>Song</i>	<i>Side</i>	<i>Speaker</i>	<i>Narrative Action</i>
Phases and Stages (Theme)/ Washing the Dishes	A	Omniscient Narrator/ Omniscient Narrator	Setting the scene/ Wife toils at daily chores and finds “red stains on the collar” of her husband’s shirt.
Phases and Stages (Theme)/ Walkin’	A	Omniscient Narrator/ Wife	Wife decides to leave her husband because of his infidelity.
Pretend I Never Happened	A	Wife	Wife’s “Dear John” letter to her husband.
Sister’s Coming Home/ Down at the Corner Beer Joint	A	Wife’s Sibling (gender unclear)	Sibling describes family’s reaction to news; wife begins to frequent the local honky-tonk.
(How Will I Know) I’m Falling in Love Again	A	Wife	Wife struggles to reconcile her disgust with her previous relationship and her desire to enter into a long-term relationship.
Bloody Mary Morning	B	Husband	Husband flees from L.A. to Houston after discovering that his wife has left him.
Phases and Stages (Theme)/ No Love Around	B	Omniscient Narrator/ Husband	Husband recounts how he discovered that his wife had left.
I Still Can’t Believe You’re Gone	B	Husband	Husband contemplates the gravity of the situation.
It’s Not Supposed to Be That Way	B	Husband	Husband tries to chastise his wife and undermine her confidence.
Heaven and Hell	B	Husband	Husband begins joking about the situation at his wife’s expense.
Phases and Stages (Theme)/ Pick Up the Tempo/ Phases and Stages (Theme)	B	Omniscient Narrator/ Omniscient Narrator/ Omniscient Narrator	Husband begins to frequent the local honky-tonk.

**Figure 4-16. Speakers and Narrative Action in *Phases and Stages*.**

Nelson fulfilled his contractual obligation to RCA upon the completion of *Yesterday’s Wine*, and it was not long before other record label executives who hoped to cash in on the increasing momentum of the Austin’s progressive country scene, the West Coast country-rock scene in Los Angeles, and the emerging Outlaw movement in Nashville began courting him. Chief among these executives was Jerry Wexler, the legendary producer at Atlantic Records, who was exploring the possibility of establishing a Nashville office for the label. In 1972, Nelson signed with Atlantic, and, in February 1972, he traveled to New York to record material for his *Shotgun Willie* album with his road band and a cadre of hand-picked session musicians.<sup>70</sup> After taking a brief hiatus

---

<sup>70</sup> Atlantic 7262. The *Shotgun Willie* sessions were held 5-9 February 1972, and the album was released in May 1973 (Bill Bentley, liner notes to *Willie Nelson: The Complete Atlantic Sessions*

from the concept album format with *Shotgun Willie*, Nelson returned to it in October 1973, when he began recording a new album at the Muscle Shoals Sound studios in Alabama.<sup>71</sup> Joined by the legendary Muscle Shoals rhythm section comprising keyboardist Barry Beckett, bassist David Hood, and drummer Roger Hawkins, Nelson's *Phases and Stages* expands on the monologue of *Yesterday's Wine* by creating narrative conflict both with and between characters.

*Phases and Stages* exploits the bipartite nature of the long-playing record to construct a narrative about divorce and emotional healing from the perspectives of both parties (Figure 4-16). Like the "Editor's Note" of *Yesterday's Wine*, the sleeve notes to *Phases and Stages* paste together the titles of all of the songs to summarize the story told on the album. But here Nelson expands upon the precedent of *Yesterday's Wine*, weaving extended quotations from the lyrics into this narrative as well:

Side one of this album tells the woman's side of the story. Beginning with Washing the Dishes, she's tired of caring for someone who don't care anymore, and Walkin' is better than running away and crawling ain't no good at all. Finally saying to him: Pretend I Never Happened—erase me from your mind; you will not want to remember any love as cold as mine. And then: Sister's Coming Home, Mama's gonna let her sleep the whole day long. Then back to the Corner Beer joint, wearing jeans that fit a little tighter than they did before. The cycle is completed with I'm Falling in Love Again, and if I lost or win, how will I know?

Side two, the man's side of the picture, begins with Bloody Mary Morning. It's been a long night in California and he's flying home to find there ain't No Love Around. His story continues with I Still Can't Believe You're Gone and It's Not Supposed to Be That Way. With Heaven and Hell he starts his comeback, regains his sense of humor, and the man's side of *Phases and Stages* is completed with Pick Up the Tempo just a little and take it on home, the singer ain't singin' and the drummer's been draggin' too long. Phases and Stages circles and cycles scenes that we've all seen before—listen I'll tell you some more.<sup>72</sup>

---

[Atlantic/Rhino R2 73383; 2006], 24). See also: Chet Flippo, "Willie Nelson's New York Country Sessions," *Rolling Stone* 132 (12 April 1973): 14.

<sup>71</sup> Bentley, 26.

<sup>72</sup> Willie Nelson, sleeve notes to *Phases and Stages* (Atlantic 7291). I have underlined the song lyric quotations.

The songs on the album are tied together not only through this narrative, but also through a short refrain entitled “Phases and Stages (Theme).” Featuring Nelson’s voice accompanied only by a nylon-string guitar, it appears on the album five times, allowing Nelson to serve both as an omniscient narrator and as a Greek chorus whose commentary reinforces the narrative and offers a hermeneutic framework within which to interpret it. In this dual role, Nelson explains that the tale we are about to experience is representative of the eternal conflict between men and women: “Phases and stages, / Circles and cycles, / Scenes that we’ve all seen before. / Let me tell you some more.”

In spite of the narrative proposed in the album’s sleeve notes, however, the ubiquity of Nelson’s nasal baritone complicates, and at times confounds, his performance of the female lead on Side A. An excellent example of Nelson’s complication of the album’s gender narrative is “(How Will I Know) I’m Falling in Love Again?.” This, the concluding song of Side A, depicts the female protagonist as she grapples with the decision to move on with her life and forge a new romantic relationship following the collapse of her marriage. The whole-note articulations of the first three syllables of each verse, combined with text-painting of the melody’s downward trajectory (“I’m falling”), the addition of chromatic neighbor chords, and the song’s ponderously slow tempo, serve to emphasize the emotional torment she experiences as she makes these decisions (Figure 4-17).<sup>73</sup> But Nelson’s use of first-person pronouns, his failure to identify the gender of the “you” character, and, most importantly, the presence of his noticeably male voice

---

<sup>73</sup> For a canonic and controversial reading of the gendered connotations of chromaticism, please consult the discussion of Bizet’s *Carmen* in Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 53-79.



complicates the emotional power of the female protagonist's most vulnerable moment.<sup>74</sup> Heard out of the context of the album as a single, Nelson's voice is not problematic; rather, the gender non-specific "you" allows this song to be a vehicle for a male or a female voice. But in the context of an elaborate concept album, the listener must make a conceptual leap, believing that, despite his noticeably male voice, Nelson is actually portraying the emotions of a female speaker.



**Figure 4-17.** "(How Will I Know) I'm Falling in Love Again" (1974), Opening Phrase (0:15-0:25).

Close examination of "Walkin'" and "Pretend I Never Happened," the other two songs displaying the female protagonist's emotions, yields similar results. Despite Nelson's proposed portrayal of both parties, his obviously male voice in many ways destabilizes the presence of a convincing female voice in Side A of *Phases and Stages*. As a relatively successful singer-songwriter, it seems probable that Nelson would have had little difficulty in securing a female vocalist for the session in order to create a more realistic rendering of both gendered voices. His decision to perform both parts in the drama is significant, therefore, and, when combined with the lack of gender specificity in the lyrics, leads one to question whether the female voice proposed in the sleeve notes is present at all.

---

<sup>74</sup> The difficulties of superimposing a gender-specific narrative on a song cycle has been discussed at some length in regards to Robert Schumann's *Frauenliebe und Leben*. Please consult Ruth A. Solie, "Whose Life? The Gendered Self in Schumann's *Frauenliebe* Songs," in *Music and Text: Critical Inquiries*, ed. Steven Paul Scher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 219-240, and Kristina Muxfeldt, "'Frauenliebe und Leben' Now and Then," *19<sup>th</sup>-Century Music* 25, no. 1 (Summer 2001): 27-48.

If Side A of *Phases and Stages* represents an emotionally and musically complicated attempt to depict the female protagonist's perspective on separation and divorce, the "B" side, which addresses the male perspective, is significantly less so. The most obvious difference between the two sides is that Nelson's voice may be interpreted as a convincing embodiment of the male character. But, more importantly, while the female protagonist's songs from Side A carefully take the listener through her thought process as she decides to leave her husband and to seek life and love elsewhere, the husband's songs represent a more manic and stereotypically male reaction to the separation. As journalist Chet Flippo explained in a *Rolling Stone* review of the album, while "the woman runs away, finds another, but still wonders...[,] the man loses himself in self-pity and then assumes the façade of honky-tonk bravado."<sup>75</sup>

The male protagonist's emotional turmoil is perhaps best exemplified by the contrast between the song that opens Side B, "Bloody Mary Morning," and "It's Not Supposed to Be That Way."<sup>76</sup> After at least three songs indicting the male character on Side A, "Bloody Mary Morning" marks the first occasion in which the male character gets to speak for himself. The listener is introduced to him as he flies from Los Angeles to Houston, fleeing from the site of his infidelity and of what he perceives as his wife's betrayal of their marriage. His reflexive response is made all the more urgent through the musical setting. "Bloody Mary Morning" features the album's densest textures, augmenting the core honky-tonk instrumentation of lead guitar, electric bass guitar, and

---

<sup>75</sup> Chet Flippo, "Honky Tonk Bravado—*Phases and Stages*, Willie Nelson, Atlantic SD 7291," *Rolling Stone* 156 (14 March 1974), p. 61.

<sup>76</sup> "Bloody Mary Morning" is an example of a song that Nelson composed prior to the idea for *Phases and Stages*. He even recorded it on his 1970 album *Both Sides Now* (RCA Victor LSP-4294).

drums with Eric Weissberg's three-finger banjo and Barry Beckett's piano. Furthermore, Roger Hawkins' steady kick drum accents combine with the banjo and piano to add an almost frenetic energy to the song, underscoring further his desire to get as far away from his problems as possible.

In stark contrast to "Bloody Mary Morning," "It's Not Supposed to Be That Way" presents the male character after his initial ire has cooled and as he begins to reflect on the circumstances of his wife's estrangement. Here, the protagonist does not blame himself for the failure of his marriage; instead, he posits that his wife was simply acting "like the other little children" by "play[ing] with fireflies 'til they're gone." In an imagined dialogue with his wife, however, he warns her to "be careful what you're dreamin' / Or your dreams'll be dreamin' you," implying that, although her dreams of liberation from her marital obligations may be perfectly natural, those same dreams may well result in the sully of her reputation. Set amid lush reverb and Nelson's sparse finger-picked guitar, the husband's vitriol is all the more pointed, because the setting indicates that his words have been deliberately chosen to belittle his wife's emotionally fraught decisions. Nelson's development of this character is, therefore, markedly different from his development of the female protagonist of Side A. Whereas he portrays the wife as a dynamic character who carefully considers the implications of the possibilities afforded her, her husband is decidedly static, remaining resolute in his belief that his wife's reasons for leaving were trivial and unjustified.

*Phases and Stages* was an important album for its musical innovations, including its compositional unity and its full exploitation of the LP's possibilities and limitations, but it was perhaps more important for the social statement it made. In an era in which

many Americans expressed the belief that the American South and Texas were the last bastions of American xenophobia, jingoism, racism, and misogyny, Nelson's statement represents an explicit attempt to explore the implications of the Women's Liberation Movement on Texan and Southern masculinity. But given that perspective, what is most remarkable about *Phases and Stages* is its ambivalence toward Women's Liberation. The female protagonist is clearly motivated by a desire to break free from the bonds of domesticity—washing the dishes, ironing the laundry, and so forth—but she is noticeably bothered by the implications of her decision: she must move in with her mother because she is financially disenfranchised. She continues to harbor romantic feelings for her husband despite his infidelity; and she feels guilty for finding a new love.<sup>77</sup> The husband's reaction, on the other hand, corresponds to the misogynistic stereotype of southerners and Texans, responding violently, hatefully, and hedonistically to his wife's decision. But, in the midst of his thrashing about, he collapses emotionally, revealing his machismo to be a fragile construction to hide his vulnerability. *Phases and Stages* never openly embraces a clear pro-Women's Liberation or anti-Women's Liberation stance; rather, Nelson constructs a narrative that reveals the complicated implications of this social revolution on everyday couples, particularly those grappling with the changing social norms outside of the monied and liberal coastal urban communities on whom much of the Movement's momentum relied. The resulting portrait, therefore, breaks down the notion that Texas and the American South stood in opposition to the social changes of the

---

<sup>77</sup> One can find parallels between the wife's continued love for her husband in Tammy Wynette's 1968 recording of "Stand By Your Man" (Billy Sherrill/Tammy Wynette), in which Wynette observes that she continues to love her husband because, "after all, he's just a man" (Epic BN-26451).

late 1960s and early 1970s by giving the conservative Texan and Southern resistance to them a nuanced, human face.

*Phases and Stages* marked the end of Nelson's relationship with Atlantic Records, since the label's Nashville offices closed shortly after the album's release, and, by 1975, Nelson had signed a contract with Columbia Records. He did not, however, agree to work with Columbia's Nashville office. He instead dealt directly with executives in New York, opting to maintain his physical and personal distance from Music Row. *Red Headed Stranger*, released in 1975, was Nelson's first release on Columbia's subsidiary CBS Records, and it capitalized on his growing countercultural success among the young fans in Austin and elsewhere.

While the story of *Red Headed Stranger*'s genesis has taken on an almost mythic status in Austin and Nashville, there is little doubt that the album represented a fundamental shift in the way country records were made. The album marks the first occasion of a progressive country or Outlaw musician recording an entire album in a non-professional recording studio; even Waylon Jennings's *Honky Tonk Heroes* was recorded at a professional studio, albeit one that was independently owned and controlled. Recorded at Autumn Sound Studios, an advertising studio in Garland, Texas, *Red Headed Stranger* cost twenty thousand dollars to record.<sup>78</sup> When Nelson took the tapes to executives at CBS Records, the album's stripped-down instrumentation and low fidelity purportedly led one executive to observe that the tapes represented a good start but would require more work before they would be ready for release.<sup>79</sup> Columbia

---

<sup>78</sup> Reid, 276.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

Records released the album without any alteration of the masters, however, and, as such, *Red Headed Stranger* took its place in both the country and rock pantheons.

Unlike *Yesterday's Wine* and *Phases and Stages*, the narratives of which take place in a contemporary setting, *Red Headed Stranger* is set in the Rocky Mountain West of 1901. As he had done in *Phases and Stages*, Nelson uses a recurring theme, here titled "Time of the Preacher," as an exposition to the narrative and as a framework within which later narrative developments can be interpreted. In the initial presentation of "Time of the Preacher," the setting, the main characters, and the initial conflict are fully explicated:

It was the time of the Preacher when the story began,  
Of the choice of a lady and the love of a man,  
How he loved her so dearly he went out of his mind  
When she left him for someone that she'd left behind.  
And he cried like a baby and screamed like a panther in the middle of the night,  
And he saddled his pony and he went for a ride.  
It was the time of the Preacher in the year of '01.  
Now the preachin' is over and the lesson's begun.<sup>80</sup>



Figure 4-18. Nelson as the Red Headed Stranger: Storyboard, Cell 1.

---

<sup>80</sup> Willie Nelson, "Time of the Preacher," *Red Headed Stranger* (Columbia 33482).

One of the principal tools that Nelson used to add emotional depth to *Red Headed Stranger* is the association of the speaker's voice and Nelson himself. This technique already appeared on *Yesterday's Wine*, in which Nelson recounted some memories of life on the road with drummer Paul English in "Me and Paul," and Nelson's notorious difficulties with marriage no doubt influenced *Phases and Stages*. But in *Red Headed Stranger*, Nelson takes this association of autobiography and concept album narrative one step further. The back of the album jacket presents a summary of the plot through excerpted lyrics (continuing the practice begun with *Yesterday's Wine* and developed further in *Phases and Stages*), but in addition to this synopsis, the jacket includes a storyboard drawn by Monica White that retells the story visually (Figure 4-18). One the storyboard, the protagonist—the Red Headed Stranger—is modeled on Nelson's own image, securing the connection between the protagonist's struggles and Nelson. While the album's historical setting precludes the inclusion of actual portions of Nelson's autobiography in the plot, the visual association leads the listener (and viewer) to make such an affective affiliation.

Although Nelson's personal ties to the narrative are established on the record jacket, the notion of presenting an historical narrative in a country concept album could well have been interpreted as pretension on Nelson's part. In order to avoid the excess of similar projects undertaken in rock concept album's, not least among them being *Sgt. Pepper's*, Nelson's arrangements are marked by a textural sparseness that forces listeners to focus on the lyrics and not on the accompaniment. In "Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain," for instance, Nelson's vocals are accompanied by only his nylon-string guitar and an

electric bass guitar and an occasional plaintive harmonica (Figure 4-20). Like Jennings’s “Honky Tonk Heroes,” the textural sparseness here gives the impression of an empty and

TIMING	STRUCTURE	ARRANGEMENT	LYRICS
0:00-0:03	Introduction	Strummed nylon-string guitar. Bass guitar accents beats 1 and 3.	
0:04-0:20	A	As before.	In the twilight’s glow I see her Blue eyes cryin’ in the rain.
0:21-0:34	A	As before.	When we kissed goodbye and parted, I knew we’d never meet again.
0:34-0:51	B	Harmonica enters in background. Guitar and bass as before.	Love is like a dyin’ ember: Only memories remain.
0:52-1:06	A	Harmonica exits. Guitar and bass as before.	And through the ages, I’ll remember Blue eyes cryin’ in the rain.
1:07-1:41	A-A	Nylon-string guitar solo, accompanied by strummed steel-string guitar and electric bass guitar accenting beats 1 and 3.	
1:42-1:57	B	Harmonica enters in background. Strummed nylon-string guitar. Electric bass guitar accents beats 1 and 3. Nelson overdubbed vocals on “We’ll stroll hand in hand again.”	Someday when we meet up yonder, We’ll stroll hand in hand again
1:58-2:10	A	Strummed nylon-string guitar. Bass guitar accents beats 1 and 3.	In the land that knows no parting, Blue eyes cryin’ in the rain.
2:10-2:16	Coda	Harmonica enters in middleground. Guitar and bass as before.	

**Figure 4-20. Arrangement of "Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain."**

boundless physical space and underscores the speaker’s loneliness.<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, the stripped-down accompaniment makes the overdubbed vocals on the phrase “we’ll stroll hand in hand again” stand out as the dramatic climax, the moment when the wandering Red Headed Stranger imagines the bliss of being reunited with his murdered love. This emptiness is also present from the very outset of the album, as the opening bars of “The Time of the Preacher” feature a downward falling line played in octaves on a nylon-string

---

<sup>81</sup> A similar textural practice can be heard in the verses of Guy Clark’s “L.A. Freeway.”



guitar and an electric bass guitar accompanied by a harmonically adventurous strummed steel-string guitar. *Red Headed Stranger*'s plot, therefore, is situated in an empty sonic landscape, both evoking the visual imagery of the Rocky Mountain West and reinforcing the protagonist's profound sadness and feelings of solitude.

In addition to the sonic construction of place and emotion in *Red Headed Stranger*, Nelson reinforces the setting of the narrative through a rather unorthodox song selection (Figure 4-20). Rather than creating an album comprised solely of his own songs as he had in his previous concept album projects,<sup>82</sup> Nelson assembled several songs written by other songwriters and arranged them into a plot connected only by the "Time of the Preacher" theme. In addition to contributing the theme, Nelson composed or arranged only two instrumental numbers, "O'er the Waves" and "Bandera," and wrote "Blue Rock Montana" and "Denver," both of which act as transitional songs that relocate the plot to a new locale. The remaining songs are culled from the work of songwriters who were active at least a generation prior to the album's creation, many of whom were stars in Nashville when Nelson was first trying to break into the scene in the late 1950s. Nelson's choice to assemble commercial country songs instead of traditional cowboy ballads is particularly telling here; he was not, in fact, trying to make some sort of statement about the passing of the American West, a statement that could be easily supported with the use of traditional materials, but was instead attempting to capture the profound human emotion experienced by this lonesome wanderer.

---

<sup>82</sup> "Family Bible" on *Yesterday's Wine* is credited to Walt Breeland, Paul Buskirk, and Claude Gray, but it is, in fact, a Nelson composition to which he sold the rights.

SONG	SONGWRITER(S)
“Time of the Preacher”	Willie Nelson
“I Couldn’t Believe It Was True”	Eddy Arnold/Wally Fowler
“Time of the Preacher (Theme)”	Willie Nelson
“Medley: Blue Rock Montana/ Red Headed Stranger”	Willie Nelson Edith Lindeman/Carl Stutz
“Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain”	Fred Rose
“Red Headed Stranger”	Edith Lindeman/Carl Stutz
“Time of the Preacher (Theme)”	Willie Nelson
“Just As I Am”	William Bradbury/Charlotte Elliot
“Denver”	Willie Nelson
“O’er the Waves”	Willie Nelson (arr.)
“Down Yonder”	L. Wolfe Gilbert
“Can I Sleep in Your Arms?”	Hank Cochran
“Remember Me (When the Candlelights are Gleaming)”	Scotty Wiseman
“Hands on the Wheel”	Bill Callery
“Bandera”	Willie Nelson

**Figure 4-20. *Red Headed Stranger*: Songs and songwriters.**

The three concept albums Willie Nelson recorded and released in the first five years of the 1970s represent his attempt to engage with and to modify the concept album as formulated by The Beatles and other rock groups in the late 1960s and early 1970s. As with his rock predecessors and colleagues, Nelson was keenly aware of the compositional possibilities afforded by the two-sided long-playing record, but unlike his contemporaries experimenting with extended musical forms, Nelson saw different creative potential in the format. By drawing together a collection of many brief songs and exploiting the necessity of flipping the record, Nelson created dramatic works with extended character development, narrative conflict, and resolution. Moreover, because Nelson constructed his concept albums by compiling a series of short singles, his concept albums at once played favorably in Nashville, which was primarily a singles-driven industry center, and were marketable to the album-oriented, progressive FM radio rock audience.

At the same time, Nelson’s concept albums, especially *Phases and Stages* and *Red Headed Stranger*, also demonstrated that, despite the perceived conservatism of Texans in the 1970s, not all Texans opposed the social revolutions of the era. In fact,

*Phases and Stages* and *Red Headed Stranger* represent two very different attempts to bring country music into the dialogue about Women's Liberation and to accommodate the movement's demands into the traditionally patriarchal country community. Nelson's sometimes awkward efforts to incorporate female voices in *Phases and Stages* and the gratuitous violence of *Red Headed Stranger* are, in many ways, indicative of the ambivalence many men felt as feminism sought greater freedom and equal rights for women.<sup>83</sup> Nelson's ambivalence should not, however, be construed in the negative, but rather as a practical and honest portrayal of the range of responses to the challenges facing society at the time. In fact, male and female country singers alike struggled with ways to integrate the values of Women's Liberation into country music as their fan base negotiated ways to make feminism part of their everyday lives. In Loretta Lynn's 1972 performance of Shel Silverstein's "One's on the Way," for instance, she observes that

The girls in New York City  
They all march for Women's Lib,  
And *Better Homes and Gardens* shows the modern way to live.  
And the pill may change the world tomorrow, but meanwhile today,  
Here in Topeka, the flies are a-buzzin'.  
The dog is a-barking and the floor need a-scrubbin'.  
One needs a spankin', and one needs a huggin'.  
Lord, one's on the way.<sup>84</sup>

Nelson's *Phases and Stages* and *Red Headed Stranger* articulate a similar hesitancy to accept Women's Liberation completely. But Nelson's portrait differs from Lynn's in one key aspect: whereas Lynn's female protagonist asks how Women's Liberation can be

---

<sup>83</sup> For a history of the internal and external challenges to second-wave feminism, including a discussion of ambivalence toward the movement, please consult Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1991); Myra Marx Ferree and Beth B. Hess, eds., *Controversy and Coalition: The New Feminist Movement across Three Decades of Change* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995).

<sup>84</sup> Loretta Lynn, *One's on the Way* (Decca DL-75334).

modified to make room for all women, Nelson's male protagonists see such social change as an obstacle to their daily comfort. Therefore, just as Jennings's *Honky Tonk Heroes* offered a distinctly Texan musical aesthetic that captured the sounds of the rural honky tonk, so, too, did Nelson's concept albums articulate a Texan identity that portrayed the contradictions of being a white, male Texan in an era of Second-Wave Feminism and the Civil Rights Movement.

*Solidifying the Texan Aesthetic: Wanted!: The Outlaws (1976)*

The album that solidified Jennings's and Nelson's roles as symbols of Texan music on the national level represented, ironically, the beginning of the scene's demise. *Wanted!: The Outlaws*, released by RCA in January 1976, is a sampler of previously recorded selections by Jennings, Nelson, Tompall Glaser, and Jennings's wife Jessi Colter.<sup>85</sup> In many ways, *Wanted!: The Outlaws* was similar to the Folk-Country campaign at RCA in the late 1960s. Like Folk-Country, *Wanted!: The Outlaws* articulated a clear marketing concept by bringing together four artists with widely divergent musical styles and a personal relationship to one another under a single rubric. In this way, producer Jerry Bradley, who oversaw the compilation for RCA, embraced the anti-establishment and anti-Nashville rhetoric of Jennings and of the Austin progressive country music movement, transforming the Outlaw image into one of RCA's greatest successes to date. At the same time that RCA co-opted the black-hatted outlaw cowboy image, the self-conscious Texan-ness of *Wanted!* encouraged more Texans and southerners to interrogate their own regional identities.

---

<sup>85</sup> RCA AFL1-1321.

The outlaw is a character with long provenance in country music and folk traditions. Country music historian Bill Malone traces the outlaw to “an ancient impulse in the western European tradition [especially in the balladry and folktales of the British Isles] that gave rise to southern folk culture.”<sup>86</sup> Malone also points to the ubiquity of the outlaw in the Southern imagination, appearing in Appalachian ballads, the rounder songs of Jimmie Rodgers, and the boastings of black and white blues singers, among others.<sup>87</sup> The outlaw character is also to some degree an outcast, existing outside the constraints of mainstream society not by choice but because of exile. As such, the boastfulness and pride of the outlaw may be read as a technique to mask a deeper emotional pain. Cultural critic Barbara Ching has proposed, for instance, that the boastfulness of much “hard” country, including the music of Jennings, Nelson, Shaver, and Kristofferson, among others, may be seen as a type of burlesque, in which the artist articulates a position in their music and their everyday lives that undermines the cultural ideals of mainstream society.<sup>88</sup> Thus, the outlaw character may be said to exist for two distinct but related cultural purposes: to remind society of its core values by offering negative examples and to undermine the very values that have defined the outlaw as dangerous. Moreover, as marketing scholars Douglas B. Holt and Craig J. Thompson have posited, the outlaw or

---

<sup>86</sup> Malone, 119.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, 117-148.

<sup>88</sup> Barbara Ching, *Wrong's What I Do Best: Hard Country Music and Contemporary Culture* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 27. The term “hard country” is derived from what sociologist Richard A. Peterson has described as “the dialectic of hard core and soft shell” (*Creating Country Music*, 229). He explains: “The basic justification for... hard country is that it represents the authentic tradition of the music called country and that it is by and for those steeped in the tradition. The corresponding justification for... soft country is that it melds country with pop music to make it enjoyable to the much larger numbers of those not born into or knowledgeable about country music” (Peterson, 150).

rebel character also persists because it “celebrates all types of men who stand apart from powerful institutions.”<sup>89</sup>

While the outlaw has figured as a prominent component of the Southern imagination, the association between the music of Jennings, Nelson, Kristofferson, and others and the “outlaw” characterization has a much briefer and identifiable pedigree. In 1972, RCA released *Ladies Love Outlaws*, featuring Lee Clayton’s title song, which explains that

Ladies love outlaws like babies love stray dogs.  
Ladies touch babies like a banker touches gold,  
And outlaws touch ladies  
Somewhere deep down in their soul.<sup>90</sup>

The musical sounds of *Ladies Love Outlaws* have much more in common with his earlier, pop-influenced RCA releases than with the albums leading up to the release of *Wanted! The Outlaws*, in part because the album was finished and released while Jennings was convalescing from hepatitis and when he could not return to the studio to supervise the production of the songs.<sup>91</sup> But, despite the sonic disparities, much of the imagery that would become associated with Jennings and his Outlaw cohort appears here. The album’s cover (Figure 4-21) features Jennings dressed in black from head to toe, standing on the boardwalk of an “Old West” style storefront, and gazing downward at a small girl (Jennings’s niece). The camera lens sits at the level of the boardwalk looking up at Jennings and, therefore, exaggerating his stature, presenting him as a larger-than-life

---

<sup>89</sup> Douglas B. Holt and Craig J. Thompson, “Man-of-Action Heroes: The Pursuit of Heroic Masculinity in Everyday Consumption,” *Journal of Consumer Research* 31 (September 2004), 428.

<sup>90</sup> Lee Clayton, “Ladies Love Outlaws,” *Ladies Love Outlaws*, Waylon Jennings (RCA APL1-1321).

<sup>91</sup> Jennings with Kaye, 183-185; Denisoff, 184.

figure. Simultaneously, the image and the title track combine to present an alternate, somewhat contradictory, image of the outlaw figure who, while existing outside the bounds of societal constraints, may be tamed by the love of a woman or the innocence of a child. This theme is carried into *Wanted!: The Outlaws* through the inclusion of Jessi Colter into the Outlaw pantheon. As Jennings's wife, she embodies the potency of this duality in Jennings's own personal life between his existence as a raging and unpredictable drug addict and a caring and compassionate husband and father.



**Figure 4-21.** Cover photograph of Waylon Jennings's *Ladies Love Outlaws* (RCA APL1-1321, 1972).

While *Ladies Love Outlaws* marked the first use of the term in relation to Jennings and his contemporaries, “Outlaw” was not a common appellation until sometime in 1973, the same year as Jennings’s pro-Texas manifesto *Honky Tonk Heroes* was released and at the height of the Austin scene’s stability. Hazel Smith, who was responsible for public relations at Glaser’s Hillbilly Central studios, was the first to use

the term “outlaws” to describe the musicians who were involved in the Nashville counterculture. Smith knew these musicians firsthand; Jennings, Shel Silverstein, Kinky Friedman, and others associated with the Nashville-Austin-Los Angeles network of singers and songwriters made frequent use of the Glaser studios as they worked to define their respective sounds during the 1970s. The term “outlaw” was first employed in a corporate setting to describe these musicians in response to a request from a disc jockey at WCSE in Asheboro, North Carolina, planning a Sunday afternoon broadcast featuring the music of Kristofferson, Jennings, Nelson, and Glaser. In search of an adjective to capture the sound and attitude of their music, he contacted Smith, who offered the term “outlaw” as an apt description. As she related to Outlaw chronicler Michael Bane:

I discussed it with Lee Clayton later, . . . and I think the term was in the back of my mind. However, later I looked it up in the encyclopedia and found that it meant, literally, someone who lived on the outside of the law. And I knew people like Willie and Waylon and Tompall, David Allan Coe, Jimmy Buffett, Kristofferson—just a lot of people in that category—who were not going along with the Music Row establishment, the Nashville Sound. So I figured they could be living on the outside of the law.<sup>92</sup>

The term “outlaw” resonated with young listeners, as students from the three colleges within the broadcast radius of WCSE confirmed. Smith reportedly began to send autographed photographs of the Outlaw artists to radio stations as promotional items for listeners and free copies of new Outlaw releases for program directors and disc jockeys at radio stations across the country.<sup>93</sup> Within months, “outlaw” was included in numerous record reviews, concert reports, and publicity interviews, as Dave Hickey did in a January

---

<sup>92</sup> Michael Bane, *The Outlaws: Revolution in Country Music* (n.p.: Country Music Magazine/Doubleday/Dolphin Books, 1978), 6. Smith reinforced this narrative in a panel discussion held in honor of the thirtieth anniversary of the release of *Wanted!: The Outlaws* at the 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual International Country Music Conference, Belmont University, Nashville, TN, 26 May 2006.

<sup>93</sup> Bane, 6, 8.



1974 report on the Country Music Disc Jockey Convention for *Country Music* entitled “In Defense of the Telecaster Cowboy Outlaws”:

I realized why two gentle people like Willie and Waylon would be considered outlaws in Nashville, where recording artists are generally treated as in-laws. There were a couple of artists there at the [RCA corporate] party, in loafers and pull-over sweaters, smiling the way you do when your deaf great aunt is lecturing you on world affairs. The moment it was polite we excused ourselves, feeling genuine respect for the host and hostess and wishing to God we had had our teeth capped.<sup>94</sup>

The term “outlaw” described the rhetoric of the Nashville counterculture, one that stood in opposition to the Nashville of “chart positions and percentage overrides.”<sup>95</sup> The public persona of the Outlaws was based on a collective desire to create a music that stood apart from the sounds of contemporaneous country music. Yet, at the same time, the Outlaw artists were also keenly aware of the corporate marketing mechanisms that entice listeners to purchase records and attend concerts, and they used that knowledge to make the Outlaw movement a household name.<sup>96</sup>

*Wanted!: The Outlaws* was released in January 1976 at the apogee of the Outlaw craze in Nashville and was conceived to some degree as a way to repackage some of RCA’s back catalogue of country recordings for a rock audience that had not yet been

---

<sup>94</sup> Hickey, “In Defense of the Telecaster Cowboy Outlaws,” *Country Music* (January 1974), 93. Denisoff observes that Jennings credited Hickey’s article with beginning the Outlaw movement in his song “Don’t You Think This Outlaw Bit Has Done Got Out of Hand?,” in which he observes that “someone called us outlaws in some ol’ magazine.... What started out to be a joke / The law don’t understand” (Denisoff, 195).

<sup>95</sup> Hickey, 91. See also: Holt and Thompson, 429.

<sup>96</sup> As Bane observes: “Being her songwriter herself, Hazel knew the value of a good hook. Damn, it could mean the whole ballgame. And things were just beginning to cook at Hillbilly Central; they *needed* that airplay. Then it hit her like a lightning bolt. ‘Call it “Outlaw Music,”’ she said. ‘Yeah—*Outlaw!*’” (Bane, 8 [emphasis in original]). See also: Chet Flippo, “From the Bump-Bump Room to the Barricades: Waylon, Tompall, and the Outlaw Revolution,” in *Country: The Music and the Musicians from the Beginnings to the ‘90s*, eds. Paul Kingsbury and Alan Axelrod (New York and Nashville: The Country Music Foundation Press, 1994), 318.

exposed to the music of Jennings, Nelson, Glaser, and Colter.<sup>97</sup> As Chet Flippo explained in the album's sleeve notes, RCA hoped that the album would expose new audiences to the music of "some special people... [who've] been waiting in the wings for years, too many years":

It's unfortunate that there still has to be a sampler, or primer, or golden book of some of the best singers working anywhere, but apparently not everyone has gotten the message yet. Maybe this album can introduce you to some people you would have liked to have known sooner, but just didn't have the opportunity to meet.<sup>98</sup>

Jennings also commented on the role of *Wanted!: The Outlaws* as an artist showcase: "As an album, our true fans had probably heard most of it before. For the newer people, who needed a sampler of Outlaw Music to understand what all the fuss was about, it was a perfect introduction."<sup>99</sup> For this population of Outlaw neophytes, the *Wanted!* concept encapsulated the Texas-centric musical aesthetic of the Outlaws while also inviting listeners into the community of long-time fans and the community of musicians itself. As journalist Tony Glover described in his *Rolling Stone* review of the album, the relationships between all of the musicians included on *Wanted!* were deeper than a shared aesthetic: "It also functions as a sampler, bringing together people whose relationships are complex: Willie Nelson and Jennings have cowritten songs and sometimes sing each other's material; Jessi Colter and Jennings are married; Jennings and Tompall Glaser are business as well as musical partners."<sup>100</sup> Jennings observed that, when Hazel Smith affixed the Outlaw label on Jennings and his cohort, "RCA was delighted. They'd tried

---

<sup>97</sup> Denisoff, 252.

<sup>98</sup> Chet Flippo, sleeve notes to *Wanted!: The Outlaws* (RCA AFL1-1321).

<sup>99</sup> Jennings with Kaye, 244.

<sup>100</sup> Tony Glover, "Wanted!: The Outlaws," *Rolling Stone* 208 (11 March 1976), 64.

to find a description to categorize my music since the days of *Folk-Country*, and now they finally had a Concept. The marketing department breathed a sigh of relief. At last: an image.”<sup>101</sup> *Wanted!: The Outlaws* was, therefore, a crash course in the Outlaw aesthetic and the Outlaw community, presented by Jerry Bradley and RCA as a way of achieving the crossover success that RCA had been seeking for Jennings since 1966.

Artist	Song Title	Original Release (Catalogue Number)	Session Date
Waylon Jennings	“Honky Tonk Heroes (Like Me)”	<i>Honky Tonk Heroes</i> (RCA APL-0240)	21 February 1973
Waylon Jennings/ Willie Nelson	“A Good Hearted Woman”	N/A	25 September 1974
Waylon Jennings/ Willie Nelson	“Heaven or Hell”	<i>This Time</i> (RCA AFL1-0539)	30 October 1973
Waylon Jennings/ Jessi Colter	“Suspicious Minds”	Released as single (RCA 47-9920)	18 August 1970
Willie Nelson	“Me and Paul”	<i>Yesterday’s Wine</i> (RCA LSP-4568)	4 May 1971
Willie Nelson	“Yesterday’s Wine”	<i>Yesterday’s Wine</i> (RCA LSP-4568)	3 May 1971
Tompall Glaser	“Put Another Log on the Fire”	<i>Tompall (Sings the Songs of Shel Silverstein)</i> (MGM M3G-4977)	N/A

Figure 4-22. Sources of previously-recorded material included on *Wanted!: The Outlaws* (1976).<sup>102</sup>

The logistics involved in compiling *Wanted!: The Outlaws* provide some indication of the lengths to which Jerry Bradley was willing to go to tap into the country-rock crossover market. The album consists of eleven cuts, seven of which had been released prior to the release of *Wanted!* (Figure 4-22). Jennings, having renegotiated his contract with RCA between the *Ladies Love Outlaws* incident and the sessions for *Honky Tonk Heroes*, was the only artist appearing on the album affiliated with the label at the

<sup>101</sup> Jennings with Kaye, 242.

<sup>102</sup> John L. Smith, “Discographies,” in Serge Denisoff, *Waylon: A Biography* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983), 338-360; Liner notes to CD reissue of Willie Nelson, *Yesterday’s Wine* (RCA Nashville/BMG Heritage 53228-2).

time, and for this reason both his solo and duet work form the core of the album.<sup>103</sup> Willie Nelson's two contributions originated as the only single released from his *Yesterday's Wine* project. The remaining four cuts feature the work of Jessi Colter and Tompall Glaser, neither of whom had contracts with RCA, which necessitated the negotiation of mechanical rights with Capitol Records and MCA, respectively. Rather than releasing an album of previously recorded material drawn exclusively from the RCA vaults, a compilation practice that had been established almost as soon as the long-playing record was accepted as the industry standard, Jerry Bradley made a deliberate decision to present the Outlaws in their entirety as a musical community despite their affiliations with competing record labels. This decision certainly reduced the total profit realized from the project, but since the bulk of the release came from recordings for which most of the expenses had already been recouped, Bradley must have deemed this to be a worthwhile sacrifice.

Although *Wanted!: The Outlaws* was essentially a compilation of previously released tracks, Jennings did not fail to exploit the opportunity to fine-tune the Outlaw aesthetic as the album was being prepared for the January 1976 release. As he recalled in his autobiography: "Some of the things on *Wanted: The Outlaws* were over ten years old. I sweetened and updated some of the vocals, added harmonies, and got Willie to sing with me on 'Good Hearted Woman'.... I remixed the album at RCA's studios, on the sly, going in late at night."<sup>104</sup> *Wanted!* was more than a mere "greatest hits" type of compilation; it was a carefully constructed articulation of the Outlaw aesthetic, designed

---

<sup>103</sup> Jennings with Kaye, 187-192; Denisoff, 182-188

<sup>104</sup> Jennings with Kaye, 243-244. Among the retouched cuts on *Wanted!* is "Honky Tonk Heroes," in which the vocal track recording's second half has been completely rerecorded.

both to appeal to the country-rock crossover audience and to refine and focus the Outlaw aesthetic for the country audience.

Because *Wanted!: The Outlaws* borrowed so heavily from earlier attempts to define the “outlaw” visually, many of the sonic characteristics of earlier sounds also shaped the refined aesthetic. Perhaps the most noteworthy trait of Outlaw music manifested in *Wanted!* is the sparseness of the arrangements. The album’s first cut, Waylon Jennings’s recording of “My Heroes Have Always Been Cowboys,” couches Jennings’s vocal track in an accompaniment of a lightly strummed acoustic guitar and bass guitar, to which the bass drum is added in the second verse. The spare texture of the backing tracks on “My Heroes Have Always Been Cowboys” emphasizes the loneliness articulated in the lyrics (“Cowboys are special, with their own brand of misery / From bein’ alone too long”), and the divergence of high and low frequencies brought about by the juxtaposition of guitar and bass creates an empty space in the middle frequencies that creates a desolate soundscape within which Jennings, as a cowboy, can wander, similar to the empty landscapes in which the B western cowboys revered by the song’s speaker existed. The emptiness of “My Heroes Have Always Been Cowboys” also appears in the first, slow half of “Honky Tonk Heroes,” throughout Colter’s “I’m Looking for Blue Eyes,” and in Jennings and Nelson’s recording of “Heaven or Hell.” When combined with the waltz time of “My Heroes Have Always Been Cowboys” and “Heaven or Hell,” it becomes clear that the outlaw is a deeply introspective character, fully aware of the fragility of his life, who regrets his status as an outsider and seeks desperately for salvation from a life of wistful wandering.

TIMING	STRUCTURE	ARRANGEMENT
0:00-0:08	Introduction	Upright acoustic bass emphasizing downbeats, sliding between pitches. High-hat cymbal on upbeats
0:08-0:22	Verse 1	Enter Jennings and strummed acoustic guitar.
0:23-0:37	Verse 2	Exit Jennings. Enter Colter, Telecaster, and full drum set.
0:38-0:55	Chorus	Jennings and Colter duet with Colter's harmony relegated to background. Background singer "oohs."
0:55-0:59	Instrumental interlude 1	Finger-picked acoustic guitar arpeggios.
1:00-1:15	Verse 3	Jennings as before, but with high-hat cymbal emphasizing beat 4 and bass drum backbeats.
1:15-1:29	Verse 4	Colter as before, but with background singer "oohs."
1:30-1:47	Chorus	As before.
1:48-1:50	Instrumental interlude 2	Ritardando into honky-tonk sound. Enter pedal steel guitar.
1:50-2:02	Bridge (antecedent)	Colter with background singers emphasizing downbeat of each measure. Extraordinary backphrasing.
2:03-2:14	Bridge (consequent)	Jennings, without background singers, with prominent pedal steel guitar responses to the vocal line. Continuation of backphrasing from Bridge (antecedent).
2:14-2:23	Instrumental interlude	Pedal steel solo at slow tempo. Jennings sings "oh, no" as continuation of Bridge (consequent) lyric. Four-beat drum introduction to original tempo.
2:24-2:39	Verse 1	Colter, accompanied by Telecaster, acoustic guitar, piano, bass, drums, and harpsichord. Rhythmic delivery has little, if any, backphrasing.
2:40-2:53	Verse 2	Jennings, accompanied by Telecaster, acoustic guitar, piano, bass, drums, and harpsichord. Straight rhythmic delivery.
2:54-3:11	Verse 1	Jennings and Colter duet with Colter's voice moved to front of mix. Jennings sings harmony. Background singer "oohs." Bass drums articulates syncopated sixteenth-note rhythm.
3:12-3:25	Verse 1	Add Jennings non-vocal utterances
3:25-3:42	Verse 1	As before.
3:43-3:58	Verse 1	Fade out.

**Figure 4-23. Arrangement of Waylon Jennings and Jessi Colter, "Suspicious Minds."**

While textural and timbral space were well-established hallmarks of the Outlaw style and form the basis of most of the songs compiled on *Wanted!: The Outlaws*, Jennings and Colter's duet recording of Mark James's "Suspicious Minds" offers a striking contrast to the Outlaw musical aesthetic (Figure 4-23). Recorded on 18 August 1970, this recording predates even the earliest rumblings of the Outlaw movement by two years. As the song's title suggests, "Suspicious Minds" depicts the emotional anguish caused by thoughts of a lover's infidelity, and, as such, it provided an excellent duet vehicle, transforming a pleading monologue of doubt into a heated argument.

The arrangement presented on *Wanted!* reflects the increasing complexity and the emotional distress of the argument as the relatively bare textures of the first thirty-seven seconds give way to the addition of background singers and increased rhythmic activity in the drums and bass. By the 1:47 mark, the arrangement has reached a dramatic climax as Colter intones the lines “Here we go again / Ask me where I’ve been / You can’t see the tears are real / I’m crying,” with background singers underscoring the tension and the melodic contour with a steady torrent of “oohs.” But, just as the listener expects the climax to resolve, a brief, four-beat instrumental interlude brings the forward momentum to a halt, reducing the tempo from a lively 120 beats per minute to 84 beats per minute as the lovers reach the final chance to resolve their differences: “Let our love survive / I’ll dry the tears from your eyes / Don’t let a good thing die / Don’t you know / I’ve never lied to you?” The release at the bridge is followed by a return to the original tempo and the state of textural complexity that preceded it, and, almost immediately, the arrangement’s density reaches a new level with the introduction of piano, harpsichord, and a continuous syncopated sixteenth-note pattern in the bass drum. While this degree of complexity would certainly have been possible to achieve without the drastic change of character at the bridge, the relaxed tempo and backphrasing in the bridge heightens the energy in the song’s second half, allowing emotional release and joy of the repeated statements of “I love you too much, baby” to shine through with more clarity and dramatic effect.

The complex, pop-oriented arrangement of “Suspicious Minds” becomes still more interesting when it is considered that the cut marks the only song on *Wanted!* in which Colter sings with one of her male compatriots. Like the cover of *Ladies Love*

*Outlaws*, the sharp contrast between the dense instrumentation and complex rhythms of “Suspicious Minds” and the sparser arrangements of the other cuts on the album implies that a feminine presence has the power to tame the hypermasculine outlaw, luring him away from the rough-and-tumble life of the cowboy and bringing him back into the domestic sphere. When heard from this perspective, some of the arrangements take on greater significance. For instance, all of Jennings’s solo vocal utterances—verses 1 and 3 and the consequent phrase of the bridge—appear without the lush “oohs” of the background singers that accompany all of Colter’s solo utterances. Only in the duet sections—the choruses and the repetition of verse 1 at the recording’s conclusion—is Jennings’s voice supported by the background singers. Only when Colter and Jennings work together to define the primary problem of their relationship (“We can’t build our dreams / On suspicious minds”) do the background singers domesticate his voice.

The background singers’ entrances here may be heard as a symbol of feminine power over the outlaw, but the musical roles of Colter’s and Jennings’s voices in the duets propose a more traditional gendered narrative. This is most obvious in the two choruses of “Suspicious Minds,” in which Jennings’s voice takes the lead, singing the melody in the foreground of the mix, while Colter’s voice sings a light, lilting counterpoint to Jennings’s lead in the far background of the mix. Colter’s voice is, in fact, swallowed up almost entirely by the background singers and is relegated to a similar function and location in the overall stereo mix. Jennings, as the embodiment of the outlaw, struggles against the domesticating power of Colter and the background singers, forcing his lead vocals into the spotlight and effectively silencing Colter. These roles change drastically in the final repetitions of verse 1 at the song’s conclusion. After



resolving to work through the difficulties in their relationship, Jennings submits to Colter as she sings the lead melody and Jennings sings harmony. But unlike the mix of the choruses, Colter and Jennings have equal presence in the mix, perhaps as a symbol of their newfound romantic unity.

One of the primary catalysts for the conflicts between the masculine outlaw and the domesticating female was the fragility of the outlaw psyche itself. The outlaw, as a figure who exists outside the confines of mainstream society, either by choice or by force, is painfully aware of his outcast status and often feels unworthy of the attention he receives from women. In the first verse of the Jennings and Nelson duet “A Good Hearted Woman,” for instance, Jennings—as an omniscient narrator—catalogues all of the outlaw’s shortcomings as he struggles to understand why any woman would choose to remain by his side:

A long time forgotten  
Dreams that just fell by the way,  
And the good life he promised  
Ain’t what she’s livin’ today.<sup>105</sup>

On occasion, the insecurity of the outlaw character manifests itself as outright standoffishness, as is the case in Tompall Glaser’s recording of Shel Silverstein’s “Put Another Log on the Fire” that concludes the *Wanted!* compilation. Typical of Silverstein’s earlier satirical songs like “One’s on the Way” and “A Boy Named Sue,” the hyperbole of “Put Another Log on the Fire” results in a poignant study in the outward manifestations of outlaw insecurity, here represented by a bossy husband:

Put another log on the fire.  
Cook me up some bacon and some beans,

---

<sup>105</sup> Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson, “A Good Hearted Woman,” *Wanted!: The Outlaws* (RCA APL1-1321).

And go out to the car and change the tire.  
Wash my socks and my old blues jeans.  
Come on, baby, you can fill my pipe and then fetch my slippers  
And boil me up another pot of tea.  
The put another log on the fire, baby,  
And come and tell me why you're leaving me.<sup>106</sup>

Despite the apparent oblivion of the domesticated outlaw in “Put Another Log on the Fire,” the primary reason for such domestic conflicts may be traced to the self-reflexivity and great introspection of the outlaw figure, as manifested in Willie Nelson’s “Yesterday’s Wine” and “Me and Paul,” both of which address life’s brevity and account for all of the speaker’s regrets and achievements. This reflexivity leaves the outlaw always looking for something more adventurous than the domestic setting allows; he is always interrogating his own happiness and wondering if new, more exciting possibilities lie over the horizon. Thus, while the presence of a strong woman in his life can temporarily stabilize the outlaw, he can never stay in one place very long.

*Wanted!: The Outlaws* was not an innovative marketing technique by the time of the album’s 1976 release; rather, record companies been issuing “greatest hits” compilations and samplers of music from their label since the advent of the LP. While the album has often been ridiculed for its blatant commercialism, *Wanted!* stands out as much more than marketing concept and should be viewed instead as an important document that summarizes more than a decade of artistic foment in Nashville—a decade that witnessed the merger of traditional country music tropes with the literary songwriting

---

<sup>106</sup> Tompall Glaser, “Put Another Log on the Fire,” *Wanted!: The Outlaws* (RCA APL1-1321). The outrageous demands of the domesticated outlaw are also manifest in Kinky Friedman’s 1974 song “Get Your Biscuits in the Oven (and Your Buns in the Bed),” a parody of the Women’s Liberation Movement (*Sold American* [Vanguard 79333]).

Jessi Colter contributes further to the difficulties of loving and living with the outlaw, as is the case in “I’m Looking for Blue Eyes,” in which Colter explains that the outlaw can be a destabilizing figure in a woman’s life: “I’m looking for Blue Eyes. / Has anyone seen him? / Don’t you tell me / He gave up on me. / I’m looking for Blue Eyes. / I’ve got to find him / ‘Cause something tells me / He’s looking for me.”

of songwriters like Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell, Joan Baez, and others; a resurgence of a self-consciously Texan musical aesthetic and rhetoric; and a realignment of the compositional practices of the Nashville studio system. Furthermore, *Wanted!: The Outlaws* is noteworthy because it is not an assembly of homogeneous recordings, but rather captures the textures of the scene by including the sparse landscapes of Jennings's takes on "My Heroes Have Always Been Cowboys" and "Honky Tonk Heroes" alongside the rock-and-roll infused sounds of Tompall Glaser's recordings of "T for Texas" and "Put Another Log on the Fire." *Wanted!: The Outlaws* stands as a capstone, canonizing the most significant artists and tracing the development of the Outlaw aesthetic at the moment when both the Nashville Outlaw scene and the Austin progressive country scene were beginning to lose momentum and give way to new musical trends.

### **Conclusions**

The ways that Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings used long-playing record albums to articulate their difference from Nashville's Music Row were not, by any means, new innovations in the early 1970s. As both a collection of thematically- or topically-related songs and as a vehicle for extended creative expression, the album had been a tool of the postwar music industry since the advent of the long-playing record in the late 1940s. It had been used variously as a marketing tool, as an aesthetic platform, and as a large compositional palette, and Nelson and Jennings, along with their cohorts in Nashville, had been experimenting with the former two possibilities alongside Nashville's top producers throughout the second half of the 1960s.

We can trace the importance of these albums, in part, to their countercultural and anti-Nashville stance as a new generation of singers, songwriters, and producers emerged to challenge the status quo of Music Row by invoking distinctly Texan imagery and soundscapes. A comparison of the sounds presented on the albums of both Jennings and Nelson yields a fairly cohesive body of shared characteristics: sparse textures created through limited instrumental accompaniments, emphasis on the electric bass guitar and bass drum to articulate downbeats and root the songs in a dancehall atmosphere, and lyrical tropes that are rooted in everyday rural life and/or the artists' autobiographies. These stylistic markers, presented as cohesive musical statements in albums, soon filtered down to other country artists like David Allan Coe, who was peripherally related to the "Outlaw" scene, or Tanya Tucker, who was separated by several degrees from the scene. Furthermore, by the release of the summary *Wanted!: The Outlaws* in 1976, both the anti-Nashville rhetoric and Outlaw musical aesthetic had been thoroughly explored by Jennings and Nelson and were, in fact, yielding to more recent developments in popular music.

The albums Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings recorded throughout the 1970s represent the reconciliation of the independent rhetoric of contemporaneous rock, the production practices of Music Row, and the rural gaze of progressive country and country-rock fans in Texas and elsewhere. Rather than adopting the experimental compositional practices of The Beatles and progressive rock groups, Nelson, Jennings, and their contemporaries built upon their prior professional experiences in the Nashville and Los Angeles music industries to create large-scale musical works that had great crossover potential while remaining faithful to traditional country music themes.

## CONCLUSION

### “THE LIVE MUSIC CAPITAL OF THE WORLD”: LIVE PERFORMANCE AND PROGRESSIVE COUNTRY MUSIC

Throughout the 1970s, Austin, Texas, was home to a vibrant and diverse live music scene. The city boasted dozens of formal venues for live musical performance: large concert halls including the Armadillo World Headquarters and the Texas Opry House, old-fashioned Texan dancehalls including the Broken Spoke, and small clubs for fledgling artists including the One Knite and the Split Rail Inn. It was also the site of innumerable (and wholly unquantifiable) informal gatherings—benefits for local social causes, house parties, free vegetarian dinners—at which live musical performances were the featured entertainment. Each of these venues offered a wide variety of musics and played host to equally varied audiences, often in the same night, and contributed, if only in sheer quantity, to the cultural movement that was Austin’s progressive country music scene.

By the mid-1970s, the local secret of Austin thriving club scene had entered the national consciousness. Journalists from nationally-circulating magazines such as *Time* and *Newsweek* had begun to flock to Austin in search of colorful stories from the city’s clubs and the same pastoral retreat as had the cosmic cowboy figures in the songs of Michael Murphey and Guy Clark. Pete Axthelm, writing for *Newsweek* in 1976, reflected:

Austin was a refreshing place to be last week. While millions of viewers saw an Academy Award bestowed on an insipid, fake-country song from the

condescending movie “Nashville,” it was bracing to wander through honky-tonks like the Soap Creek Saloon and Armadillo World Headquarters, where down-to-earth musicians stilled beer in longneck bottles and shared their songs and dreams.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, a 1977 *Time* article observed, “With one stage for every ten musicians in town, Austin has blossomed into a performer’s paradise. Hangar-size halls like the Armadillo World Headquarters and slant-floored beer emporiums like the Split Rail give steady work to... country-rock artists.”<sup>2</sup> Yet, while interested musicians, listeners, and entrepreneurs rushed to Austin in order to partake of the live music scene there, musicians who had been part of the community from its inception began to fear the scene’s collapse; as Doug Sahm noted in 1977, “Let’s face it, fellow Austinites.... The scene is rapidly decaying from the lovely, stoned, slow town it once was to a sometimes circus of egos that has made it not the fun it used to be.”<sup>3</sup>

Because live musical performance played such a central role in defining Austin’s progressive country movement musically and socially, local entrepreneurs sought ways to distill into a concise, commodified form the diverse sounds of the scene, the notion of Austin as a free-spirited oasis away from the national music industry, and the idealism of the progressive country movement.<sup>4</sup> Yet, to the many devoted participants in the progressive country music scene, this commodification threatened to undermine the scene’s sanctity by inviting the national music industry into their community. This

---

<sup>1</sup> Pete Axthelm, “Songs of Outlaw Country,” *Newsweek* (12 April 1976), 79.

<sup>2</sup> “In the Heart of Honky-Tonk Rock: Going Back to the Basics of Austin,” *Time* (19 September 1977), 86.

<sup>3</sup> Qtd. in James Neff, “A Big Commotion in Austin,” *Country Style* 26 (December 1977), 5.

<sup>4</sup> Barry Shank, *Dissonant Identities: The Rock ‘n’ Roll Scene in Austin, Texas* (Hanover, NH, and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 439.

process of commodification and resistance highlights a number of important tensions within the progressive country movement, tensions that are present throughout the recorded musical output of the scene's most prominent recording artists and in the rhetoric of local musicians, fans, and businesspeople alike. Within the complex landscape of this process, live music festivals rose to monumental importance in defining progressive country as a musical and social phenomenon and in allowing participants in the progressive country movement to articulate their collective Texan-ness.

### **Music Festivals and the Distillation of the Austin Scene**

On Independence Day, 1973, Willie Nelson hosted his first Fourth of July Picnic on a Hays County, Texas, ranch, initiating an event that would become an annual Texan institution that continues to the present day. This one-day event featured musicians representing all sects of Austin's progressive country movement, including singer-songwriter Michael Murphey; rock musician, session musician, and impresario Leon Russell; yodeler and folk music pedagogue Kenneth Threadgill; and Nashville-based "Outlaw" Waylon Jennings. The picnic drew a critical mass of Austin's fan base to witness a showcase of the emerging progressive country movement. But while this initial gathering in the Hill Country of central Texas and its subsequent iterations throughout the state provided a literal stage to promote Austin's musical community, Willie Nelson's Picnics also offered a public forum in which to negotiate the political, ideological, personal, and musical conflicts that shaped the progressive country scene through live performance.

Nelson's Picnics were the capstone of a long-standing tradition of music festivals

in Austin. Since the mid-1960s, the music festival had proven to be an effective means to display the city's latest musical innovations and to articulate the scene's collective identity. At the same time, these festivals permitted a few, motivated businesspersons to generate much-needed revenue for the local musical community by showcasing the most popular local and regional bands and, occasionally, a few national touring artists. Austin's music festivals, therefore, blended the idealism of communal music-making and the opportunism of grassroots entrepreneurship, creating in the process an identifiable "brand" with which to market Austin and its music to a wider audience: Austin as a free-spirited, free-thinking, and music-centered community.<sup>5</sup>

The first of these festivals, the Zilker Park Folk Festival, was organized in 1965 by Rod Kennedy, an FM radio station owner-operator and former race car driver. Inspired by the success of the Newport Folk Festival and other similar gatherings around the United States, the Zilker Park Folk Festival featured the talents of local musicians from the Threadgill's scene and the University of Texas, including Powell St. John and Roger Abrahams, and also drew the interest of folk musicians from elsewhere in the state, including a young Michael Murphey and Steven Fromholz, who appeared at the inaugural gathering with the Dallas Jug Band.<sup>6</sup>

In June 1972, Kennedy organized a similar festival in Kerrville, a town located

---

<sup>5</sup> Timothy J. Dowd, Kathleen Liddle, and Jenna Nelson, "Music Festivals as Scenes: Examples from Serious Music, Womyn's Music, and SkatePunk," in *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal, and Virtual*, eds. Andy Bennett and Richard A. Peterson (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), 149-167. Dowd, *et al* note that, in general, the most important function of a music festival within any music scene is its "boundary work." That is, festivals define which musical styles and artists are included in the scene and which are excluded. This boundary work often "facilitate[s] changes that may not be viewed as positive, such as... the commercialization of popular music" (150).

<sup>6</sup> Rod Kennedy, interview with Jan Reid, tape recording, Austin History Center, Austin Public Library, 1 January 1970; Jan Reid, *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*, new edition (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 35-36. In 1967, Kennedy opened the Chequered Flag, a rock club and auto racing museum.



over one hundred miles southwest of Austin. Initially, the Kerrville Folk Festival was not a financial success; it lost \$27,000 the first year and did not show a profit for at least the first two years. But, despite his financial losses, Kennedy was successful in bringing attention to Austin's folk musicians and singer-songwriters and providing a forum for other types of folk revivalist musics, including ragtime and bluegrass.<sup>7</sup>

The Kerrville Folk Festival and the other activities that took place under Kennedy's direction embodied the entrepreneurial spirit and communal desires of many Austinites. Despite having been a financial disaster in the first two seasons, Kennedy invested several thousand dollars of his own money as well as hundreds of hours of his personal time to develop the Kerrville facilities into a more permanent space in which the festival could thrive and grow. The resulting festival grounds, renamed the "Quiet Valley Ranch," encompassed over forty-five acres for parking and camping, featured a forty-four-foot stage, and quickly became a world-class facility for musicians of all varieties. But none of this could have come about without personal investment; as Kennedy told Jan Reid: "I've just finished my first hundred hours of chain-sawing . . . , and I've just traded in my racing car for a four-wheel drive [*sic*] jeep. Which is good."<sup>8</sup> Moreover, while Kennedy was responsible for most of the capital investment in the Kerrville project, the Austin-based musicians who performed there volunteered to make the Kerrville Folk Festival a positive experience, including offering to serve as the house sound engineer at no cost and obtaining releases from each performer's record labels to

---

<sup>7</sup> Chet Flippo, "Rod Kennedy: Music is His Life," *Texas Parade* 34, no. 1 (April 1974), 21.

<sup>8</sup> Reid, 51.

be included in limited-release live albums.<sup>9</sup> Insiders—especially Kennedy himself, who had a direct financial stake in the success of the festival—described the Kerrville Folk Festival as a free-spirited gathering of like-minded individuals, meeting in a public forum to display the shared progressive country aesthetic.

In many ways, Kerrville was an ideal location for a music festival featuring the latest progressive country music. It was located in the same rural environment into which Michael Murphey’s cosmic cowboy hoped to escape, and, as the name “Quiet Valley Ranch” implies, Kennedy portrayed the Kerrville festival grounds as an idyllic location for a festival. At the same time, this small Hill Country town also resembled the place in which Ray Wylie Hubbard’s redneck mother threatened violence. Yet, most progressive country fans were unaffected by such tales of redneck violence against hippies. On the other hand, local residents of Kerrville expressed deep fears about the Kerrville Folk Festival, worrying that the mass of cosmic cowboys that would attend such a festival would introduce a negative element—namely, marijuana, underage drinking, and premarital sex—to the town.

While some of the consternation over hippie music festivals may be traced to small-town distrust of outsiders and difference, Kerrville’s residents also had real reasons to be concerned about the effects of such a gathering on their local community. Televised images and newspaper accounts of Woodstock and the Altamont Free Concert portrayed hippies as a blight on unsuspecting small towns, gridlocking peaceful communities and stripping them of their resources. Kennedy, however, proposed the Kerrville Folk Festival as an alternative to the drug- and sex-infused pop festivals, instead

---

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

casting the Kerrville Folk Festival as a space in which the mutual distrust between the cosmic cowboys and local residents could be broken down by permitting direct interaction between the two communities. As he related to Reid, his promotion strategy involved “a continuing, low-pressure publicity campaign about our moving to Kerrville, about the way our festivals bring young and old people together, about the age-old tradition of festivals in this country. To the uninitiated, the word ‘festival’ means rock, pot, bottle-throwing, filth. Which is something we’re campaigning against.”<sup>10</sup>

This conception of the festival as a unifying social space was a popular one among the counterculture in Austin and elsewhere. As sociologist Andy Bennett has posited in his study of Woodstock, “The notion of a counter-cultural community was a myth, maintained by the sheer belief of those involved that music could, in some way, represent their interests and, ultimately, change the world.”<sup>11</sup> The idea that music festivals could facilitate social change is particularly evident in Kennedy’s description of the Kerrville Folk Festival as a tool to facilitate cross-generational empathy by “bring[ing] young and old people together” to enjoy a musical performance.<sup>12</sup> Yet such unifying rhetoric is also inextricably bound to his goals as a grassroots entrepreneur. Kennedy’s campaign against popular associations of “the word ‘festival’... [with] rock, pot, bottle-throwing, [and] filth” and his invocation of “the age-old tradition of festivals in this country” promoted the Kerrville Folk Festival as a wholesome environment, dispelling local concerns about hippie immorality, enticing many Kerrville residents to

---

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>11</sup> Andy Bennett, “‘Everybody’s Happy, Everybody’s Free’: Representation and Nostalgia in the *Woodstock* Film,” in *Remembering Woodstock*, ed. Andy Bennett (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 49.

<sup>12</sup> Flippo, 21. Such binaries fail, however, to recognize the inevitabilities of young people who had no interest in progressive country music and of older people who did.

pay the admission fee, increasing the festival's profits, and funneling more financial capital into Austin's musical community. Like the rhetoric of independence that marks local music scenes as different from competing musical communities and an often ambiguous musical "mainstream," Kennedy's unifying rhetoric promulgated the utopian ideology of Austin's progressive country movement and commodified it.

The Kerrville Folk Festival also offers insight into how festivals define and commodify the musical identity of local music scenes. While the festival showcased musicians working in Austin and the surrounding Texas Hill Country, it offered a necessarily limited portrait of the progressive country music scene. That is, the daily musical activities at the Armadillo World Headquarters, the Soap Creek Saloon, and the Broken Spoke supported a wide variety of musical acts than did the Kerrville Folk Festival. On a typical night in Austin, for instance, one could partake of performances ranging from local bar bands covering honky tonk classics and contemporary mainstream country music to aspiring singer-songwriters who played "open-mic" nights in Austin's clubs and political functions around the city. But the Kerrville Folk Festival, because of time and space limitations, could only feature a small portion of such acts. As a result, Kennedy's programming decisions implicitly validated the musical aesthetic of some musicians while neglecting others. Such was the case when, in 1973, Kennedy allowed Michael Murphey and B.W. Stevenson to perform with drums and amplified instruments. Fans and performers of wholly acoustic folk music challenged his decision, but Kennedy defended it by noting:

Michael and B.W. were telling the same kinds of things that folksingers have told for years and they're just using the current tools, which are drums and electric

instruments. You know, the Indians were the first to use drums. Folk music, in this area, encompasses many forms.<sup>13</sup>

Kennedy's decision to include Murphey and Stevenson in the 1973 Kerrville festival represented a controversial expansion of progressive country's musical boundaries. At the same time, by neglecting the many of the Austin-based artists and bands that did not have major-label recording contracts or other obvious connections to the national music industry, Kennedy also allowed these singer-songwriters to, perhaps unfairly, define the entire community. This was the same issue, in fact, that troubled the acoustic musicians. The Kerrville Folk Festival, therefore, marks one of the first attempts to market the progressive country movement by creating both a local awareness of a selected breadth of Austin's progressive country scene and commoditizing it through the sale of festival tickets and even a series of annual limited-edition recordings pressed from the festival performances.<sup>14</sup>

Three months prior to the first Kerrville Folk Festival, the Dripping Springs Reunion offered a very different interpretation of the progressive country aesthetic. Organized by four Dallas-based promoters—Edward Allen, Michael McFarland, Peter B. Smith, and Don Snyder—the Reunion was held at a ranch in small town of Dripping Springs, Texas (which was located only twenty-four miles west of Austin) on 17-19 March 1972. As McFarland observed, the promoters “just wanted to put on the best country and western show I'd ever seen and could ever hope to see.”<sup>15</sup> To achieve this

---

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Dowd, *et al.*, p. 149: “While music festivals occur more rarely than do events that constitute local scenes, the intensity of a festival compensates for its infrequency.”

<sup>15</sup> “C&W Rock Festival: Pickin' and Singin' in Texas,” *Los Angeles [Calif.] Times* (17 March 1972).

goal, Reunion organizers turned to Nashville. While a few of Nashville's more radical and youth-oriented songwriters, including Kris Kristofferson and Billy Joe Shaver, performed at the Reunion, most of the musicians on the program were representatives of the mainstream of contemporary country music (Loretta Lynn, Roger Miller, Merle Haggard) or were country music patriarchs (Roy Acuff and Hank Snow).<sup>16</sup> Yet, although this assemblage of mainstream country artists brought significant star power to the Dripping Springs Reunion, promoters also needed to augment the program with a few Austin-based acts to fill the twelve-hour bill. As a result, a few local artists, including among them yodeler Kenneth Threadgill, also performed at the Reunion.

For some conservative audience members, the Dripping Springs Reunion took on a political and social significance similar to the large rock festivals of the era. As *Los Angeles Times* music critic Robert Hilburn noted, some audience members interviewed at the Reunion expressed hopes that, just as Woodstock and other rock festivals drew attention to the hippie counterculture, high attendance figures at the Reunion would demonstrate "the strength of the silent majority" to the world.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, Hilburn observed that, like Rod Kennedy, organizers of the Dripping Springs Reunion promoted the event as a wholesome affair: "What the promoters wanted was a sort of family Woodstock featuring country music, giving adults a chance to participate in a celebration of their music (and no doubt life-style) just the way the younger rock fans had done at so many festivals."<sup>18</sup> The Dripping Springs Reunion was imagined, therefore, in opposition

---

<sup>16</sup> "C&W Rock Festival"; Robert Hilburn, "'Woodstock' of C&W: Pride, but No Money," *Los Angeles [Calif.] Times* (21 March 1972).

<sup>17</sup> Hilburn, "'Woodstock' of C&W."

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* Hilburn goes on to describe the audience as "a mixture of young and old, sometimes

to the counterculture.

Despite its intended and perceived opposition to the national and regional liberal youth culture, however, the Dripping Springs Reunion actually acted as a catalyst for the progressive country movement and for the cosmic cowboys. Hilburn's comments regarding the country music "lifestyle" are strikingly similar to the indictments of country music as "the ballad of the Silent Majority" and as signs of "fundamentalism, racism, and political reaction" made by sociologists Paul DiMaggio, Richard A. Peterson, Jack Esco, Jr., and Jens Lund in their contemporaneous examinations of country music.<sup>19</sup>

Statements such as these indicate that many liberals—including academics, rock critics, and even casual observers—heard country music as the soundtrack underscoring southern resistance to the Civil Rights Movement and patriotic support of the Vietnam War. Such an evaluation neglects, however, to account for the sizeable audience of liberal people who also listened to and identified with country music, especially what bandleader Ray Benson described as "roots" music.<sup>20</sup> Many of these people were in attendance at the Dripping Springs Reunion, including fiddler Alvin Crow, who was living in Amarillo and playing with the recently formed Pleasant Valley Boys.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the Dripping Springs Reunion offered the first opportunity for Waylon Jennings, then an established

---

bringing together three generations of a family. They sat around on the dirt in picnic fashion with blankets, lawn chairs, [and] coolers of beer."

<sup>19</sup> 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 McNally and Company, 1972), 38-55; Jens Lund, "Fundamentalism, Racism, and Political Reaction in Country Music," in *The Sounds of Social Change: Studies in Popular Culture*, eds. R. Serge Denisoff and Richard A. Peterson (Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1972), 79-91.

<sup>20</sup> Ray Benson, interview with author, 31 May 2005.

<sup>21</sup> Margaret Moser, "The Whole Bow: Alvin Crow Plays It His Way, Always Has," *The Austin Chronicle* (12 November 2004), <<http://www.austinchronicle.com/gyrobase/Issue/story?oid-oid%3A237280>>, accessed 14 August 2006.

Nashville artist, to hear the music of relatively unknown Texan songwriter Billy Joe Shaver, who would later provide the songs for Jennings's 1973 album *Honky Tonk Heroes*.<sup>22</sup>

Not surprisingly, the ideological differences between liberal fans of country music and the conservative majority in attendance often yielded verbal and physical conflicts.

As Jan Reid recalled, mutual distrust and disrespectful behavior made the Dripping Springs Reunion a tense situation:

Dope-smoking gate-crashers were taken aback by the sight of uniformed security guards toting shotguns, and a Veteran of Foreign Wars trinket vendor was equally taken aback by a young man who flipped his Frisbee in the air and remarked, "If we'd quit having wars we wouldn't have any veterans."<sup>23</sup>

These conflicts were also played out onstage; as Reid has noted:

Tex Ritter sang awhile, then emceed awhile too long, cracking lame Black Panther jokes and trying to bar Tom T. Hall from the microphone though the crowd was bellowing for an encore. Roy Acuff declared that he was the by-God king of country music, then crowed in triumph when an emcee announced that Merle Haggard was in a state of collapse and wouldn't make his scheduled appearance. "If that had happened to me or one of the boys in my band," Acuff claimed, "we'd *been* here."<sup>24</sup>

While many Reunion participants may well have expected to witness performances by the stars of the Grand Ole Opry and to celebrate their conservative social values, the sight and sounds of long-haired young performers stood as a direct affront to their core social values and their musical taste. Furthermore, Acuff's criticism of Merle Haggard reveals ideological conflicts even within "mainstream" country music and most likely extends beyond a simple criticism of Haggard's lack of professional decorum. Although

---

<sup>22</sup> Waylon Jennings with Lenny Kaye, *Waylon: An Autobiography* (New York: Warner Books, 1996), 201; Billy Joe Shaver, *Honky Tonk Hero* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 32-33.

<sup>23</sup> Reid, 245.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* (emphasis in original).



Haggard's "Okie from Muskogee" and "The Fightin' Side of Me" led progressive country musicians (and liberals, in general) to view him as the musical embodiment of the Silent Majority, he was nothing of the sort to Acuff, a supporter of Alabama governor George Wallace. Rather, Haggard's contemporaneous work as a champion of the American working class in such songs as "Workin' Man's Blues" and "Hungry Eyes" had aligned him with the political left in the eyes of many people along Music Row.<sup>25</sup> That Haggard, the paragon of conservatism to many members of the counterculture, would be viewed as too liberal a figure is particularly shocking in light of the many virulent reactions to his music. At the same time, it further underscores the Silent Majority's distrust of countercultural figures and rhetoric.

In many ways, the Dripping Springs Reunion was a failure. Prior to the festival, promoters projected a daily attendance of around 60,000 people, but, by most estimates, between 10,000 and 17,700 people attended the three-day festival; because of poor advertising, the Reunion lost at least \$75,000.<sup>26</sup> Yet, despite the physical and verbal conflicts between audience members and the featured musicians, many fans believed that, if the Reunion were to be mounted again with appropriate financing, a country music festival would be quite successful in central Texas, in large part because a significant number of young people were interested in country music. As one fan observed at the festival's conclusion, country music "is our music.... All we ever hear about is rock 'n'

---

<sup>25</sup> Merle Haggard, *A Portrait of Merle Haggard*, Capitol ST-319 (1969). See also Bill C. Malone, *Don't Get Above Your Raisin': Country Music and the Southern Working Class* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 45-46.

<sup>26</sup> Hilburn, "'Woodstock' of C&W."

roll, rock ‘n’ roll. I hope this (Reunion) can become an annual event so that people can see how beloved country music is.”<sup>27</sup>

While McFarland, Snyder, Smith, and Allen decided to discontinue the Dripping Springs Reunion following their initial attempt, Willie Nelson, one of the featured artists at the 1972 Reunion, resurrected it as an event that featured the most exciting acts from Austin alongside some of Nashville’s more radical artists. As the emerging leader of Austin’s progressive country scene, Nelson was keenly aware of his audience’s political goals and musical tastes and harbored a deep concern for their physical and ideological well-being. His experiences at the 1972 Dripping Springs Reunion showed Nelson firsthand the challenges associated with hosting an event that catered to two disparate audiences. He, therefore, sought not to bridge the generational and ideological divisions of the time, but chose instead to host a gathering at which fans of progressive country music, including not only Austin’s cosmic cowboys but also older people (like Nelson) who were sympathetic to their cause, could gather to hear the latest music developed in Austin. At the same time, Nelson, an astute businessman and recent émigré from Music Row, had not forgotten the marketing methods of the Nashville record labels corporations, envisioning a festival that would allow him to capitalize on the commercial potential of the growing progressive country movement by providing a venue for emerging talent, offering casual fans a concentrated exposure to its sound, and perhaps developing a state-wide or even national market for the music. As Nelson recalled:

In the spring [of 1972] some promoters had put together an outdoor concert called the Dripping Springs Reunion on a ranch west of Austin. They had bluegrass, Loretta Lynn, Tex Ritter, Roy Acuff, Kris Kristofferson, Waylon Jennings, Billy Joe Shaver, Leon Russell, and me—with [University of Texas coach] Coach

---

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

[Darrell] Royal onstage. The promotion lost a bundle, but it had the seed of a sort of country Woodstock and got me wondering if I could do it better.<sup>28</sup>

With all of these goals in mind and the failed Dripping Springs Reunion serving as a model, Nelson set out to stage a festival that could both encapsulate the diverse sounds of Austin's progressive country scene and provide a safe space for Austin's cosmic cowboys to enjoy them.

After securing the Dripping Springs Reunion site from rancher Burt Hurlbut for \$2850, the control of all concessions sold on the premises, and money for capital improvements to the facilities, Nelson's first gathering was scheduled to occur on 4 July 1973.<sup>29</sup> Having performed at the Dripping Springs Reunion, Nelson knew that the first step to organizing an event of such magnitude would be to hire a well-organized planner to assist with the project. He obtained the services of Michael Price, a businessman whom Nelson met while in New York for the *Shotgun Willie* sessions at Atlantic and who, as Reid has asserted, "wanted to make a national figure of [Nelson]."<sup>30</sup> Price immediately went to work, asking Francois de Menil, a filmmaker and friend of his from New York, to arrange to film version of Nelson's 1973 gathering, hoping to follow the Woodstock model by capitalizing on post-festival opportunities as well.<sup>31</sup> De Menil, the son of French oil prospectors living in Houston, obtained fifteen thousand dollars to finance the film, stipulating that Nelson must secure permission from all of the artists

---

<sup>28</sup> Nelson with Shrake, 171.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 255.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 252, 254.

involved.<sup>32</sup> Unfortunately, Nelson could not (or did not) secure the necessary releases, and, despite proposing that the releases be obtained after the festival, as was done at Woodstock, De Menil withdrew his funding for the film only days before the Picnic was scheduled to take place. To further complicate matters, Price, who believed that he was Nelson's sole legal representative, grew wary of the influence that Nelson's manager exerted on him and withdrew from the project as well.<sup>33</sup>

While Price and De Menil had exerted most of their energies in planning for the post-Picnic marketing, Nelson was occupied with booking acts to fill the one-day program. Being rooted in both the Austin and Nashville scenes, Nelson was in a strong position to entice the strongest performers from both scenes to perform at the Picnic. The notion that Nelson was inviting his closest friends for a celebration of this music was quite prevalent in Austin. As rock journalist and Austin observer Ed Ward noted in an October 1975 feature in *Creem*:

The favored type of music around town [Austin] was something called "progressive country," and Willie, in both his music and his lifestyle, sort of epitomizes what that term is all about. So when Willie made it known that he wanted to get some of the top progressive country artists together for a little bash, some of his friends set it up, and in 1973 was born the first annual Willie Nelson 4<sup>th</sup> of July Picnic.<sup>34</sup>

Waylon Jennings, one of the Nashville artists with whom Nelson would later become closely associated through the 1976 *Wanted!: The Outlaws* compilation, remembered that Nelson exerted a powerful and almost inexplicable influence on musicians in Austin and Nashville:

---

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 254-255.

<sup>34</sup> Ed Ward, "Willie Nelson: Rednecks, Thai Sticks and Lone Star Beer," *Creem* 7, no. 5 (October 1975), 40.

Independence Day, 1973.

Willie has called a gathering of the tribes to this dusty patch of ranch twenty miles west of Austin. He's roped in Sammi Smith, who's just had a big hit with Kris's [Kristofferson] "Help Me Make It Through the Night," and myself to help him bring it off.

Naturally it's pure chaos. We've got Ernest Tubb, Hank Cochran, Charlie Rich, Kris Kristofferson and Rita Coolidge, Ray Price, Loretta Lynn, Johnny Bush, the whole Austin scene with Jerry Jeff Walker and Doug Sahm, and yours trulys [*sic*] milling backstage....<sup>35</sup>

The power of Nelson's influence even led some observers in Austin to speculate that Bob Dylan, who had recently been working with Austin fixture Doug Sahm and whose work with The Band paralleled many of the developments in Austin, might even perform; he did not appear, however.<sup>36</sup>

While Nelson's 1973 Fourth of July Picnic provided a boon to the Austin progressive country music scene by bringing national artists and Austin's stars into close contact with one another, it also offered an opportunity for Austin's entertainment entrepreneurs to demonstrate their skills as promoters, booking agents, and businesspersons to national artists who, prior to the early 1970s, would have bypassed Austin in favor of cities like Dallas and Houston. When Price and De Menil left Nelson's operation in mid-June 1973, Nelson turned to Eddie Wilson, proprietor of the Armadillo World Headquarters, to promote the event and make certain that all of the bills were paid on time. Beginning on June 23, less than two weeks prior to the event, Wilson and his

---

<sup>35</sup> Jennings with Kaye, 204. As Jennings's comments indicate, Nelson's first Fourth of July Picnic did feature a few elder statesmen of country music, yet the inclusion of Ernest Tubb and Hank Cochran on this program should not be a great surprise. Given the revivalist spirit that shaped much of the music in Austin, Tubb and Cochran's presence not only provided a connection to an earlier generation of musicians and the honky-tonk styles which they helped to popularize, but they also offered a distinctly Texan connection to the past. Unlike Roy Acuff, whose musical style was emblematic of the string band traditions of the Southeast, Tubb and Cochran's honky-tonk music was born and popularized in Texan dancehalls between the 1940s and the 1960s.

<sup>36</sup> Reid, 256.

team—including an accountant, a site manager, a lawyer, and a clerical staff—organized a promotional campaign to encourage Austin’s young people to make the short trek to Dripping Springs for the Picnic.<sup>37</sup> While Wilson and his team were paid handsomely for his efforts (over ten percent of the reported gross revenue of \$111,398.60),<sup>38</sup> the real benefit of the Wilson-Nelson alliance was in securing the Armadillo’s future. By 4 July 1973, the Armadillo had been open for nearly three years, but it had endured almost constant financial struggles as Wilson and his staff sought ways to entice Austin’s young people to spend their disposable income at the Armadillo.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, Wilson had been working to develop the Armadillo as a venue suitable for national touring acts, noting that, although such musicians demand higher costs, they also generate more revenue from casual fans. By 1974, Wilson was planning to expand his operation at the Armadillo into a multimillion-dollar recording facility and media production center with the hope of bringing local and national musicians alike there to make records.<sup>40</sup> Although a rushed affair, the opportunity to work with Nelson on the Fourth of July Picnic allowed Wilson to demonstrate both his efficiency and his hospitality as a promoter and businessman and set the stage for future developments at the Armadillo.

Furthermore, Wilson’s assistance may well have worked to secure the notion of

---

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 255.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 255-256.

<sup>39</sup> See, for instance, Susan White, “Armadillo World Headquarters Celebrates 4<sup>th</sup> Year,” *Austin [Tex.] American-Statesman*, 14 August 1974, morning ed., p. 45: “‘At the outset we had 300 to 500 people who would come here under any circumstances,’ Wilson mused. Now he guestimates around 150,000 in town will probably attend Armadillo at one time or another.”

<sup>40</sup> In a 1974 interview with Robert Heard, Wilson claimed to employ a market analyst who specialized in youth markets in order to develop marketing strategies to reach Austin’s ubiquitous community of young people (Eddie Wilson, interview by Robert Heard, tape recording, Austin History Center, Austin Public Library, 26 June 1974).

Austin as a unified musical community in the minds of many national artists. Whereas the presence of New York-based promoters like Michael Price very clearly demonstrated Nelson's links to the national music industry, Wilson was an unmistakable representative of the Austin scene. As such, when the artists arrived in Dripping Springs on 4 July 1973, they were greeted not by New York agents but by Texans. Moreover, these Texans appeared to have focused their attentions exclusively on the celebration of progressive country and on the development of Austin as a center for new musical developments. During a time when many artists on both the local and national levels were openly distrustful of the machinations of large music corporations, Wilson and the "Armadillos" displayed a marked parochialism that obscured the role of the music industry in Austin and at the Picnic. As a result, Nelson's Fourth of July Picnic permitted musical exchange between national artists and lesser-known Texan artists, forged connections between the Austin scene and the national recording artists there, provided new energy to Austin's artists as musicians of national repute paid attention to them, and offered new musical directions for artists working within the national music industries.

Nelson's 1973 Fourth of July Picnic also elicited strong audience response. Unlike the poorly-attended Dripping Springs Reunion, fans of progressive country music flocked to Hays County to witness Nelson's picnic, causing a Woodstock-like traffic jam outside the festival grounds. Reid, covering the Picnic for *Texas Monthly* magazine, left his overheating car along the highway and attempted to hike cross-country to Hurlbut's ranch, which he believed was "only a couple of miles" from the highway. After getting lost along the way, Reid and his hiking companion found their way back to the highway, where a hippie exodus was underway:

When we got the road we saw that the pavement had played out into gravel. Cars, people, and dogs were clothed in a chalky coat of caliche dust. We hitched the first ride available, and jostled along uncomfortably, more stop than go, sweltering during the long waits. We could move faster, so we got out and trudged onward until the traffic started moving again, then hitched another ride. Minutes wore into hours as we battled exhaust fumes, drivers who wouldn't stop, and that white dust. Banter was a thing of the past. "Get in," someone would glumly say, and we would collapse on the tailgate, gasping. What if there were two roads to the festival site, and the highway patrolman had directed us down the wrong one? We could be ten miles away from Willie's Picnic, and we were moving at a walking pace. There was also no way to turn back. The motorist had long ago taken over the oncoming lane, and their cars overheated side by side. Foolhardy souls walked along the roadside carrying large coolers of beer, finally gave up and salvaged what they could, gave the rest away. One girl sat with her chin in her hands in a bar-ditch beside her footsore dog. The cries of infants were heard from time to time. Willie Nelson's Picnic had turned into a traffic jam in the wilderness.<sup>41</sup>

Reid's description of the Nelson's Picnic as "a traffic jam in the wilderness" is an especially interesting one. Although Dripping Springs is located just a few miles west of Austin, this journey outside of Austin appears to have satisfied a collective desire to escape into rural Texan spaces. In fact, the difficulty of the trip imbued the Picnic with a degree of importance that a painless commute could not; traveling on foot, the cosmic cowboys became Texan pioneers of a sort, forging new musical and social paths through physical sacrifice. Yet, at the same time, once they arrived at Burt Hurlbut's ranch, concertgoers could feel safe and free to celebrate the shared musical and social values of the Austin progressive country scene within the bounded spaces of the Picnic grounds.

Nelson's attempts to stage subsequent events were marked by confrontations with local authorities who, like those people who protested the Kerrville Folk Festival, wished

---

<sup>41</sup> Reid, 246, 248, 250. Ed Ward, discussing the 1975 Picnic in Liberty Hill, Texas, echoed Reid's description: "I'm glad I left Austin early because people wound up parking as far as five miles from the site and walking under the 95 degree sun (usually lugging a Styrofoam cooler of beer) right through downtown Liberty Hill, the small town that played host to the festival, to the site, a flat, grassless plain just outside of town" (Ward, 76).



to prevent a mass gathering of young people. Following the relative success of the Dripping Springs event, Nelson decided to take the program on the road, appearing at venues throughout the state of Texas and venturing ever farther from the safe spaces around Austin. After hosting a three-day-long event at College Station (1974) and a one-day festival in Liberty Hill (1975), Nelson sought to stage the 1976 Picnic near the town of Gonzales, Texas, a town located sixty miles south of Austin and seventy miles east of San Antonio. Under the Texas Music Festival Act, a law that governed music festivals lasting longer than one day, Nelson was required to request written permission from the Gonzales County Commissioners' Court to stage the 1976 Picnic.<sup>42</sup> However, a local citizens' group led by Gonzales minister James Darnell—Citizens for Law, Order, and Decency (CLOD)—protested the event, observing in an April 1976 advertisement in the *Gonzales Inquirer*:

To allow this invasion is to invite anti-American, anti-Christian, hippie subculture right into our homes. Drinking and drunkenness (already a terrible problem in our schools), illegal sale and use of marijuana and hard drugs, nudity and immorality,

---

<sup>42</sup> The Texas Music Festival Act was passed by the Texas Legislature in 1971 as a reaction to the Texas International Pop Festival, a rock festival held only two weeks after Woodstock (30 August-1 September 1969) in Lewisville, Texas, a suburb of Dallas (*Acts of the Texas Legislature* 1971, 62nd Legislature, p. 1867, ch. 552; amended Acts 1973, 63rd Legislature, p. 995, ch. 399).

While most newspaper reports of the festival indicate only minor problems with illegal drug consumption, public nudity, and illicit sex, many local residents protested against the event because of the negative influence they believed it had on their community. The Texas Music Festival Act was passed in order to regulate the hours of operation and to set standards for facilities management for music festivals.

See, for instance: Henry Tatum, "Pop Show Promoters Insuring Against Another Muddy Mess," *The Dallas [Tex.] Morning News* (20 August 1969); James Overton, "Lewisville Worries Bit," *The Dallas [Tex.] Morning News* (27 August 1969); James Ewell, "Patrol Worried: Festival to Create Traffic Woes," *The Dallas [Tex.] Morning News* (29 August 1969); Tom Johnson and Henry Tatum, "Drugs Mar Pop Festival," *The Dallas [Tex.] Morning News* (31 August 1969); Marlyn Schwartz, "Thousands Tell Their Message of Peace, Love," *The Dallas [Tex.] Morning News* (31 August 1969); Henry Tatum, "Crackdown on Drugs Ordered: Lewisville Mayor Says Law Violators at Festival Face Arrest," *The Dallas [Tex.] Morning News* (1 September 1969); Marlyn Schwartz, "Youngsters Draw Praise: Lewisville Merchants Find Visitors Warm, Friendly," *The Dallas [Tex.] Morning News* (2 September 1969); Tom Johnson, "Wilson Blasts Lax Drug Law Enforcement," *The Dallas [Tex.] Morning News* (2 September 1969); Henry Tatum, "Lewisville's Police Chief Will Resign," *The Dallas [Tex.] Morning News* (3 September 1969); Tom Johnson, "Suit Asks \$175,000 After Pop Festival," *The Dallas [Tex.] Morning News* (22 October 1969).

lawlessness and total disrespect for law officers, anti-patriotism and crude music that stirs up the viler impulses of the human psyche will all characterize this “Bicentennial event.”<sup>43</sup>

After CLOD petitioned the Gonzales County Commissioners, the court decided to withhold approval of the event.<sup>44</sup> Friends of Willie, a counter-organization composed of local fans and promoters, then circulated a petition to reverse the decision, collecting over two thousand names in little more than one week.<sup>45</sup> In late May, Nelson filed a new permit application under the Texas Mass Gathering Act, which had jurisdiction over events lasting twelve hours or less, because, unlike the Texas Music Festival Act, the application needed only the approval of the county judge. The application was approved, and Nelson booked acts for a shorter, one-day festival featuring only eighteen artists.<sup>46</sup>

The language of Darnell’s April advertisement lays bare the core issues at stake in the battle between Austin’s cosmic cowboys and rural Texans. First, his use of the word “invasion” to describe the arrival of Nelson’s fans in Gonzales indicates that Darnell, and presumably the congregation of his Daystar Fellowship Church, saw the Picnic as an assault on a purportedly innocent Texan town and perceived progressive country

---

<sup>43</sup> Qtd. in Joe Nick Patoski, “Rednecks Frying in the Sun: Willie Nelson’s Picnic Is On,” *Rolling Stone* 217 (15 July 1976), 12. Nelson had experienced similar local opposition when he organized The Spring Fever Festival in Prairie Hill, Texas, on 8 May 1976, but District Judge Clarence Ferguson ruled that the festival could take place despite local protests (Pete Oppel, “Hearing Clears Way for Festival,” *The Dallas [Tex.] Morning News* [29 April 1976]).

<sup>44</sup> “Gonzales County Rejects Nelson Music Fest,” *The Dallas [Tex.] Morning News* (23 May 1976).

<sup>45</sup> Connie Hershorn, “Friends Don’t Forget Willie,” *The Dallas [Tex.] Morning News* (29 May 1976).

<sup>46</sup> Patoski, p. 12; Pete Oppel, “Picnic to Feature Mixed Bag,” *The Dallas [Tex.] Morning News* (29 June 1976). The program featured, in addition to Nelson, Waylon Jennings, Leon Russell, Kris Kristofferson, Jerry Jeff Walker, Roger miller, Rusty Weir, Steve Fromholz, George Jones, Bobby Bare, Ray Wylie Hubbard, David Allan Coe, Tompall Glaser, Billy Joe Shaver, B.W. Stevenson, Asleep at the Wheel, Jessi Colter, and Rita Coolidge.

musicians and their fans as outsiders. Moreover, Darnell's diatribe echoes the sentiments of Merle Haggard's "Okie from Muskogee," positioning the long-haired youths in opposition to core Middle American values. Yet the mass of young people who might attend Nelson's 1976 Picnic differed significantly from the San Franciscan hippies of Haggard's song. Whereas Haggard's hippies existed in a distant and exotic California, the hippies of Nelson's Picnics were perhaps more threatening to conservative Texans because they actually resided there, alongside the congregation of Darnell's church. Echoing the rhetoric of the parents who protested the influence of rock and roll on their children during the 1950s, Darnell and the over twelve hundred people who signed a petition opposing the Gonzales Picnic feared a complete dissolution of their community at the hands of the "crude music" that would be performed at the Picnic. As Nelson and his colleagues presented their construction of the Austin scene and its concomitant youth culture in the Fourth of July Picnics, therefore, Darnell's protests—and the Texas Music Festival Act—represented a fortification of the boundaries separating the "anti-American, anti-Christian, [*sic*] hippie subculture" from more conservative rural and small-town Texans.<sup>47</sup>

To rebuff critics like Darnell, Nelson, like most contemporaneous festival promoters, portrayed the Fourth of July Picnics as peaceful celebrations in public interviews. Nelson also followed the example of his contemporaries, especially the examples provided by Woodstock and the Monterey Pop Festival, by financing a feature-length film that depicted the Picnic as a positive social event. While the first Picnic at Dripping Springs in 1973 was supposed to be filmed, the financial and logistical

---

<sup>47</sup> Patoski, 12.

arrangements never came through. So, for the 1974 Picnic, held at Texas World Speedway in College Station, Nelson hired director Yabo Yablonski and producers Michael Jay Jones and Gary Kratochvil to film the three-day affair. The resulting film, *Willie Nelson's 4<sup>th</sup> of July Picnic*, was released by La Paz Productions in 1977 and depicts the Picnic as a non-violent event in which the distinction between audience and performer are blurred and all participants celebrate the progressive country movement.

Yablonski portrays the communality of the Picnic by combining shots of the audience's reactions to the musical events with images of the musicians' interactions both onstage and in the wings. The sequence that accompanies "Whiskey River," the opening musical number in the film, is particularly indicative of how this idealized notion is constructed throughout the film. Yablonski begins by highlighting the diversity of Nelson's audience, a group including not only college students and other young people but also a few older fans as well, including a heavy-set man in his late thirties or early forties and dressed only in patterned overalls dancing and drinking from a bottle of whiskey. In the same sequence, Yablonski also focuses on a group of young people dancing in a circle and sharing alcoholic beverages. These shots are spliced together with images of Nelson's entire band—not Nelson himself, who, as both the bandleader and the festival's impresario and namesake, certainly deserved close-up shots—performing as a cohesive and collective unit. This three-and-a-half-minute-long segment breaks down the boundaries between the audience and the performers onstage; instead, they are collectively enjoying the music performed onstage. Furthermore, the placement of this sequence at the very beginning of the film indicates that the ideas of community and communality are central elements of the Picnic's success and proposes that these ideas

frame viewers' perception of the remaining eighty minutes of performances and the 1974 Picnic as a whole.

The conclusion of *Willie Nelson's 4<sup>th</sup> of July Picnic* further underscores Yablonski's construction of Austin's progressive country music scene as a unified community. In the film's final fifteen minutes, all of the performers who had appeared onstage throughout the festival come together for an extended jam session. Michael Murphey, the artist onstage at the time, invites Nelson, Leon Russell, the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, David Allan Coe, and many others to perform alongside him, noting that "These people *are* the cosmic cowboys." Such a statement indicates that, by 1974, the term "cosmic cowboy" had already transcended Austin and become a broader phenomenon applicable to California-born and Nashville-based groups like the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band (who recorded "Cosmic Cowboy" on their 1974 album *Stars & Stripes Forever*),<sup>48</sup> Nashville songwriters like Coe, and internationally-renowned session musicians like Russell. The assemblage performs two songs: Michael Murphey's "Cosmic Cowboy" and "Goodnight, Irene," a folksong made popular by the Weavers in 1950.

The choice of these three compositions to conclude the film is of particular interest for a number of reasons. First, each of these songs is representative of the core musical and cultural values of the progressive country movement. "Cosmic Cowboy" addresses the cosmic cowboy's idealization of the American West, while "Goodnight, Irene" hearkens to the movement's origins in the folksinging groups at Threadgill's and the University of Texas. Moreover, because of their repetitive refrains and the ubiquity of Murphey's song on local radio stations, both songs are easily adaptable to group

---

<sup>48</sup> United Artists UA-LA184-J2.

singing, allowing both the musicians displayed onstage and the now invisible audience, hidden by the cover of darkness, to contribute their voices to the mix. Murphey's studio recording of "Cosmic Cowboy" displays the same type of imprecise background singing as does the live performance at Nelson's Picnic. But, perhaps most importantly, this concluding scene offers a unifying vision of progressive country movement, drawing together the wide variety of musicians who performed in the three-day 1974 Willie Nelson Fourth of July Picnic in a single performance. Just as music festivals bring together a heterogeneous body of fans for a single, intense musical experience, so too, by Yablonski's estimation, do they galvanize a community of musicians through their shared musical and cultural values.

*Willie Nelson's 4<sup>th</sup> of July Picnic* does not rebut the charges of immorality that protesters like Darnell feared, therefore. Rather, several shots prominently feature blatant illegal and immoral behavior, including the consumption of alcohol and marijuana, public nudity, and fondling. Such behavior was as much a part of the Picnic and other similar festivals as was the performance of music itself, and Nelson's gathering was in no way immune.<sup>49</sup> The film argues instead that the Picnic's positive social message and community-building efforts transcend such immorality. Like many other contemporary concert films—including *Woodstock* (1970) and *Mad Dogs and Englishmen* (1971), among others—*Willie Nelson's 4<sup>th</sup> of July Picnic* promotes progressive country music fans and contemporary youth culture, in general, as a positive and socially-involved community by portraying the Picnic as a non-violent event in which the admission-

---

<sup>49</sup> By portraying these behaviors, Yablonski and Nelson may, in fact, have been attempting to reach out to a more liberal audience.

paying audience and the onstage musicians alike were focused exclusively upon the performance of music.

LOCAL ARTISTS WITH NO CONNECTIONS TO NATIONAL RECORD INDUSTRY	AUSTIN ARTISTS WITH CONNECTIONS TO THE NATIONAL RECORD INDUSTRY	NATIONAL ARTISTS WITH CONNECTIONS TO AUSTIN
Barefoot Jerry Milton Carol Band Alvin Crow Freda and the Firedogs Greezy Wheels Ray Wylie Hubbard Lost Gonzo Band Augie Meyers Fanni Smith Spanky and Our Gang Kenneth Threadgill	Asleep at the Wheel Guy Clark Doug Kershaw Michael Murphey Tracy Nelson and Mother Earth Willis Alan Ramsey B.W. Stevenson Jerry Jeff Walker Rusty Weir	Moe Bandy Jimmy Buffett Lee Clayton Hank Cochran David Allan Coe Larry Gatlin Tompall Glaser Linda Hargrove Alex Harvey John Hartford Waylon Jennings Dee Moeller Rick Nelson Willie Nelson Leon Russell Red Steagall

**Figure 5-1. Artists who performed at Willie Nelson’s 1974 Fourth of July Picnic, College Station, TX.<sup>50</sup>**

In conjunction with the film’s positive portrayal of the progressive country movement and its fans, *Willie Nelson’s 4<sup>th</sup> of July Picnic*, like the Kerrville Folk Festival, the Dripping Springs Reunion, and the annual Willie Nelson Picnics themselves, offered a narrow vision of the Austin progressive country music scene and its connections to the national music industry. Nelson’s 1974 Picnic in College Station, Texas, lasted three days and featured no fewer than thirty-six artists and groups, including representatives of Austin’s local club scene, the local stars of progressive country music, and national country stars (Figure 5-1). The bookings offered a vision of the progressive country movement as one that thrived locally, as represented by local bands Freda and the Firedogs, Kenneth Threadgill, and Greezy Wheels; that was home to a community of

---

<sup>50</sup> David McNeely, “Fireworks Show, and Willie, Too,” *The Dallas [Tex.] Morning News* (4 July 1974).

musicians who had begun to enjoy a regional or national audience and had secured major-label recording contracts, like Michael Murphey, Guy Clark, and Willis Alan Ramsey; and that had also secured the support of some of the more radical members of Nashville's Music Row, such as John Hartford, Tompall Glaser, and Waylon Jennings.<sup>51</sup>

The portrait of Austin's progressive country scene in *Willie Nelson's 4<sup>th</sup> of July Picnic* is, however, a necessarily limited one; Yablonski could not capture the full breadth of the three-day festival in a two-hour feature film. The film instead offers performances of only eight of the festival's thirty-six acts: Nelson, B.W. Stevenson, Waylon Jennings, Leon Russell, Doug Kershaw, Jerry Jeff Walker, the Lost Gonzo Band, and Michael Murphey. This reduced program offers a slightly different understanding of progressive country music in Austin than the Picnic from which the footage was culled. The elimination of nearly all of Austin's local bands, with the sole exception of the Lost Gonzo Band, which accompanied Walker's performance, and the inclusion of artists with major label recording contracts validates the progressive country movement. At once, this representation depicts Austin's connections to the Nashville music industry, marking it as being of national interest, and by portraying it as a free-spirited oasis, isolated from the rest of the country, in which the stars of country music can collaborate with one another outside of the influence of Music Row.

Progressive country music developed within the many venues for live musical performance located throughout Austin. The daily interactions of musicians, promoters, and audiences in the city's clubs and dancehalls facilitated the constant renegotiation of Austin's musical and social identities. Festivals like Willie Nelson's Fourth of July

---

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*



Picnics, on the other hand, offered audiences fixed representations of the progressive country movement, reinforced the scene's core musical and social values, and distilled and commodified the complex daily interactions of Austin's progressive music scene. Nelson's Picnics were carefully composed snapshots of the progressive country movement that permitted, for a relatively small admission fee,<sup>52</sup> the music's passionate fans and casually committed audiences alike to connect to Austin's musical community through their participation in an intense live musical experience.<sup>53</sup> As a result, Nelson's Picnics solidified Austin's reputation as a hotbed for live musical performance, as an alternative country music community, and as a free-spirited oasis where musicians could collaborate and liberal audiences could celebrate their collective difference.

### Coda

Articulating a single, monolithic definition of progressive country music as a musical style is an incredibly difficult, and possibly unproductive task. In the hands of Michael Murphey, Guy Clark, and B.W. Stevenson, progressive country music was the music of singer-songwriters who used contemporary songwriting practices developed in New York and Los Angeles to create idyllic portraits of the American West and wide open Texan spaces that hark back to the dime store novels and "B" western films that shaped popular understandings of the region. For them, progressive country music facilitated a direct communication between the songwriter and the listener, revealing the

---

<sup>52</sup> Admission fees for the 1974 Picnic in College Station, Texas, were \$8 per day or \$20 for a three-day pass ("Willie Nelson July 4 Picnic," *The Dallas [Tex.] Morning News* [2 July 1974]).

<sup>53</sup> Dowd, *et al*, observe "varying degrees of commitment displayed by festival attendees and expected by festival organizers" (163).

musician's innermost thoughts to a sympathetic audience with minimal mediation via musical arrangements or studio interference. For Alvin Crow and Ray Benson, it was the fiddle music of rural Texas dancehalls from a particular time. Borrowing the repertoires and performance practices of western swing and honky tonk pioneers like Bob Wills, Milton Brown, and Ernest Tubb, these musicians tapped into a different notion of authenticity than the singer-songwriters, offering music that connected to the working-class and agricultural Texas of the 1930s and 1940s. The progressive country music of the Nashville "Outlaws" stands as a third contrasting iteration of progressive country's musical style, blending the electric guitars and drums of "hardcore" country music with the slick production, songwriting, and distribution practices of Music Row to yield a carefully packaged and easily marketed sonic statement of nonconformity.

While progressive country music is difficult to define sonically, it is much easier to define as a social phenomenon. In venues like the Armadillo World Headquarters, the One Knite, the Split Rail Inn, the Liberty Lunch, Castle Creek, Soap Creek Saloon, and the Broken Spoke, performers and audiences of progressive country music came together to redefine what it meant to be "Texan" following the political, social, and economic upheavals of the late 1960s and early 1970s, including the ongoing Civil Rights Movement, Second Wave Feminism, the Vietnam War, and Sun Belt expansion. At the same time, Austin's live music venues provided opportunities for musicians to communicate directly to their audiences, to witness their reactions firsthand, to discuss their social concerns with them, and to compose and perform music that treated those concerns. Austin's musical venues offered, therefore, a physical space in which participants in Austin's progressive country music scene could articulate and refine

definitions of their collective social identity. While commitment to the social and musical projects of the progressive country movement certainly varied among audiences and performers alike, these musical venues permitted Austin's young people to join together in a communal celebration of their Texan-ness.<sup>54</sup>

Because these performance spaces were the source of progressive country's musical and social identities, many savvy entrepreneurs, record producers, and concert promoters searched for ways to tap into the energy of Austin's live music scene and to market it to a broader regional and national audience in order to finance the expansion of Austin's music industry infrastructure. Willie Nelson's Fourth of July Picnic and the Kerrville Folk Festival were only one component of this far-reaching scheme that included not only progressive country music festivals but also recordings and television broadcasts of live musical performances. Albums like Jerry Jeff Walker's *Viva Terlingua!* (1973) and Commander Cody and His Lost Planet Airmen's *Live from Deep in the Heart of Texas* (1974) offered record buyers throughout the United States an opportunity to experience firsthand the intensity of musical performance in Austin, presenting concert recordings complete with audience reactions, stage patter, and mistakes.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, in 1974, local public television station KLRU began taping *Austin City Limits*, a show broadcasting the latest musical developments in Austin to a regional audience, and in 1976, the show began syndication over the Public Broadcasting System, delivering Austin's musical culture and the music of national touring artists who visited Austin to a national audience.

---

<sup>54</sup> Will Straw, "Communities and Scenes in Popular Music," in *The Subcultures Reader*, eds. Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 494-505.

<sup>55</sup> MCA 382 and MCA 1017, respectively.

By the end of the 1970s, Austin was known throughout the United States as “the live music capital of the world,” and as one might suspect from such a clever trademark, Austin’s planners continue to capitalize on the density of live music venues and the city’s reputation in order to entice still more musicians and the creative people who normally accompany them to the city. On its official website today, the City of Austin proudly notes that “music is a driver of the ‘creative economy’ that translates into millions of dollars annually for Austin. Austin City government recognizes that music is one of the things that makes Austin special....”<sup>56</sup> The Austin Music Marketing Office, part of the city’s Convention and Visitors’ Bureau, “promotes... the diversity of Austin music, whether it’s blues, rock and Latino, or jazz...,”<sup>57</sup> and the non-profit Austin Music Foundation works “to unite, ignite, and revolutionize our local music community.”<sup>58</sup> While many of the venues that were popular during the heyday of the progressive country music movement of the 1970s have long since closed, new venues, many of which are owned and operated by entrepreneurs who learned about the music industry during the 1970s, have filled the void and have offered musical styles that speak to the city’s perpetually young population. At the same time, many of the institutions established during the progressive country movement have continued to thrive, including Willie Nelson’s Fourth of July Picnic, which convened its thirty-third annual gathering in Fort Worth, Texas, in 2006, and *Austin City Limits*, which celebrated its thirtieth year of

---

<sup>56</sup> “City of Austin—Music,” <<http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/music>>, (accessed 30 January 2007).

<sup>57</sup> “Austin Music Office,” <<http://www.austintexas.org/music/contact>>, (accessed 30 January 2007).

<sup>58</sup> “Austin Music Foundation—About AMF,” <<http://www.austinmusicfoundation.com/?PageID=3>>, (accessed 30 January 2007).

syndication the same year.<sup>59</sup>

During the 1970s, participants in Austin's progressive country music movement struggled to define themselves in the midst of the social upheavals of the era. Looking to country music, they sought to redefine what it meant to be Texan in a countercultural age by claiming ownership of a distinctly Texan form of expressive culture: country music. Adapting regional country music styles to fit contemporary musical tastes and adopting the honky tonk as a social space, these "cosmic cowboys" constructed Texan identities built on an ethos of independence: independence from the conservative, middle-class views of their parents' generation; from non-Texans who thought Texas to be a stronghold of racists, misogynists, and reactionaries; and, perhaps most importantly to the local musical community, from the limiting influence of the national music industry.<sup>60</sup> For the cosmic cowboys, the live musical venues of Austin were liberatory spaces in which they could celebrate their collective Texan-ness. This mindset enticed nationally-known artists with an independent mindset to work or even to relocate there, and it encouraged still more people to come to Austin in search of the freedom and liberation so present in the city's public image. It was precisely this notion that is the progressive country movement's legacy. As members of Austin's progressive country movement publicly discussed their desires to escape into an idealized and perhaps unrealistic American West, they tapped into an impulse that was present all across the United States, offering romantic visions for unromantic times.

---

<sup>59</sup> "Willie Nelson's 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual 4<sup>th</sup> of July Picnic," <<http://www.williespicnic.com>>, (accessed 30 January 2007); "PBS—Austin City Limits," <<http://www.pbs.org/krlu/austin/about/index.html>>, (accessed 30 January 2007).

<sup>60</sup> Shank, 20.

## APPENDIX 1

### THE NEW HICKS: MELLOW, RIGHTEOUS, SINCERE

JOE KRUPPA<sup>1</sup>

1. The New Hicks are full of crap.
2. The New Hicks are not a movement but a state of mind.
3. The New Hicks have nothing to do with the Counter-Culture which is a nostalgic relic anyway.
4. The New Hicks gather together in little clumps for ceremonial observances.
5. These observances are often punctuated with utterances like “far out,” “down home,” “mellow,” and “righteous.”
6. A New Hick offered me a “righteous” chocolate chip cookie the other day.
7. New Hicks should not be confused with Rednecks who don’t know any better.
8. New Hicks would like to be Rednecks who don’t know any better, but they are having a hard time pulling it off.
9. The New Hicks think a pedal steel guitar is a holy instrument.
10. The New Hicks think Kris Kristofferson writes profound songs about the human condition.
11. After all, he was a Rhodes Scholar.
12. The New Hicks would like to be shit-kickers, but they just manage to be excrement punters.
13. The New Hicks like to get reall [*sic*] “mellowed out” and listen to Loggins and Messina, the Marijuana Mantovanis.
14. The New Hicks are very open to cultural pursuits because they have ballet once a month at Armadillo World Headquarters.
15. The New Hicks try to drink Shiner Beer because it is “more organic.”
16. The New Hicks don’t like real loud music because it isn’t sincere.
17. The New Hicks don’t know what they like, they like what they know.
18. Over and over and over again.
19. The New Hicks can be individually pleasing, but collectively they are a pain in ass.
20. You don’t have to wear overalls or bluejeans to be a New Hick, nor are all people wearing bluejeans or overalls New Hicks.
21. Anyone who uses the words “mellow” and “righteous” 3 or more times in the space of two sentences is probably a New Hick.
22. I’d bet money on it.
23. The New Hicks dote on pleonasms.
24. An example of a pleonasm: “Greasy Wheels [*sic*] they’re righteous.”
25. A pleonasm is a slightly hokey redundancy.
26. Redundancy is what New Hickdom is all about.
27. In thermodynamics redundancy is sometimes called entropy.

---

<sup>1</sup> Joe Kruppa, “The New Hicks: Mellow, Righteous, Sincere,” Typescript, Archie Green Collection, Southern Folklife Collection, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

28. Entropy is the degradation of matter and energy in the universe to an ultimate state of inert uniformity.
29. In other words, the New Hicks are repetitions to the point of stasis.
30. The New Hicks could grow and prosper only in the Nixon Nation.
31. But the New Hicks are more sincere than President Nixon.
32. The New Hicks have managed to create a new musical genre: Marijuana Muzak.
33. This Muzak is usually created by “solo” artists who have broken away from groups in order to realize their “creative potential.”
34. Any number of ex-Byrds and ex-Burritos have created splendid examples of the New Muzak.
35. Austin is trembling on the verge of becoming a center for the New Muzak.
36. Country and Western Music lends itself beautifully to the creation of the New Muzak.
37. The New Hicks have even made a creative breakthrough: Progressive Country Music.
38. Poco.
39. Maybe they’ll soon discover Third-Stream Country Music!
40. Classical Country Music!
41. Jazz Country!
42. I’m only kidding, of course.
43. Just kidding.
44. To become a New Hick, one requires no real good reason.
45. No one has ever become a New Hick on behalf of science, or in search of celebrity, or because Hickdom was a challenge.
46. Those are not the reasons.
47. But reasons do exist.
48. In the middle of Hickdom there is a comfortable home, and in a room in that home sits...
49. You’re probably wondering where this is leading.
50. You’re probably wishing that I would get to the point and sit down.
51. ...a righteous bottle of Shiner Beer!
52. I am trying to give you an impression of an impression of the New Hicks.
53. An impression of an impression.
54. It is difficult to be serious about the New Hicks because they’re so damn silly.
55. They are also everywhere, in our homes, on the radio, on TV, even in our churches God forbid.
56. They have even established their own church: Armadillo World Headquarters.
57. A few questions keep bothering my mind.
58. Does one have to enter the New Hickdom just to get a righteous bottle of beer?
59. Do today’s New Hicks still need righteousness?
60. Obviously.
61. Otherwise what would they be doing repeating that word over and over and over again.
62. The best way to become a New Hick is to get all mellowed out and listen to an imitation of an imitation of country music.

63. The following people have failed to become New Hicks: David Bowie, Lou Reed, Mick Jagger, Herman Kahn, Bob Dylan (surprised you with that one), Marc Bolan, Miles Davis, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Yoko Ono, Vito Acconci, Bix Barentine, Sir Peter Coleville, Tom Wells, John Lennon, Roger McGuinn, Kit Carson, John McLaughlin, The Soft Machine, and many others.
64. I have real compassion and pity for these failures.
65. I have so much compassion for them that I spend more time consoling them for their failure than I spend in the New Hickdom.
66. How long will the New Hickdom retain its hold over its inhabitants?
67. The New Hickdom is guarded by its own sincerity.
68. In the New Hickdom sincerity is not a style but a deep-rooted belief.
69. My immediate concern is to pry out that sincerity and test it for malignancy.
70. In the New Hickdom people were concealing their emptiness behind a facade of mellow, righteous sincerity.
71. "You dumb hicks."
72. "The information and quickly—We have no time to waste with such as you."  
(William Burroughs)
73. Control yourself.
74. Let's get back to some serious problems.
75. What is the likely outcome of a state of mind like that of the New Hicks?
76. What are its possible social and political consequences?
77. What does it suggest about the American Experience?
78. What are its artistic ramifications?
79. I reviewed the conventional means of answering these questions.
80. The conventional means of answering these questions are as follows: "The New Hicks represent a revolt against a mechanized, technological society, and a return to values in the American Experience. They incorporate forms of living and forms of music indigeneous [*sic*] to the American Experience, and put themselves in touch with native American traditions. They are questing for a new genuineness in human relationships, a new simplicity and sincerity in forms of expression, a mellow and righteous mode of living." (from The New Hicks, ed. by Corn & Bull)
81. I don't believe this for a minute.
82. What do I believe then....
83. The New Hicks are an exercise in nostalgia.
84. The New Hicks are a desperate attempt to be real.
85. The New Hicks are the ultimate in bad faith—a lie to the self.
86. The New Hicks have no where to go but round and round and round in circles.
87. Square Dances.
88. I am bored with the redundancies of the New Hicks.
89. I try to bear this boredom without a sound, but sometimes the pain becomes too intense.
90. I wonder if the New Hicks will eventually get bored with their redundancies and realize that we can live only a succession of styles.
91. Is it possible for them to open themselves to new styles?
92. I'm waiting bravely.



93. Meanwhile life goes on in the “down home” of the New Hicks.
94. No, I’m just listening to good Karma and trying to keep from going on the nod.
95. Mellow.
96. Righteous.
97. Sincere.
98. Mick Jagger wrote a song, “Sweet Virginia,” for a forthcoming TV special on the New Hicks.
99. It closes with the line, “Got to scrape that shit right off your shoes.”
100. And out of our heads.

## SOURCES

### **Collections**

Archie Green Collection. Southern Folklife Collection. Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Armadillo World Headquarters Collection. Center for American History. University of Texas at Austin.

Jack Barnhardt Collection. Southern Folklife Collection. Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Soap Creek Saloon Archives. Center for American History. University of Texas at Austin.

Southern Folklife Collection Festival Files, 1936-2005. Southern Folklife Collection. Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

### **Interviews**

Allred, Sammy. Interview by Art Young. 1976. Tape recording. Austin History Center, Austin Public Library, Austin, TX.

Ball, Marcia. Interview with author. 19 January 2007.

Benson, Ray. Interview with author. 31 May 2005.

Clark, Guy. Interview by Art Young. 14 January 1976. Tape recording. Austin History Center, Austin Public Library, Austin, TX.

\_\_\_\_\_. Interview by Jack Bernhardt. 24 October 1988. Tape recording. Jack Bernhardt Collection #20061. Southern Folklife Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

\_\_\_\_\_. Interview by Jack Bernhardt. 7 November 1988. Tape recording. Jack Bernhardt Collection #20061. Southern Folklife Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Friedman, Richard "Kinky," and Jeffrey Mark Friedman. Interview by Art Young. 10 June 1975. Transcript. Austin History Center, Austin Public Library, Austin, TX.

Green, Archie. Interview with author. 25 May 2006.

- Goldsmith, Tommy. Interview with author. 23 May 2005.
- Hubbard, Ray Wylie. Interview with author. 6 July 2005.
- Kennedy, Rod. Interview by Jan Reid. 1 January 1970. Tape recording. Austin History Center, Austin Public Library, Austin, TX.
- Kristofferson, Kris. Interview by Jack Bernhardt. 6 February 1990. Tape recording. Jack Bernhardt Collection #20061. Southern Folklife Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
- Murphey, Michael Martin. Interview by Jack Bernhardt. 27 May 1993. Jack Bernhardt Collection #20061. Southern Folklife Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Interview by Jack Bernhardt. 5 June 1993. Jack Bernhardt Collection #20061. Southern Folklife Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
- Reid, Jan. Interview with author. 20 April 2005.
- Taggart, Pat. Interview by Art Young. 1978. Austin History Center, Austin Public Library, Austin, TX.
- Wilson, Eddie. Interview by Robert Heard. 26 June 1974. Tape recording. Austin History Center, Austin Public Library, Austin, TX.
- Van Zandt, Townes. Interview by Jack Bernhardt. 9 December 1988. Jack Bernhardt Collection #20061. Tape recording. Southern Folklife Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

## **Bibliography**

- Abernethy, Francis Edward. "Texas Folk and Modern Country Music." In *Texas Country: The Changing Rural Scene*. Eds. Glen E. Lich and Dona-B. Reeves-Marquardt. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1986. 137-169.
- Allen, Bob. "Willie Nelson." In *The Encyclopedia of Country Music*. Ed. Paul Kingsbury. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. 374-375.
- Agnew, Eleanor. *Back from the Land: How Young Americans Went to Nature in the 1970s, and Why They Came Back*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2004.
- Allen, Michael. "'I Just Want to Be a Cosmic Cowboy': Hippies, Cowboy Code, and the Culture of a Counterculture." *The Western Historical Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (Autumn 2005).

- <<http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/whq/36.3/allen.html>>. Accessed 28 November 2005.
- Astrachan, A. "Feelin' Good in Austin." *New Republic* 175 (17 July 1976): 11-13.
- Averill, Patricia. "Esoteric-Exoteric Expectations of Redneck Behavior and Country Music." *The Journal of Country Music* 4, no. 2 (Summer 1973): 34-38.
- "Band of Unknowns Fails to Emerge." *Rolling Stone* 97 (9 December 1971): 10.
- Bane, Michael. *The Outlaws: Revolution in Country Music*. n.p.: Country Music Magazine/Doubleday/Dolphin Books, 1978.
- Bangs, Lester. "Records: Sold American." *Rolling Stone* 137 (21 June 1973): 63.
- Becker, Howard S. *Art Worlds*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982.
- Bennett, Andy, ed. *Popular Music and Youth Culture: Music, Identity, and Place*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Remembering Woodstock*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Subcultures or Neo-Tribes? Rethinking the Relationship Between Youth, Style and Musical Taste." *Sociology* 33, no. 3 (August 1999): 599-617.
- \_\_\_\_\_, and Keith Kahn-Harris, eds. *After Subculture: Critical Studies in Contemporary Youth Culture*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004.
- \_\_\_\_\_, and Richard A. Peterson, eds. *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal, and Virtual*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004.
- Bernhardt, Jack. "Guy Clark." In *The Encyclopedia of Country Music*. Ed. Paul Kingsbury. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. 94.
- Borders, James. "Form and the Concept Album: Aspects of Modernism in Frank Zappa's Early Releases." *Perspectives of New Music* 39, no. 1 (2001): 118-160.
- Boyd, Jean A. *The Jazz of the Southwest: An Oral History of Western Swing*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *"We're the Light Crust Doughboys from Burrus Mills": An Oral History*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003.
- Brackett, David. "(In Search of) Musical Meaning: Genres, Categories and Crossover." In *Popular Music Studies*. Eds David Hesmondhalgh and Keith Negus. London: Arnold, 2002. 65-84.

- \_\_\_\_\_. *Interpreting Popular Music*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995; paperback ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.
- Bufwack, Mary A., and Robert K. Oermann. *Finding Her Voice: Women In Country Music, 1800-2000*. Nashville: The Country Music Foundation Press and Vanderbilt University Press, 2003.
- Burns, Richard. "Ethnography of an East Austin Bar." *Collectanea: Papers in Folklore, Popular & Expressive Culture* 1 (1990): 16-38.
- Butts, Robert W. "More Than a Collection of Songs: The Concept Album in Country Music." *Mid-American Folklore* 16, no. 2 (Fall 1988): 90-99.
- Cantwell, Robert. *When We Were Good: The Folk Revival*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996.
- Carney, George O., ed. *The Sounds of People and Places: A Geography of American Music from Country to Classical and Blues to Bop*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Lanham, Boulder, New York, and Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003.
- Carter, Bill, with James Sallis. "The Ralph Mooney Story: From 'Crazy Arms' to Waylon Jennings." *Steel Guitarist* no. 5 (May 1980): 20-31.
- Ching, Barbara. *Wrong's What I Do Best: Hard Country Music and Contemporary Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Clarke, Paul. "'A Magic Science': Rock Music as a Recording Art." *Popular Music* 3 (1983): 195-213.
- Clay, John. "Plastic Plowboy." *The Rag* 4 (4 September 1973), 16.
- Cobb, James D. "From Muskogee to Luckenbach: Country Music and the 'Southernization' of America." *Journal of Popular Culture* 16, no. 3 (Winter 1982): 81-91.
- Coffey, Kevin. "Bob Dunn." In *The Encyclopedia of Country Music*. Ed. Paul Kingsbury. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. 156.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Jesse Ashlock." In *The Encyclopedia of Country Music*. Ed. Paul Kingsbury. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. 18.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Johnny Gimble." In *The Encyclopedia of Country Music*. Ed. Paul Kingsbury. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. 203.

- \_\_\_\_\_. "New Riders of the Purple Sage." In *The Encyclopedia of Country Music*. Ed. Paul Kingsbury. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. 377.
- Cohen, Sara. "Country at the Heart of the City: Music, Heritage, and Regeneration in Liverpool." *Ethnomusicology* 49, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 25-48.
- Cook, Bruce. "Nashville's Counter-Culture." *Saturday Review* 3 (4 October 1975): 48-49.
- Coppage, Noel. "Crossing Over with Waylon Jennings." *Stereo Review* 37 (October 1976): 104-106.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Is Country Going to the Dogs?" *Stereo Review* 41 (November 1978): 99-104.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Preacher Willie Nelson." *Stereo Review* 38 (February 1977): 88-89.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Waylon Jennings: Suddenly a Low-Pitched Baritone is the Voice to Have." *Stereo Review* 35 (October 1975): 74.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Willie Nelson Presents an Adult, Love-and-Death Western in Song." *Stereo Review* 35 (December 1975): 83.
- Covach, John. "Popular Music, Unpopular Musicology." In *Rethinking Music*. Eds. Mark Everist and John Nicholas Cook. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. 452-470.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "We Won't Get Fooled Again: Rock Music and Musical Analysis." In *Keeping Score: Music, Disciplinarity, Culture*. Eds. David Schwarz, Anahid Kassabian, and Lawrence Siegel. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1997. 75-89.
- \_\_\_\_\_, and Graeme Boone, eds. *Understanding Rock: Essays in Musical Analysis*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Cray, Ed. *Ramblin' Man: The Life and Times of Woody Guthrie*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2004.
- Cusic, Don. "Michael Martin Murphey." In *The Encyclopedia of Country Music*. Ed. Paul Kingsbury. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. 360.
- Davidoff, Nicholas. *The Country of Country: People and Places in American Music*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1997.
- De León, Arnaldo. "Region and Ethnicity: Topographical Identities in Texas." In *Many Wests: Place, Culture, & Regional Identity*. Eds. David M. Wrobel and Michael C. Steiner. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1997. 259-274.

- Dempsey, John. *The Light Crust Doughboys Are on the Air: Celebrating Seventy Years of Texas Music*. Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2002.
- Denisoff, R. Serge. "The Evolution of the American Protest Song." In *The Sounds of Social Change: Studies in Popular Culture*. Eds. R. Serge Denisoff and Richard A. Peterson. Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1972. 15-25.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Nashville Rebels: Myth or Reality?" *Popular Music and Society* 5, no. 5 (1977): 79-88.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Sing a Song of Social Significance*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1972.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Waylon: A Biography*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983.
- DiMaggio, Paul, 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 McNally and Company, 1972. 38-55.
- Di Salvatore, Bryan. "Merle Haggard." In *The Encyclopedia of Country Music*. Ed. Paul Kingsbury. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. 223.
- Ditlea, Steve. "Records: Shotgun Willie." *Rolling Stone* 142 (30 August 1973): 80, 82.
- Doggett, Peter. *Are You Ready for the Country: Elvis, Dylan, Parsons and the Roots of Country Rock*. New York: Penguin, 2000.
- Doyle, Peter. *Echo & Reverb: Fabricating Space in Popular Music Recording, 1900-1960*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2005.
- Dunne, Michael. "Romantic Narcissism in 'Outlaw' Country Music." In *All That Glitters: Country Music in America*. Ed. George H. Lewis. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Press, 1993. 226-238.
- Endres, Clifford. *Austin City Limits*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987.
- Escott, Colin. *Lost Highway: The True Story of Country Music*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2003.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Talking Machine: How Records Shaped Country Music." In *The Encyclopedia of Country Music*. Ed. Paul Kingsbury. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. 465-469.
- Evans, David. "Folk Revival Music." *The Journal of American Folklore* 92, no. 363 (January-March 1979): 108-115.

- Farley, Jeffrey Ellrick. "Culture Industry as Cottage Industry: The Production of Musical Meaning in Austin, Texas." Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1996.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "For Love or Money? Austin Musicians' Discourse on the Idealist/Materialist Debate." In *Popular Music: Style and Identity*. Eds. Will Straw, Stacey Johnson, Rebecca Sullivan, and Paul Friedlander. Montreal: Centre for Research on Canadian Cultural Industries and Institutions, 1995. 79-82.
- Feludi, Susan. *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*. New York: Crown Publishers, 1991.
- Ferree, Myra Mace, and Beth B. Hess, eds. *Controversy and Coalition: The New Feminist Movement across Three Decades of Change*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995.
- Fink, Robert. "Elvis Everywhere: Musicology and Popular Music Studies at the Twilight of the Canon." In *Rock Over the Edge: Transformations in Popular Music Culture*. Eds. Roger Beebe, Denise Fulbrook, and Ben Saunders. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002. 60-109.
- Finnegan, Ruth H. *The Hidden Musicians: Music-Making in an English Town*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Finson, Jon. "Music and Medium: Two Versions of Manilow's 'Could It Be Magic.'" *The Musical Quarterly* 65, no. 2 (April 1979): 265-280.
- Flippo, Chet. "Austin: The Hucksters Are Coming." *Rolling Stone* 158 (11 April 1974): 24.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Country Music: The R&R Influence." *Rolling Stone* 150 (20 December 1973): 15-16.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Country & Western: Some New-Fangled Ideas." *American Libraries* 5 (April 1974): 185-189.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "David Allan Coe: Don't Fence Him In." *Rolling Stone* 165 (18 July 1974): 16.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "From the Bump-Bump Room to the Barricades: Waylon, Tompall, and the Outlaw Revolution." In *Country: The Music and the Musicians from the Beginnings to the '90s*. Eds. Paul Kingsbury and Alan Axelrod. New York and Nashville: The Country Music Foundation Press, 1994. 312-327.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Hill Country Sound." *Texas Parade* 34, no. 11 (April 1974): 16-23.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Honky Tonk Bravado." *Rolling Stone* 156 (14 March 1974): 61.



- \_\_\_\_\_. "One Week in the Life of Kinky Friedman: Triumph at the Opry, Showdown in Big D." *Rolling Stone* 145 (11 October 1973): 22.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Records: Geronimo's Cadillac." *Rolling Stone* 118 (28 September 1972): 52-53.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Records: Ladies Love Outlaws." *Rolling Stone* 122 (23 November 1972): 68-69.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Ride 'Em Jewboy: Kinky Friedman's First Two Premieres." *Rolling Stone* 134 (10 May 1973): 20.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Saga of Willie Nelson." *Rolling Stone* 269 (13 July 1978): 45-49.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Willie Nelson's New York Country Sessions." *Rolling Stone* 132 (12 April 1973): 14.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Willie Nelson's Phonographic Western." *Rolling Stone* 194 (28 August 1975): 68.
- Fong-Torres, Ben. *Hickory Wind: The Life and Times of Gram Parsons*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1991.
- Fox, Aaron A. "'Out the Country': Speech, Song, and Feeling in American Rural, Working-Class Culture." Ph.D. diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 1995.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Real Country: Music and Language in Working-Class Culture*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004.
- Fox, William S., and James D. Williams. "Political Orientation and Music Preferences Among College Students." *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (Autumn 1974): 352-371.
- Friedman, Kinky. *The Great Psychedelic Armadillo Picnic: A "Walk" in Austin*. New York: Crown Publishers, 2004.
- Gallagher, Bob. "Albums: Ol' Waylon." *Melody Maker* 52 (9 July 1977): 23.
- Garofalo, Reebee. "From Music Publishing to mp3: Music and Industry in the Twentieth Century." *American Music* 17, no. 3 (Autumn 1999): 318-354.
- Gerstin, Julian. "Reputation in a Musical Scene: The Everyday Context of Connections between Music, Identity and Politics." *Ethnomusicology* 42, no. 3 (Autumn 1998): 385-414.

- Ginnell, Cary. "The Development of Western Swing." *JEMF Quarterly* 20 (Fall/Winter 1984): 58-67.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Milton Brown and the Founding of Western Swing*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994.
- Glassie, Henry. "Tradition." *The Journal of American Folklore* 108, no. 430 (Autumn 1995): 395-412.
- Glover, Tony. "Records: Dreaming My Dreams." *Rolling Stone* 194 (28 August 1975): 70-71.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Records: Wanted!: The Outlaws." *Rolling Stone* 208 (11 March 1976): 64.
- Green, Archie. "Austin's Cosmic Cowboys: Words in Collision." In *Torching the Fink Books and Other Essays on Vernacular Culture*. Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001. 66-108.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Hillbilly Music: Source and Symbol." *Journal of American History* 78, no. 309 (July-September 1965): 204-228.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Commercial Music Graphics #34: Midnight and Other Cowboys." *JEMF Quarterly* 11, no. 3 (Autumn 1975): 137-152.
- Green, Marian. "The Songs of Willie Nelson: Voice of the Self in America's Age of Protest." *Popular Music Perspectives* 2 (1985): 228-232.
- Griffis, Ken. "The Jesse Ashlock Story." *JEMF Quarterly* 8, no. 3 (Autumn 1972): 122-127.
- Griffiths, Dai. "Cover Versions and the Sound of Identity in Motion." In *Popular Music Studies*. Eds David Hesmondhalgh and Keith Negus. London: Arnold, 2002. 51-64.
- Guralnick, Peter. "Half-Hearted Nelson Sounds Out of His Mind." *Rolling Stone* (3 June 1976): 73-74.
- Haggard, Merle, with Tom Carter. *Merle Haggard's My House of Memories: For the Record*. New York: HarperEntertainment, 1999.
- Harkins, Anthony. *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Haslam, Gerald W. *Workin' Man Blues: Country Music in California*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

- Hebdige, Dick. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. London: Methuen, 1979; reprint ed., London and New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Hesmondhalgh, David. "Popular Music Audiences and Everyday Life." In *Popular Music Studies*. Eds David Hesmondhalgh and Keith Negus. London: Arnold, 2002. 117-130.
- Hickey, Dave. "In Defense of the Telecaster Cowboy Outlaws." *Country Music* (January 1974): 90-95.
- Hicks, Michael. *Sixties Rock: Garage, Psychedelic & Other Satisfactions*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999.
- Hill, Trent. "Why Isn't Country Music 'Youth' Culture?" In *Rock Over the Edge: Transformations in Popular Music Culture*. Eds. Roger Beebe, Denise Fullbrook, and Ben Saunders. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 161-190.
- Hoffman, Frank, ed. *Encyclopedia of Recorded Sound*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York and London: Routledge, 2005.
- Holden, Stephen. "Records: Cosmic Cowboy Souvenir." *Crawdaddy* 27 (August 1973): 73-74; *Rolling Stone* 142 (30 August 1973): 86.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Records: Kinky Friedman." *Rolling Stone* 186 (8 May 1975): 70.
- Holt, Douglas B., and Craig J. Thompson. "Man-of-Action Heroes: The Pursuit of Heroic Masculinity in Everyday Consumption." *Journal of Consumer Research* 31 (September 2001): 425-440.
- Holzinger, Wolfgang. "Towards a Typology of Hybrid Forms in Popular Music." In *Songs of the Minotaur: Hybridity and Popular Music in the Era of Globalization: A Comparative Analysis of Rebetika, Tango, Rai, Flamenco, Sardana, and English Urban Folk*. Ed. Gerhard Steingress. *Populäre Musik und Jazz in der Forschung: Interdisziplinäre Studien* 9. Münster: LIT, 2002. 255-296.
- Hudson, Kathleen. *Telling Stories, Writing Songs: An Album of Texas Songwriters*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001.
- Huff, W.A. Kelly. "A Thematic Analysis of Willie Nelson's Song Lyrics." *Popular Music and Society* 18, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 91-124.
- Jennings, Waylon, with Lenny Kaye. *Waylon: An Autobiography*. New York: Warner Books, 1996.
- Jensen, Joli. "Creating the Nashville Sound: An Interpretive Approach to Culture Production." Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1984.

- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Nashville Sound: Authenticity, Commercialization, and Country Music*. Nashville and London: The Country Music Foundation Press and Vanderbilt University Press, 1998.
- Joplin, Laura. *Love, Janis*. New York: Villard Books, 1992; paperback ed., New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2005.
- Katz, Mark. *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.
- Kienzle, Rich. *Southwest Shuffle: Pioneers of Honky-Tonk, Western Swing, and Country Jazz*. New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Koster, Rick. *Texas Music*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2000.
- Kruse, Holly. *Site and Sound: Understanding Independent Music Scenes*. New York: Peter Lang, 2003.
- Lich, Glen E. "The Rural Scene in Texas: Half-Created/Half-Perceived." In *Texas Country: The Changing Rural Scene*. Eds. Glen E. Lich and Dona B. Reeves-Marquardt. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1986. 3-15.
- Lipsitz, George. "Looking for a Style: Male Images in Country Music of the 1970s." In *Popular Culture in America*. Ed. Paul Buhle. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987. 84-90.
- Livingston, Tamara E. "Music Revivals: Towards a General Theory." *Ethnomusicology* 43, no. 1 (Winter 1999): 66-85.
- Lock, Cory. "Counterculture Cowboys: Progressive Country of the 1970s & 1980s." *The Journal of Texas Music History* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 14-23.
- Lund, Jens. "Fundamentalism, Racism, and Political Reaction in Country Music." In *The Sounds of Social Change: Studies in Popular Culture*. Eds. R. Serge Denisoff and Richard A. Peterson. Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1972. 79-91.
- \_\_\_\_\_, and R. Serge Denisoff. "The Folk Music Revival and the Counter Culture: Contributions and Contradictions." *The Journal of American Folklore* 84, no. 334 (October-December 1971): 394-405.
- Macan, Edward. *Rocking the Classics: English Progressive Rock and the Counterculture*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Malone, Bill C. *Country Music, U.S.A.* 2<sup>nd</sup> revised ed. Austin: The University of Texas Press, 2002.

- \_\_\_\_\_. *Don't Get Above Your Raisin': Country Music and the Southern Working Class*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Myth, Media, and the Making of Texas Music." *Texas Humanist* 7, no. 6 (July-August 1985): 8-10.
- \_\_\_\_\_, and David Stricklin. *Southern Music/American Music*. 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2003.
- Mann, Bill. "Kinky Capers." *Melody Maker* 48 (8 December 1973): 23.
- Manuel, Peter. "Music as Symbol, Music as Simulacrum: Postmodern, Pre-Modern, and Modern Aesthetics in Subcultural Popular Musics." *Popular Music* 14, no. 2 (1995): 227-239.
- McCall, Michael. "Billy Joe Shaver: Yesterday Tomorrow Was Today." *The Journal of Country Music* 19, no. 3 (1998): 11-19.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Billy Joe Shaver: The Road Goes on Forever." *The Journal of Country Music* 20, no. 1 (1998): 18-29.
- McClary, Susan. *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Start Making Sense! Musicology Wrestles with Rock." In *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*. Eds. Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin. New York: Pantheon Books, 1990. 277-292.
- Mellers, Wilfrid. *Twilight of the Gods: The Beatles in Retrospect*. London: Faber & Faber, 1973.
- Menconi, David. "Music, Media and the Metropolis: The Case of Austin's Armadillo World Headquarters." M.J. thesis, The University of Texas at Austin, 1985.
- Middleton, Jason. "D.C. Punk and the Production of Authenticity." In *Rock Over the Edge: Transformations in Popular Music Cultures*. Eds. Roger Beebe, Denise Fulbrook, and Ben Saunders. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002. 335-356.
- Miller, Philip L., and Morton Lee. "The New Victor Jewel Box." *Notes* (2<sup>nd</sup> series) 6, no. 2 (March 1949): 263-264.
- Montgomery, David Owen. "The Rock Concept Album: Context and Analysis." Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 2002.

- Moore, Allan F. *Rock: The Primary Text: Developing a Musicology of Rock*. Buckingham and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1993.
- Morthland, John. "Records: Waylon Live." *Creem* 8 (April 1977): 60.
- Moser, Margaret. "The Whole Bow: Alvin Crow Plays It His Way, Always Has." *The Austin Chronicle* (12 November 2004). <<http://www.austinchronicle.com/gyrobase/Issue/story?oid-oid%3A237280>>. Accessed 14 August 2006.
- Muxfeldt, Kristina. "'Frauenliebe und Leben': Now and Then." *19<sup>th</sup>-Century Music* 25, no. 1 (Summer 2001): 27-48.
- Nackman, Mark E. *A Nation within a Nation: The Rise of Texas Nationalism*. Port Washington, NY, and London: Kennikat Press, 1975.
- Neal, Jocelyn. "Popular Music Analysis in American Music Theory." *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Musiktheorie* 2 (2005). <[http://www.gmth.de/www/artikel/2005-07-14\\_01-00-33\\_7/](http://www.gmth.de/www/artikel/2005-07-14_01-00-33_7/)>. Accessed 15 November 2006.
- Neff, James. "A Big Commotion in Austin." *Country Style* no. 26 (December 1977): 5, 66-67.
- Nelson, Paul. "Willie Nelson's Phonographic Western." *Rolling Stone* 194 (28 August 1975): 68-69.
- Nelson, Willie. *The Facts of Life and Other Dirty Jokes*. New York: Random House, 2002.
- \_\_\_\_\_, with Bud Shrake. *Willie: An Autobiography*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988; reprint ed., New York: Cooper Square Press, 2000.
- "New Acts: Kinky Friedman." *Variety* 270 (9 May 1973), 248.
- Nicholls, David. "Virtual Opera, or Opera between the Ears." *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 129, no. 1 (2004): 100-142.
- Nightbyrd, Jeff. "Highway 71 Revisited." *Crawdaddy* 22 (March 1973): 25-26.
- Ochs, M. "Waylon: The Texan Rebel." *Melody Maker* 49 (13 July 1974): 49.
- Oldfield, Michael. "Outlaws on the Run..." *Melody Maker* 52 (3 September 1977): 21.
- Orum, Anthony M. *Power, Money, & People: The Making of Modern Austin*. Austin: Texas Monthly Press, 1987.

- Owens, Thomas. "Forms." *Grove Music Online*. Ed. Laura Macy. Accessed 1 August 2006. <http://www.grovemusic.com>.
- Parachini, Allan. "Waylon Jennings." *Stereo Review* 32 (2/1974): 63-65.
- Patoski, Joe Nick. "Rednecks Frying in the Sun: Willie Nelson's Picnic is On." *Rolling Stone* 217 (15 July 1976): 12.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Thunder Deep in the Heart of Texas." *Rolling Stone* 215 (17 June 1976): 10.
- Perlowin, Mike. "From the Desk of Herb Steiner: Portrait of an Unsung Hero." *Steel Guitar World Magazine* 2, no. 10 (March/April 1993): 46-47.
- Peterson, Richard A. *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997.
- Phillips, Stacy. "The History of Western Swing Fiddling." *Fiddler Magazine* 2, no. 2 (1995): 10-14.
- Porcello, Thomas. "Music Mediated as Live in Austin: Sound, Technology, and Recording Practice." In *Wired for Sound: Engineering and Technologies in Sonic Cultures*. Eds. Paul D. Greene and Thomas Porcello. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2005.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Sonic Artistry: Music, Discourse, and Technology in the Sound Recording Studio." Ph.D. diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 1996.
- Price, Michael H. "Jazz Guitar and Western Swing." In *The Guitar in Jazz: An Anthology*. Ed. James Sallis. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1996. 81-88.
- Reid, Jan. *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*. New edition. Austin: The University of Texas Press, 2004.
- Reed, S. Alexander. "Crowd Noise and the Hyperreal." In *The Proceedings of the First Art of Record Production Conference, 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> September 2006, University of Westminster, London*. <<http://www.artofrecordproduction.com>>. Accessed 25 April 2006.
- Reynolds, Mike. "Hook 'Em Horns!" *Crawdaddy* 72 (May 1977): 28-33.
- Robertson, Alec. "A New Age in Recorded Music." *The Musical Times and Signing-Class Circular* 94, no. 1323 (May 1953): 207-209.
- Rodnitzky, Jerome L. "The Decline of Contemporary Protest Music." *Popular Music and Society* 1, no. 1 (Fall 1971): 44-50.

- Schneider, Lynn. "Waylon Jennings & the Speeding Pompadour." *Crawdaddy* 23 (April 1973): 26-27.
- Shank, Barry. *Dissonant Identities: The Rock 'n' Roll Scene in Austin, Texas*. Hanover, NH, and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1994.
- Shaver, Billy Joe. *Honky Tonk Heroes*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005.
- Simon, George T. *The Big Bands*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Schirmer Books, 1981.
- Slobin, Mark. *Subcultural Sounds: Micromusics of the West*. Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1993.
- Sloman, Larry. "Kinky and the Money Changers." *Crawdaddy* 47 (4/1975): 30-31.
- Solie, Ruth A. "Whose Life? The Gendered Self in Schumann's *Frauenliebe* Songs." In *Music and Text: Critical Inquiries*. Ed. Steven Paul Scher. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. 219-240.
- "Space Cowboys." *Melody Maker* 50 (8 November 1975): 28-29.
- Specht, Joe W. "Put a Nickel in the Jukebox: The Texas Tradition in Country Music, 1922-1950." In *The Roots of Texas Music*. Eds. Lawrence Clayton and Joe W. Specht. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2003. 66-94.
- Spitzer, Nicholas R. "Romantic Regionalism and Convergent Culture in Central Texas." In *All That Glitters: Country Music in America*. Ed. George H. Lewis. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Press, 1993. 87-93.
- Stanfield, Peter. *Horse Opera: The Strange History of the 1930s Singing Cowboy*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002.
- Straw, Will. "Communities and Scenes in Popular Music." In *The Subcultures Reader*. Eds. Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton. London: Routledge, 1997. 494-505.
- Swenson, John. "A Slice of the Night Life from Willie Nelson." *Crawdaddy* 28 (September 1973): 24-25.
- Texas Almanac and State Industrial Guide, 1980-1981*. Dallas: A.H. Belo Corp., 1981.
- Thornton, Sarah. *Club Cultures: Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital*. Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1996.
- Tichi, Cecilia. *High Lonesome: The American Culture of Country Music*. Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994.



- Townsend, Charles R. *San Antonio Rose: The Life and Music of Bob Wills*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1976.
- Tosches, Nick. "Records: Waylon & Willie." *Rolling Stone* 261 (23 March 1978): 66.
- Tucker, Ken. "Records: Are You Ready for the Country." *Rolling Stone* 222 (23 September 1976): 115.
- Tucker, Stephen R. "Progressive Country Music, 1972-1976: Its Impact and Creative Highlights." *Southern Quarterly* 22, no. 3 (Spring 1984): 93-110.
- Turley, Alan Craig. "The Social and Ecological Determinants of the Production of Original Rock Music in Austin, Texas." Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1997.
- The University of Texas at Austin, Office of Institutional Studies, Statistical Handbook, 1977-78*. Austin: University of Texas, 1979.
- Walker, Earl, Philip L. Miller, and Morton Lee. "Recording Symposium." *Notes* (2<sup>nd</sup> series) 7, no. 3 (June 1950): 363-371.
- Walker, Jason. *Gram Parsons: God's Own Singer*. London: Helter Skelter Publishing, 2002.
- Ward, Ed. "Willie Nelson: Rednecks, Thai Sticks and Lone Star Beer." *Creem* 7 (10/1975): 40, 76-77.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Willie Nelson: Breakthrough of a Lone-Star Legend." *Rolling Stone* 204 (5 January 1976): 18.
- Watts, Michael. "You Gotta Be a Man First, 'Fore You Can Be Anything." *Melody Maker* 48 (11 August 1973): 24-25.
- Webb, Peter. "Interrogating the Production of Sound and Place: The Bristol Phenomenon, from Lunatic Fringe to Worldwide Massive." In *Music, Space and Place: Popular Music and Cultural Identity*. Eds. Sheila Whitley, Andy Bennett, and Stan Hawkins. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004. 66-88.
- Wells, Paul. "The Last Rebel: Southern Rock and Nostalgic Continuities." In *Dixie Debates: Perspectives on Southern Cultures*. Eds. Richard H. King and Helen Taylor. New York: New York University Press, 1996. 115-129.
- Wilgus, D.K. "Country-Western Music and the Urban Hillbilly." *The Journal of American Folklore* 83, no. 328 (April-June 1970): 157-179.

Williams, Raymond. *The Country and the City*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1973.

Wilson, Burton, with Jack Ortman. *The Austin Music Scene through the Lends of Burton Wilson*. Austin: Eakin Press, 2001.

Wolfe, Charles K. "Bob Wills, Fiddler." In *The Devil's Box: Masters of Southern Fiddling*. Nashville and London: The Country Music Foundation Press and Vanderbilt University Press, 1998. 151-162.

Wrobel, David M. "Western Themes in Contemporary Rock Music, 1970-2000: A Lyric Analysis." *American Music Research Center Journal* 10 (2000): 83-100.

Young, J.R. "Records: Singer of Sad Songs." *Rolling Stone* 97 (9 December 1971): 58.

Zak, Albin J., III. *The Poetics of Rock: Cutting Tracks, Making Records*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

## **Discography**

13<sup>th</sup> Floor Elevators. *The Psychedelic Sounds of the 13<sup>th</sup> Floor Elevators*. United Artists IA LP 1, 1966.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Easter Everywhere*. United Artists IA LP 5, 1967.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Bull of the Woods*. United Artists IA LP 9, 1968.

Asleep at the Wheel. *Comin' Right at Ya*. United Artists 038F, 1973.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Asleep at the Wheel*. Epic KE-33097, 1974.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Texas Gold*. Capitol ST-11441, 1975.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Wheelin' and Dealin'*. Capitol ST-11546, 1976.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Wheel*. Capitol SW-11726, 1978.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Collision Course*. Capitol SW-11726, 1978.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Served Live*. Capitol ST-11945, 1979.

Balcones Fault. *It's All Balcones Fault*. Cream CR-1004, 1977.

The Band. *Music from Big Pink*. Capitol SKAO-2955, 1968.

- Big Brother and the Holding Company. *Big Brother and the Holding Company*.  
Mainstream 6099, 1967.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Cheap Thrills*. Columbia PC-9700, 1968.
- Bridger, Bobby. *Merging of Our Minds*. RCA Victor LSP-4792, 1972.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *And I Wanted to Sing for the People*. RCA Victor APL1-0182, 1973.
- Brown, Milton, and His Musical Brownies. *Complete Recordings of the Father of  
Western Swing, 1932-37*. Texas Rose TXRCD 1-5, 1996.
- Bruce, Ed. *Ed Bruce*. United Artists UA-LA613-G, 1976.
- The Byrds. *Sweetheart of the Rodeo*. Columbia CS-9670, 1968.
- Clark, Guy. *Old No. 1*. RCA Victor APL1-1303, 1975.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Texas Cookin'*. RCA Victor APL1-1944, 1976.
- Coe, David Allan. *The Mysterious Rhinestone Cowboy*. Columbia KC-32942, 1974.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Once Upon a Rhyme*. Columbia KC-33085, 1975.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Long Haired Redneck*. Columbia KC-33916, 1976.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Rides Again*. Columbia KC-34310, 1976.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Tattoo*. Columbia PC-34780, 1977.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Family Album*. Columbia KC-35306, 1978.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Human Emotions*. Columbia KC-35535, 1978.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Spectrum VII*. Columbia KC-35789, 1979.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Compass Point*. Columbia JC-36277, 1979.
- Colter, Jessi. *A Country Star Is Born*. RCA Victor LSP-4333, 1970.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *I'm Jessi Colter*. Capitol ST-11363, 1974.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Jessi*. Capitol ST-11477, 1976.
- Commander Cody and His Lost Planet Airmen. *Lost in the Ozone*. Paramount PAS-  
6017, 1971.

- \_\_\_\_\_. *Hot Licks, Cold Steel, and Truckers' Favorites*. Paramount PAS-6031, 1972.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Country Casanova*. Paramount PAS-6054, 1973.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Live from Deep in the Heart of Texas*. Paramount PAS-1017, 1973.
- Crow, Alvin, and the Neon Angels. *Alvin Crow and the Neon Angels*. Big Wheel BW 1003, 1979.
- \_\_\_\_\_, and the Pleasant Valley Boys. *Alvin Crow and the Pleasant Valley Boys*. Long Neck LN-001, 1976.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *High Riding*. Polydor PD-1-6102, 1977.
- Crowell, Rodney. *Ain't Living Long Like This*. Warner Bros. BSK 3228, 1978.
- The Flatlanders. *More a Legend Than a Band*. Rounder CD SS34, 1990.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Live '72*. New West NW 6052, 2004.
- The Flying Burrito Brothers. *The Gilded Palace of Sin*. A&M SP-4175, 1969.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Burrito Deluxe*. A&M SP-4258, 1970.
- For the Records: Austin Country, 1973-1978*. Maverick Records LP-001, 1980.
- Freda and the Firedogs. *Freda and the Firedogs*. Plug Music PM 0004-2, 2002.
- Friedman, Kinky. *Sold American*. Vanguard VSD 79333, 1973.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Kinky Friedman*. ABC-Paramount ABCD 829, 1974.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Lasso from El Paso*. Epic PE 34304, 1976.
- \_\_\_\_\_, and the Texas Jewboys. *Mayhem Afterthought: August 19, 1973, You Are There*. Sphincter Records SRI 00712D, 2005.
- Fromholz, Steven. *Come on Down to Texas for Awhile: The Anthology, 1969-1991*. Raven RVCD-116, 2001.
- Glaser, Tompall. *Songs of Shel Silverstein*. MGM M3G-4977, 1975.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Great Tompall and His Outlaw Band*. MGM M3G-5014, 1976.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Tompall and His Outlaw Band*. ABC 978, 1977.

Goodman, Steve. *Steve Goodman*. Buddah 69017, 1971.

The Grateful Dead. *Workingman's Dead*. Warner Bros. WS-1869, 1970.

\_\_\_\_\_. *American Beauty*. Warner Bros. WS-1893, 1970.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Grateful Dead*. Warner Bros. 2WS-1935, 1971.

Haggard, Merle. *Okie from Muskogee: Recorded "Live" in Muskogee, Oklahoma*. Capitol ST-384, 1969.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Fightin' Side of Me*. Capitol ST-451, 1970.

Hofner, Adolph, and His Texans. *South Texas Swing*. Arhoolie Folklyric 7029, 1980.

The International Submarine Band. *Safe at Home*. LHI Records LHI-S-12,001, 1968.

Jennings, Waylon. *Folk-Country*. RCA Victor LSP-3523, 1966.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Leavin' Town*. RCA Victor LSP-3620, 1966.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Nashville Rebel*. RCA Victor LSP-3736, 1967.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Sings Ol' Harlan*. RCA Victor LSP-3660, 1967.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Love of the Common People*. RCA Victor LSP-3825, 1967.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Waylon*. RCA Victor LSP-4260, 1970.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Taker/Tulsa*. RCA Victor LSP-4487, 1971.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Good Hearted Woman*. RCA Victor LSP-4647, 1972.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Ladies Love Outlaws*. RCA Victor LSP-4647, 1972.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Lonesome, On'ry, and Mean*. RCA Victor LSP-4854, 1973.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Honky Tonk Heroes*. RCA Victor APL1-0240, 1973.

\_\_\_\_\_. *This Time*. RCA Victor APL1-0734, 1974.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Dreaming My Dreams*. RCA Victor APL1-1062, 1975.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Are You Ready for the Country?* RCA Victor APL1-1816, 1976.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Waylon Live*. RCA Victor APL1-1108, 1976.

- \_\_\_\_\_. *Ol' Waylon*. RCA Victor APL1-2317, 1977.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *I've Always Been Crazy*. RCA Victor APL1-2979, 1978.
- \_\_\_\_\_, with the Kimberleys. *Country-Folk*. RCA Victor LSP-4180, 1969.
- \_\_\_\_\_, and Willie Nelson. *Willie and Waylon*. RCA Victor APL1-2686, 1978.
- \_\_\_\_\_, Willie Nelson, Tompall Glaser, and Jessi Colter. *Wanted! The Outlaws*. RCA Victor APL1-1321, 1976.
- Joplin, Janis. *I Got 'Dem Ol' Kozmic Blues Again, Mama!* Columbia 9913, 1969.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Pearl*. Columbia 30322, 1970.
- Kershaw, Doug. *Spanish Moss*. Warner Bros. WS 1861, 1970.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Doug Kershaw*. Warner Bros. WS 1906, 1971.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Douglas James Kershaw*. Warner Bros. BS 2725, 1973.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Mama Kershaw's Boy*. Warner Bros. BS 2793, 1974.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Alive & Pickin': Recorded Live in Atlanta*. Warner Bros. BS 2851, 1975.
- King, Freddie. *Texas Cannonball*. Shelter SW 8913, 1972.
- Kristofferson, Kris. *Kristofferson*. Monument SLP-18139, 1970.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Silver Tongued Devil and I*. Monument Z-30679, 1971.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Border Lord*. Monument KZ-31362, 1972.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Jesus Was a Capricorn*. Monument KZ-31909, 1972.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Who's to Bless and Who's to Blame*. Monument PZ-33379, 1975.
- Lewis and Clark Expedition. *Lewis and Clark Expedition*. Colgems COS-105, 1967.
- Lipscomb, Mance. *Texas Songster*. Arhoolie 306, 1989.
- The Lost Gonzo Band. *The Lost Gonzo Band*. MCA 487, 1975.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Thrills*. MCA 2232, 1976.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Signs of Life*. Capitol SW-11788, 1978.

- Meyers, Augie, and the Western Head Band. *Live at the Longneck* Texas Re-cord LP-1002, n.d.
- Mother Earth. *Mother Earth Presents Tracy Nelson Country*. Mercury SR 61230, 1969.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Mother Earth*. Mercury SR 61270, 1970.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Bring Me Home*. Reprise 6431, 1971.
- Murphey, Michael. *Geronimo's Cadillac*. A&M SP-4358, 1972.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Cosmic Cowboy Souvenir*. A&M SP-4388, 1973.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Michael Murphey*. Epic KE-32835, 1974.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Blue Sky/Night Thunder*. Epic KE-33290, 1975.
- Nelson, Tracy, and Mother Earth. *Tracy Nelson/Mother Earth*. Warner Bros. MS 2054, 1972.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Poor Man's Paradise*. CBS 31759, 1973.
- Nelson, Willie. *Country Willie: His Own Songs*. RCA Victor LSP-3418, 1965.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Country Favorites*. RCA Victor LSP-3528, 1966.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Yesterday's Wine*. RCA Victor LSP-4568, 1971.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Shotgun Willie*. Atlantic SD-7262, 1973.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Phases and Stages*. Atlantic SD-7291, 1974.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Red Headed Stranger*. Columbia KC-33482, 1975.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Sound in Your Mind*. Columbia PC-34092, 1976.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Troublemaker*. Columbia KC-34112, 1976.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Live*. RCA APL1-1487, 1976.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Stardust*. Columbia KC-35305, 1978.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Willie and Family Live*. Columbia KC2-35642, 1978.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Crazy: The Demo Sessions*. Sugar Hill SHCD 1073, 2003.

- New Riders of the Purple Sage. *New Riders of the Purple Sage*. Columbia C-30888, 1971.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Powerglide*. Columbia KC-31284, 1972.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Gypsy Cowboy*. Columbia KC-31930, 1972.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Adventures of Panama Red*. Columbia CK-32450, 1973.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Home, Home on the Road*. Columbia PC-32870, 1974.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Brujo*. Columbia 33145, 1975.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Oh, What a Mighty Time*. Columbia PC-33688, 1975.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Austin, Texas, June 13, 1975*. Kufala KUF0125, 2005.
- Nitty Gritty Dirt Band. *Will the Circle Be Unbroken*. United Artists UXS-9801, 1972.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Stars and Stripes Forever*. United Artists UALA-184J2, 1974.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Symphonion Dream*. United Artists UALA-469G, 1975.
- Parsons, Gram. *GP*. Reprise MS-2123, 1973.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Grievous Angel*. Reprise MS-2171, 1974.
- Prine, John. *John Prine*. Atlantic SD-8296, 1971.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Diamonds in the Rough*. Atlantic SD-7240, 1972.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Sweet Revenge*. Atlantic SD-7274, 1973.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Common Senses*. Atlantic SD-18127, 1975.
- Ramsey, Willis Alan. *Willis Alan Ramsey*. Shelter SW 8914, 1972.
- Sahm, Doug. *Doug Sahm and Band*. Atlantic SD-7254, 1973.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Groover's Paradise*. Warner Bros. BS-2810, 1974.
- Shaver, Billy Joe. *Old Five and Dimers Like Me*. Monument KZ 32293, 1973.
- Shiva's Headband. *Take Me to the Mountains*. Capitol ST 538, 1970.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Psychedelic Yesterday*. Akarma AK 282, n.d.



Sir Douglas Quintet. *Sir Douglas Quintet +2*. Smash SRS 67108, 1968.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Mendocino*. Smash SRS 67115, 1969.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Together After Five*. Smash SRS 67130, 1970.

\_\_\_\_\_. *1+1+1=4*. Philips PHS 600-344, 1970.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Return of Doug Saldaña*. Philips PHS 600-353, 1971.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Live Love*. Texas Re-Cord TRC 1007, 1977.

Stevenson, B.W. *B.W. Stevenson*. RCA Victor LSP-4685, 1972.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Lead Free*. RCA Victor LSP-4794, 1972.

\_\_\_\_\_. *My Maria*. RCA Victor APL1-0088, 1973.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Calabasas*. RCA Victor APL1-0410, 1973.

\_\_\_\_\_. *We Be Sailin'*. Warner Bros. WBS-2901, 1975.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Lost Feeling*. Warner Bros. WBS-3012, 1977.

Van Zandt, Townes. *For the Sake of the Song*. Poppy PYS-40,001, 1969,

\_\_\_\_\_. *Our Mother the Mountain*. Poppy PYS-40,004, 1969.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Townes Van Zandt*. Poppy PYS-40,007, 1970.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Delta Momma Blues*. Poppy PYS-40,012, 1970.

\_\_\_\_\_. *High, Low and In Between*. Poppy PYS-5700, 1971.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Late, Great Townes Van Zandt*. United Artists Consolidated PP-LA004-F, 1973.

*Viva! Terlingua! Nuevo!: Songs of Luckenbach, Texas*. Palo Duro PDR-4201, 2006.

Walker, Jerry Jeff. *Mr. Bojangles*. Atco SD-33259, 1968.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Five Years Gone*. Atco SD-33297, 1968.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Driftin' Way of Life*. Vanguard VSD-6521, 1969.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Bein' Free*. Atco SD-33336, 1970.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Jerry Jeff Walker*. Decca SD-33259, 1972.

\_\_\_\_\_. *¡Viva Terlingua!* MCA 382, 1973.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Walker's Collectables*. MCA 450, 1974.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Ridin' High*. MCA 2156, 1975.

Wier, Rusty. *Rusty Wier*. 20<sup>th</sup> Century Records T-495, 1975.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Don't It Make You Wanna Dance?* 20<sup>th</sup> Century Records T-469, 1975.

Williams, Hank. *Hank Williams: The Original Singles Collection Plus*. Mercury 847 194-2, 1990.

Wills, Bob, and His Texas Playboys. *San Antonio Rose: The Bob Wills Recordings, 1932-1947*. Bear Family BCD 15933-LL, n.d.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Faded Love: 1947-1973*. Bear Family BCD 16550-NL, n.d.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Tiffany Transcriptions, Vol. 2*. Rhino R2 71470, 1987.

## **Filmography**

Altman, Robert, dir. *Nashville*. Paramount Pictures. 1975.

Brown, Margaret, dir. *Townes Van Zandt: Be Here to Love Me*. Rake Films/Palm Pictures. 2005.

Elfstrom, Robert, and David Hoffman, dirs. *The Nashville Sound*. Ivy Films. 1970.

Friedman, Kinky. *Kinky Friedman and Friends*. Kinkajou Records. n.d.

Jennings, Waylon. *The Lost Outlaw Performance*. White Star 1682. 1991.

Szalapski, James, dir. *Heartworn Highways*. 1981.

Wadleigh, Michael, dir. *Woodstock: 3 Days of Peace & Music*. Warner Bros. 1970.

Yablonski, Yabo, dir. *Willie Nelson's 4<sup>th</sup> of July Picnic*. La Paz Productions. 1974.