



**Country Music's "Hurting" Albertan":  
Corb Lund and the Construction of "Geo-Cultural" Identity**

**Thèse**

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## Resumé

Le concept de lieu fait partie intégrante de la musique country, genre musical traditionnellement associé à certaines aires géographiques, à des paysages ruraux et aux valeurs communautaires. Bien que la littérature sur la musique country ait bien cerné les liens entre ce genre musical et la notion de lieu, en particulier en ce qui concerne la géographie des origines du genre et de ses scènes importantes, on observe un intérêt scientifique croissant envers les chansons de plus en plus nombreuses explorant le thème du lieu. Cette tradition trouve ses racines dans les chansons hillbilly, les chansons de cowboys chantants, le bluegrass du Kentucky et le western swing, où les artistes ont exprimé la nostalgie des lieux familiers et du temps de leur enfance. Ces récits ne décrivent pas seulement le paysage et la culture d'aires géographiques données; plutôt, ils définissent la relation entre les individus et leur environnement, dévoilant ainsi le caractère, les valeurs et les croyances de l'artiste.

En se concentrant sur la musique de l'artiste canadien de country alternatif Corb Lund, cette thèse vise à définir cette relation entre cet artiste de musique country et son environnement, et à interroger la façon dont il utilise (à l'instar d'autres artistes du genre) ces chansons afin d'explorer plus à fond les liens avec ses origines albertaines. Plus précisément, il s'agit d'étudier comment ces récits de lieu contribuent à la construction de l'identité de l'artiste, ce que Simon Frith (1996) appelle la *persona*. Selon Richard Peterson (1997) et Pamela Fox (2009), les artistes country ont tendance à se référer à leurs origines dans un acte de « sincérité authentique », afin de construire une conception personnalisée du lieu (souvent autobiographique). Cette recherche a dû considérer les multiples couches de signification entourant l'artiste en tenant compte du genre, des niveaux identitaires et des rapports géocultureaux. Les approches géoculturelles et écomusicologiques permettent de mieux comprendre les façons dont les individus réagissent au lieu et aux liens intimes entre le « sentiment de soi » et le « sentiment de lieu » (Tuan 1974; Cantrill 1993; Solomon 2000). Le concept d'identité « géoculturelle », issu des sciences politiques (Talukder 2013), est invoqué pour décrire cette relation. Par l'analyse de la musique de Lund, cette thèse explore les manières dont l'artiste aborde la vie quotidienne, le travail et les questions socioculturelles propres à l'Alberta en proposant diverses conceptions du lieu, tout en construisant sa propre identité géoculturelle albertaine.





## Abstract

The concept of place is integral to country music, a genre conventionally associated with geographic regions, rural landscapes, and community values. While country music literature has defined the genre's connection to place in relation to the geography of its origins and prominent scenes, there has been a growing scholarly interest in the place-themed songs that proliferate the genre. The tradition of place songs finds its roots in early hillbilly recordings, songs of the singing cowboy, Kentucky bluegrass, and western swing, where songwriters expressed nostalgia for the seemingly simpler places and times of their childhood. These narratives do not just describe the landscape and culture of geographic regions, but rather, they also define the relationship between individuals and their surrounding environment and community, unveiling elements of the artist's character, values, and beliefs.

Focusing on the music of Canadian alt-country artist Corb Lund, this dissertation seeks to define this relationship between country singer-songwriter and place, and interrogate how he (like many other country artists) uses place songs to explore more fully his ties to his Albertan origins. More specifically, it is interested in how place-based narratives contribute to the construction of an artist's identity, what Simon Frith (1996) calls the artistic *persona*. As both Richard Peterson (1997) and Pamela Fox (2009) have noted, country artists tend to refer to their origins as an act of "authentic sincerity," constructing *personalized* (often autobiographical) conceptions of place. For a study of this nature, it was important to consider the multiple layers of signification surrounding a singer-songwriter including genre, levels of artistic identity, and geographic-cultural ("geo-cultural") association. Cultural geographic and ecomusicological discourse offers a rich understanding of the ways in which individuals respond to place and the intimate connection between the "sense of self" and the "sense of place" (Tuan 1974; Cantrill 1993; Solomon 2000). The concept "geo-cultural" identity, drawn from the political sciences (Talukder 2013), is invoked to describe this connection and define the geographic-cultural elements of an artist's identity. Through an interrogation of Lund's music, this dissertation explores how the singer-songwriter describes life, work, and socio-cultural issues in his native Alberta, creating diverse conceptions of place, all while constructing his uniquely Albertan "geo-cultural" identity.



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## List of Abbreviations

### Charitable Organization

C.A.T.S.      Checotah Animal, Town, and School Foundation

### Country Music Associations

ACM          Academy of Country Music  
CMA          Country Music Association (USA)  
CCMA        Canadian Country Music Association

### Fossil Fuel Energy Terminology

CBM          Coal Bed Methane  
MTR          Mountain Top Removal mining  
SAGD        Steam Assisted Gravity Drainage

### Public Broadcasting Network

CBC          Canadian Broadcasting Corporation  
CMT Canada   Country Music Television Canada

### Rodeo Associations

CPRA        Canadian Professional Rodeo Association  
CPRHF      Canadian Professional Rodeo Hall of Fame  
PRCA        Professional Rodeo Cowboy Association  
PRHF        Professional Rodeo Hall of Fame



## Foreword and Acknowledgements

This research project has grown out of a strong interest in place songs in country music, and specifically the ways in which country artists have continually turned to specific places or regional cultural traditions as a way of defining their artistic identity. My first project on this topic considered the response of Natalie Maines (lead singer of the Dixie Chicks) to her hometown of Lubbock, TX, and the ways in which she infused her song “Lubbock or Leave it” with complex musical markers of place. Analyzing this song (and others by Lubbock artists) made me acutely aware of the important role that place songs play in defining an artist’s identity. I began to notice that many of the genre’s artists were invoking place, both specific and archetypal. These songs tied country artists to a way of life, a set of cultural traditions, and a specific community, enabling them to maintain ties to the rural working-class communities in which they no longer lived. These ties have proven to be integral to allowing an artist, specifically the singer-songwriter, to appear “authentic” and “sincere” to their audiences. This interest led me to Canadian alt-country singer-songwriter Corb Lund, whose discography is full of songs about life in rural southern Alberta. A fourth-generation rancher, Lund, in his songs, considers a wide range of topics about this region, each intimately tied to the history of the region, creating fascinating portraits about rural life in Alberta, while at the same time constructing a strongly rural Albertan identity.

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To my daughter, Senna, who was born just before I started writing: it is for you that I remained focused and determined to write every day, in the hopes that I could teach you to never give up on your dreams. This dissertation is for you.



Corb Lund savours the morning breeze blowing off the mountains, cool from snow-kissed peaks softly perfumed with a waft of sage. This is his paradise, where the prairies meet the mountains in southern Alberta, a terrain of swirling hills not far from the Montana border. Some day he hopes to again call this home, settling down on a piece of land long tethered to his ranching family.

Wendy Dudley on Corb Lund, 2011



## Introduction

*Hurtin' Albertan with nothing more to lose  
Too much oil money, not enough booze  
East of the Rockies and west of the rest  
Do my best to do my damndest and that's just about all I guess*

Chorus from "Hurtin' Albertan," by Corb Lund and Tim Hus

In the popular track from his 2005 album *Hair in My Eyes like a Highland Steer*, Canadian alternative country artist Corb Lund proudly declared himself to be a "Hurtin' Albertan," linking his artistic self to the traditions and cultures of the western Canadian province of his origins. The Hurtin' Albertan is defined as a hard working individual who is just doing his best to make an honest living (as outlined in the chorus lyrics above), and expresses a strong attachment to Alberta. Lund portrays the protagonist in this narrative, assuming the role of a grader operator who chases the rodeo circuit on weekends. In so doing, he defines his artistic identity as a working-class individual strongly connected to Alberta and its rodeo culture. The song narrative captures the often intangible and unconscious associations of comfort and security that individuals feel about a particular geographic region, and the place of their origins in particular. For many, like this "Hurtin' Albertan," these associations can emerge by simply crossing a national or provincial border and feeling the change in road pavement, air quality, and even time zones, as elaborated in the song verses. The conditions at home may not be perfect ("too much oil money, not enough booze"), but they are an integral part of the socio-cultural, political, topographical, and environmental characteristics that define a region and, by extension, shape an individual or community's experiences and identity.

Lund elaborates his ties to Alberta through the song narrative of "Hurtin' Albertan." Although he does so through a fictional song character, the singer-songwriter used his

intimate knowledge of, and relationship to Alberta, to define the Hurtin' Albertan's occupation, lifestyle, and travels, while evoking a strong sense of place. More than underscoring this attachment to place, the song's narrative expresses the duality of Albertan identity: an individual caught between the province's long tradition of rodeo, while forging a path for himself through a life of hard labour as a grader. What lies under the surface of this narrative is a comment on the sacrifices many Albertans make to secure gainful employment in order to live decent lifestyles and support families. Lund himself may not be living this particular life (he lives as a touring/recording musician), but he understands this lifestyle because it was the one in which he was raised. Thus, while he performs the role of the protagonist in this song, the narrative suggests a complex layering of identity levels. The *real* Corb Lund grew up in rural southern Alberta in the small town of Taber, which had a population 8,104 in 2014 (Statistics Canada 2014b). The town was settled by Mormons in 1902, and remains a largely agrarian community today. Lund spent his childhood on his family's ranch in Taber, where he also helped with his father's veterinary practice. He soon left this town behind to pursue a life in music. Despite the "distance" between Lund's reality and the character in this song, he understands the sacrifices individuals make to secure gainful employment in order to live decent lifestyles and support families because he has spent much time observing friends and family forging new paths outside of agriculture in various hard labour positions (oil sands, construction, etc.). Influenced by his family's century-long history in southern Alberta, as well as the stories from individuals surrounding him, Lund uses his music to share experiences about life and community in southern Alberta, and to explore the complexities and contradictions of Albertan identity.

As a *singer-songwriter* and individual raised in rural southern Alberta, Lund pulls from the experiences of those surrounding him to weave together a complex *artistic identity* (or *persona* [Frith 1996]) built on the notion of country music "authenticity" (Peterson 1997). By assuming the role of this grader operator *character*, Lund seeks to express to his audience that he remains just like the men and women sitting in his audience. Through this exploration of the working-class issues that many Albertans face, Lund's artistic identity grapples with the eternal struggle to find and define his position in relation to provincial traditions and the hardships of modern life in the province. Through his music, in general,

he defines not just the socio-political, cultural, and environmental structures of place, but also his relationship *to* place. His songs often communicate variations of his *real* personal experiences and, in the end, reveal as much about place as it does about his own understanding of the culture and traditions of the region and, more importantly, his artistic identity.

### **0.1 Corb Lund, A Biographic Sketch**

A fourth-generation rancher and rodeo rider, Corby “Corb” Clark Marinus Lund (b. 1969) grew up on his family’s ranch in Taber, Alberta, where he was fully immersed in local, rural cowboy culture. Both sides of his family ranched in Utah and Nevada before migrating north to southern Alberta in the towns of Raymond (paternal Lunds) and Cardston (maternal Ivinses) at the turn of the twentieth century, where his great-grandfathers each built homesteads and raised their families. His great-grandparents were amongst the Mormon population migrating north at the turn of the twentieth century. Led by Charles Ora Card, the first Mormon groups began settling regions of southern Alberta following the passage of the Edmonds Act (1882) in the USA, which made the practice of polygamy illegal (Rosenvall 1982, 53). Although their immigration to southern Alberta was initially met with resistance due to their beliefs and practices, Canadian government welcomed the Mormon community, as they were eager to establish agrarian societies in the west and had expertise in irrigation agriculture (Lee 1968; Rosenvall 1982). The first group settled along Lee’s Creek in 1887, where they founded the town of Cardston. Between 1887 and 1900, Mormon groups settled the southern territory of the province (from Cardston to the USA border), and then settled towns to the north in Raymond (1901) and Taber (1902). Their knowledge of irrigation agriculture was put to good use in the dry climate of southern Alberta—especially in in Lund’s hometown of Taber, which sits on a significant water aquifer. Thanks to Mormon immigrants, Taber supplied water to the Lethbridge-Medicine Hat railway. As a result of both its water supply and long, hot, sunny summer days, Taber has become famous for its sweet corn and is the self-proclaimed “Corn Capital of Canada” (Maki 2015). In his Glenbow Exhibition, Lund (2013c) acknowledged his Mormon heritage, stating, “Though I’ve never been a member of the church, both sides

of the family (Lund and Ivins) followed the Mormon migration north to Alberta from Utah around the turn of the century and homesteaded in the Raymond and Cardston areas.” Even though he did not grow up practicing the controversial religion, some of the church’s activities were part of his life. For instance, in a blog about “Getting’ Down on the Mountain,” Lund (2012h) recalls with fondness a story about his grandparents following the Mormon practice of having one year’s supply of food in storage for emergency situations (discussed in chapter 5).<sup>1</sup>

Lund spent his youth riding horses, helping on the family ranch, and chasing cows. In addition to participating in the daily activities on the ranch, he also engaged in the family tradition of rodeo riding. In his teen years, Lund rode steer, and may very well have followed in the footsteps of his numerous buckle-winning family members if it were not for an injury and the lure of Black Sabbath, both of which ultimately influenced his decision to leave the sport (discussed in chapter 4). Although Lund has not lived in rural southern Alberta since the late-1980s, it is clear from his discography that the experiences of his youth, and the stories of his family members, have had a significant impact on his understanding of place and local culture, his songwriting, and his identity.

Lund’s early introduction to country music came from his grandfather, who taught him to sing the old traditional cowboy song “Strawberry Roan” (Wheeler 2012). He grew up listening the music of Marty Robbins, Wilf Carter, and Willie Nelson, and the rockabilly stylings of Johnny Cash, shaping his early musical taste and the styles to which he would gravitate later in his career. Interestingly, it was the music of Black Sabbath that lured Lund to a life in music. In interview with *RollingStone*’s Jim Allen (2014), Lund revealed that he first learned to play guitar as a young metalhead:

When I was 15 years old I heard Black Sabbath and all that stuff. All the cowboy stuff seemed kinda [*sic*] normal because that’s what my parents were into, so to me

---

<sup>1</sup> He has also written several songs with references to Mormon religion and culture including “No Roads Here” (*Five Dollar Bill*, 2002), “Truck Got Stuck” (*Hair in My Eyes like a Highland Steer*, 2005), and “Family Reunion” and “Brother Brigham, Brother Young” (*Horse Soldier! Horse Soldier!* 2007). Even though “Brother Brigham, Brother Young” alludes to the second president of the Mormon Church (Brigham Young, from 1847-77), it is a fictional story. Lund (2013c) revealed in his Glenbow Exhibit that he researched the setting and language “using Mormon reference material to accurately reflect the milieu of the early church.”

when I heard hard rock it was a whole new, exotic world for me. I actually learned to play music playing electric guitar, playing heavy riffs.

In the late 1980s Lund enrolled in the University of Lethbridge where he studied anthropology and history for two years (Louie 2013). He then moved north to Edmonton in 1989, where he transferred into the jazz music performance program at Grant MacEwan Community College.<sup>2</sup> While studying at Grant MacEwan he and three classmates formed the speed metal band called The Smalls, who enjoyed a regional cult-like following throughout the 1990s, but ultimately parted ways in 2001. While recording and touring as bassist for The Smalls, Lund started to turn his attentions to the country music that he grew up with, and founded the Corb Lund Band with upright bassist Kurt Ciesla and drummer Ryan Vikedal in 1995, playing and recording two albums of country songs by Lund.

Lund, Ciesla and Vikedal recorded three albums together as The Corb Lund Band, *Modern Pain* (1995), *Unforgiving Mistress* (1999), and *Five Dollar Bill* (2002). *Five Dollar Bill* marked a significant change for the trio: not only was it the first of three albums recorded on the Edmonton-based label Stony Plain Records, but it also marked their first collaboration with esteemed Nashville producer Harry Stinson. While they enjoyed a mainly regional success, they started to garner attention of critics in the United States by 2005, as a result of their Stinson collaboration, as well as the popularity of his humorous 2002 single “The Truck Got Stuck” (*Five Dollar Bill*). In 2005 Lund’s band underwent a change in name and personnel (Bonikowsky 2014). Ciesla remained, but Brady Valgardson officially replaced Vikedal (who joined Nickelback) and Grant Siemens joined on lead guitar (as well as mandolin, dobro, lap steel, baritone and banjo). Now known as the “Hurtin’ Albertans,” Lund and his band released a fourth album, *Hair in My Eyes Like a Highland Steer* (2005). The album earned Lund his only Juno award (Roots and Traditional Album of the Year – Solo) and the Canadian Country Music Association Award for Album of the Year in 2006. Their final album on Stony Plains Records was the concept *Horse Soldier! Horse Soldier* (2007), which explores the role of horse cavalry in military history. In 2009, Lund signed a two-album deal with New West Records, an Austin-based label that includes alt-country artists such as Dwight Yoakam, Steve Earle, Kris Kristofferson, and

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<sup>2</sup> While studying at Grant MacEwan (now MacEwan University), Lund pursued a minor in anthropology and history at the University of Alberta (Louie 2013).

Rodney Crowell. Interestingly, his first American release, *Losin' Lately Gambler* (2009), is teeming with Canadian—specifically *Albertan*—references.

Lund's songwriting reveals a strong influence of place in general, and southern Alberta in particular. While his first five albums are peppered with regional themes, Lund's first album on the Austin-based New West Records is arguably the most evocative of place and regionalism. His last album produced by Stinson, *Losin' Lately Gambler* (2009), explores a variety of regional issues and topics, from weather patterns ("Chinook Wind") to land ownership issues ("Long Gone to Saskatchewan" and "This Is My Prairie") to contrasting notions of urban and rural spaces ("Alberta Says Hello"). Through each of the album's songs, Lund marks out his relationship to, and understanding, of the cultures, traditions, and lifestyles of place. While there are likely several reasons for his focus on Alberta on this album, one factor could be the change in market with his move to the US label. This album marked a kind of "re-introduction" to country music: the songs on this album effectively introduced Lund to a new and wider fan base, people who likely do not have the same knowledge of the singer-songwriter's background and heritage as long-time Canadian fans (and that's not just of the artist himself, but of Albertan culture and traditions as well). For existing fans, this album provided even more insight into Lund's story, and perhaps more intimate detail on family relations. Lund also stepped-up his online presence around this time, and he released a number of written and video blogs about the experiences that influenced specific song narratives. With this album and each blog, Lund reaffirmed his Albertan identity as he shifted into the North American market. His second album on New West Records, *Cabin Fever* (2012), explored a wider variety of themes, but continued to pull from regional imagery both lyrically ("Cows Around" and "September") and visually in music videos ("September" and "Gettin' Down on the Mountain").

More recently, Lund had the opportunity to record some of his more popular songs from *Five Dollar Bill* and *Hair in My Eyes like a Highland Steer* in a live setting at Sun Studios in Memphis, TN. CMT Canada approached Lund and his band to do a special for the television network, and to record some of their songs in the historic studio where Buddy Holly, Elvis Presley, and Johnny Cash had recorded in the 1950s. The band recorded over a two-day period, during which time Lund and the Hurtin' Albertans were interviewed about



their music, the contribution of each band member to the overall sound and arrangement, and reflected on what it was like to record in such a historic location. Initially released as a CMT documentary titled *Corb Lund: Memphis Sun* in December 2013, Lund released *Counterfeit Blues* (2014) via New West Records as a two-disc CD/DVD in June 2014 (see Corb Crew 2014a).

Lund's discography demonstrates a diverse range of influences and styles drawn from the musical sounds of his youth. Indeed, his exposure to such a wide variety of musical styles has had a tremendous impact on his writing and arranging, both stylistically and harmonically. As a result of his childhood hearing old cowboy songs, his jazz music studies, and love of metal and punk music, his own music reveals a stylistic eclecticism rooted in traditional country, but influenced by a variety of styles and genres. As such, he occupies a fascinating space not only within the alt-country subgenre, but within Canadian country music as well. Reflecting on his shift to country music, Lund stated:

After years of that I realized I could pick up a guitar and play those old cowboy songs, and I started writing that stuff. I think doing 10 years in a weirdo underground metal band where you're trying to be as weird as you can, that had an effect on my writing approach (Allen 2014).

While Lund writes all of his own songs, The Hurtin' Albertans play a significant role in arranging his tunes, writing their solos, and shaping his overall alt-country sound, which has been described as a "hybrid of wild rock and wooly western" (Dudley 2011). His style is characterized as a blend of traditional country and cowboy themes with a variety of roots and country styles, including country blues, western swing, rockabilly, honky-tonk, and Bakersfield, but also reveals a punk-rock influence (from his days as a bass player in the speed metal band The Smalls). In addition, his time at Grant MacEwan provided Lund with knowledge of jazz music theory, a musical language that he has turned to throughout his career to infuse his songs with harmonic colours outside of the traditional I-IV-V of country music. Yet Lund's musical style is not only a product of his personal musical tastes; rather, it is the result of a blending of the influences that each of the Hurtin' Albertans brings to the table. Siemens and Lund reflected on this aspect of their stylistic diversity during an interview for the CMT documentary, *Corb Lund: Memphis Sun*:

Siemens: I think the cool thing about it is that clearly we all love particular music and somehow it's our interpretation of what we love through Corb's songs. [...]

Lund: You guys all have an individual, very deep roots in a particular style that isn't necessarily country either. So I think that's helped. Like Brady's kind of a rock guy, and Kurt's a jazz, funk guy, and Grant's a roots guy for sure. Grant and I probably have the closest fundamental musical taste. [...] You end up with an interesting... textural depth that you don't see sometimes (Lund 2014b).

Thus, the blending of all of these musical influences, Lund and his band have forged their own path in the genre, one that is both progressive for its stylistic diversity and traditional in its nod to styles, bands and themes ingrained in the genre's history.

One of the ways in which Lund and the Hurtin' Albertans have defined a unique sound for the singer-songwriter's music is through the instrumental arrangement of Ciesla on upright bass, Siemens on lead guitar(s), and Valgardson on the drums. Perhaps one of the most prominent features of his music is the use of upright bass instead of the more modern electric bass. While upright bass is not frequently used in contemporary country music, the instrument is an integral component of the styles that Lund draws from (western swing, rockabilly, honky-tonk) and harkens back to the rockabilly bands of the 1950s and 1960s such as Johnny Cash and the Tennessee Three, Buddy Holly and The Crickets, and especially his favourite artist Marty Robbins, whose albums featured Grady Martin and Jack Pruett on guitar, Bob Moore on upright bass, and Louis Dunn on drums.<sup>3</sup> Beyond this traditional instrument arrangement, Siemens has reflected on their "real," "honest," and "organic" sound that harkens back to these very musicians. In the *Memphis Sun* special, he used his own instrumental practice to support this definition: "I don't use pedals, I plug into my amp. We do things how they used to do them. I sometimes feel like we're one of the few bands still doing that. It's kind of a lost art form. People rely on things nowadays (Lund 2014b). Thus, even though their music displays a certain progressive tone, the general roots style and instrumentation reveals the singer-songwriter's (and his band's) neo-traditionalist tendencies, which are further underscored by Lund's lyrical focus on local regional themes and issues, allowing him to capture the sound of particular regions or

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<sup>3</sup> Lund has repeatedly indicated that Robbins' 1959 album *Gunfighter Ballads and Trail Songs* is his all-time favorite record and has been a seminal influence on his music and style. He has even recorded in Robbins' old studio (Inman 2009).

environments, as well as the conflicting emotions and tensions in each topic addressed in his music.

In the current landscape of Canadian country music, Lund stands out as an artist strongly connected to place and the culture and traditions of his rural Alberta origins. He is often referred to as the “new [Ian] Tyson,” and highly regarded as an artist keeping the western cowboy tradition alive and bringing Alberta’s vibrant history to life in his music (Phillips 2011, 43). And indeed Tyson has been an important influence on the singer-songwriter: although their styles are quite different, Lund states that Tyson “made it acceptable to refer to Canadian places in song. It’s easy to put Houston, Nashville or New York City into a song, but it’s tricky to put in Moose Jaw. Ian was the first guy I listened to that used our regional references in a tasteful way” (Dudley 2011). His discography is devoid of traditional country love ballads, and is shaped instead by personal experiences, family ranching and rodeo stories, humorous tales about life in rural southern Alberta, and the province’s rich cultural heritage. When asked to reflect on Lund’s strength as a songwriter, long-time bassist Ciesla stated: “I think it’s the sincerity behind the songs. He writes what he knows about, and what he cares about. He’s not trying to pander to any specific audience” (Lund 2014b). While he is known for his sarcastic, witty lyrics, Lund has also addressed a number of serious and controversial topics including local conservation issues as a result of urban sprawl (“The Truth Comes Out,” *Hair in My Eyes like a Highland Steer* [2005]), the negative destructive impact of the fossil fuel energy industry (“This is My Prairie,” *Losin’ Lately Gambler* [2009]), the effect of the weather phenomenon called a “Chinook” on ranching (“Chinook Wind,” *Losin’ Lately Gambler* [2009]), and even the devastating floods of 2013 that destroyed the Calgary Stampede grounds and surrounding rural communities (“Blood, Sweat and Water” [2013]).<sup>4</sup> While Lund is certainly not the only Canadian country artist to write such geographically centered songs (Ian Tyson, Wilf Carter, Gordon Lightfoot, Paul Brandt, Tim Hus, and Dave McCann, to name a few, have also written about place), he is one of the only current artists to dedicate his career to writing songs about the traditions, culture, politics, and environment of his rural Albertan origins.

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<sup>4</sup> “Blood, Sweat and Water” was released as an iTunes single download (Corb Crew, 12 July 2013).

## **0.2 Presentation of the Research Project**

Like many country singers, “place” and “space” remain critical themes in Lund’s music, as his songs explore life, work, and environment on the Canadian prairies. Over the span of his seventeen-year career as an alternative country artist, Lund has continually turned to aspects of Alberta’s heritage, culture, politics, landscape and environment to inform his songwriting. While his discography is replete with both nostalgic and rough and tumbling cowboy songs about his beloved prairie landscape and the characters that have touched his life, his music also reveal the tensions that exist between rural and urban spaces. “My whole life,” he says, “is sort of a dichotomy between being a cowboy kid and living in the city. I guess that informs my music too” (Lund 2012a). Lund’s songs draw on iconic imagery of both the country and the city, presenting diverse conceptions of these spaces. His songs have not only become powerful vehicle for social commentary and the conflicts between urban and rural values, but they have also become an essential part of his artistic identity.

Yet music is not the only avenue through which Lund expresses his ties to Albertan land and heritage. Over the last decade he has become a frequent blogger (both written and video), sharing stories about his youth and family that have influenced his music. He proudly proclaims his love of his prairie homeland in these blogs, as well as in interviews, music videos, and, most recently, in a museum exhibition. As the 2013 Artist-in-Residence with Calgary’s Glenbow Museum, Lund was invited to curate an exhibition based on his music and Albertan heritage (Glenbow Museum 2015). The “No Roads Here” exhibition ran from 26 January to 28 April 2013, using songs from four of his albums to tell stories about Alberta’s history, tracing his family’s story into that narrative. As the introductory plaque to the exhibition stated, “I feel very strongly rooted in Alberta and in Western life. I guess it goes back a long way. Song by song, I’ve tried with this exhibition to capture the spirit of my ancestors and my pride in being from this part of the world” (Lund 2013c). The exhibition drew on his personal experiences of growing up on a ranch in southern Alberta and family history in the province, and featured images and artefacts from his family archive (as well as the museum archive). Each exhibit revealed a piece of Albertan heritage, as related to paternal (Lund) and maternal (Ivins) family histories in the province, and

covered a range of topics from veterinary medicine (“Horse Doctor, Come Quick,” 2009), prohibition and boot legging (“Five Dollar Bill,” 2002), gambling (“A Game in Town Like This,” 2009), rodeo (“Buckin’ Horse Rider,” 2002), ranch life (“Little Foothills Heaven,” 2002), the energy industry (“Roughest Neck Around,” 2002), and natural conservation issues (“The Truth Comes Out,” [2005]).<sup>5</sup> Of particular interest is how the exhibit highlights his family’s role in these areas, with special emphasis on their prominence in Alberta’s rodeo history. Both the Lunds and Ivins families have played an integral role in the Calgary Stampede and rodeo: his grandfather Clark Lund, father D.C. Lund and several other relatives have been inducted into the Canadian Professional Rodeo Hall of Fame. His mother Patty Lund (born Ivins) was also named a Pioneer of the Calgary Stampede for having won the Ladies Barrel Racing competition in its first year as an event (1959), and his uncle Lynn Jensen was a prominent local rodeo coach for several years. Lund has also performed at local fundraisers, bringing attention to important regional issues (discussed throughout the dissertation). Through each of these avenues, Lund demonstrates his knowledge of and love for his home province, further solidifying his geographic roots and cultural identity as a staunchly Albertan singer-songwriter.

Taking an interdisciplinary approach, this dissertation will address the ways in which Corb Lund uses music to define his artistic identity as being uniquely Western Canadian, and Albertan in particular, and examine the themes and issues that emerge in his songs. The term that will be used to describe this element of Lund’s *persona* is “geo-cultural” identity, a term drawn from a new study in the political sciences that captures the essence of place and regional culture within his artistic identity (Talukder 2013). Influenced largely by the growing field of ecomusicology, an interdisciplinary field that draws from ecocriticism and cultural and human geography, the dissertation will interrogate the ways in which Lund’s music describes life, work and nature on the Canadian prairies, as well as the socio-political, cultural, and geographic issues that help define specific places and geographic spaces or territories. Integral to this study will be the role that the *music* plays in such complex narratives. Drawing on the scholarship of the late Adam Krims (2007) and Travis Stimeling (2012), I am interested in how musical codes and conventions are used as

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<sup>5</sup> Both the Lunds and the Ivins (his maternal lineage) moved to Alberta from Utah and Nevada at the turn of the twentieth century to build homesteads in southern Alberta (Lund 2013c).

a method of marking out place, not just as a way of characterizing a geographic space, but also supporting, contradicting and critiquing aspects of environment. The analyses will consider the relationship between the musical setting and the song text, but will extend this discussion to include vocal performance, recording strategies, and even music video, to consider the role that Lund's performance and visual representation of his narratives plays in his song narratives. The larger questions being asked here will consider how Lund turns to songwriting to construct elements of his artistic identity. To interrogate the role that such place songs have in an artist's identity, I will draw from Richard Peterson (1997) and Pamela Fox's (2009) work on natural or authentic identities, which emphasizes the importance of tradition, geographic origins/roots, and elements of rusticity in one's artistic identity. To this end, I am interested in how Lund's music and discourse functions as a pseudo-documentary for the singer-songwriter, highlighting the "real" elements of his modern cowboy identity.

### **0.3 Literature Review**

#### *0.3.1 Country Music Literature*

While it is clear that place assumes a significant role in defining the genre and its artists, country music literature has only hinted at its importance and has yet to really delve into issues related to region and identity. The seminal history of the genre remains Bill Malone's monograph *Country Music USA*, which outlines the origins of the genre from its folk roots in the rural south of the USA to the emergence of the genre we now know to be "country" music (Malone 2002).<sup>6</sup> While the author illuminates the various shifts that have taken place with the emergence of new substyles and the rise of new, influential artists, he merely hints at the role that place plays in defining the genre's artists. More recently, however, Patrick Huber has revealed that both *urban* factory communities in the south and New York City studio singers and musicians played a significant role in the creation of country (or "hillbilly") music (Huber 2008, 2014). Malone (2006) and Aaron Fox (2004)

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<sup>6</sup> Jocelyn Neal revised and updated Malone's monograph in 2010, with a new chapter that outlines the developments in the industry since the events of 9 September 2011.

have contributed to literature considering country music and working class traditions and the sociological surroundings of the genre, focusing predominantly on southern rural culture and traditions. The literature also focuses on particular “places” that have been important sites in which country music scenes have emerged, such as Nashville, TN (Pecknold 2007; Peterson 1997), Austin, TX (Shank 1994; Stimeling 2011), Bakersfield, CA (Ching 2008), and Chicago, IL (Berry 2008).<sup>7</sup>

The role of places in defining an artist’s identity or *persona* has also been largely overlooked in country music literature. Curtis Ellison’s 1995 monograph *Country Music Culture* examines the core traditions of the genre over a seventy-year period, demonstrating a number of key elements that contribute to the success of the genre. Most importantly, his study illuminates the importance of lyrical themes of domestic turmoil and spiritual salvation, and the general quality of appearing to fans as “real” people who portray elements of their daily lives in their music. Told largely through a first-person narrative, drawing sparingly from scholarly histories and fan publications, Ellison’s monograph highlights an integral component to questions of country music *persona*, that of “authenticity” and the perception that fans are privy to the “real” characteristics of a country musician’s identity. This idea is brilliantly explored in Richard Peterson’s groundbreaking study *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity* (1997, 205-09), the first monograph to fully interrogate the notion of “authenticity” in country music. Peterson defines the characteristics of “authenticity” as being real and credible, as opposed to fake and imitative. He also stresses the importance of acting naturally and drawing on country’s traditions.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps most important to the discussion of authenticity or establishing an identity is Pamela Fox’s *Natural Acts* (2009), which argues that, despite changes in sound and image, country musicians have maintained elements of rusticity as well as connections to working-class culture by continually stressing their humble origins. In so doing, they establish a more “natural” identity, but more importantly, an identity to

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<sup>7</sup> Many of these places are also culturally significant for the genre, as the home of important country music institutions, including the Grand Ole Opry and Music Row in Nashville, Austin City Limits in Austin, and Dollywood in Pigeon Forge.

<sup>8</sup> Diane Pecknold’s monograph *The Selling Sound* (2007) offers a close reading of the relationship between commercialism and “authenticity” in country music, looking how the industry has capitalized on the perceived sincerity and realism of country musicians.

which fans can relate.<sup>9</sup> It is my contention that place plays a much more integral role in establishing such “natural” identities in country music, and that these relationships are affirmed, challenged, and reconstructed through lyrics, music, interviews, and even music videos. I first addressed the role that place plays in establishing an artistic identity in a conference paper presented at the Canadian Branch of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music (May 2013), which considered the musical and lyrical ways in which Dolly Parton invoked the sights and sounds of her rural Appalachia origins on *My Tennessee Mountain Home* (1973) after years of living in Nashville, TN. This dissertation seeks to fill the gap in country music literature to address the role that place plays in constructing such “real” and “natural” identities.

In addition to existing studies on country music, the literature that has influenced this project stems from the fields of cultural and human geography, rap and hip-hop studies, and from the new field of ecomusicology. Scholarship from these fields has delved into issues surrounding how music is used to describe and reflect elements of rural and urban spaces. Cultural and human geographers have turned to popular music in their exploration of how lyrical narratives play a role in shaping our notion of a particular place, and challenging established social and political structures. Both rap and hip-hop studies and ecomusicology have drawn on cultural geographic discourse in the pursuit of deeper explorations of musical representations of place and the relationship between an individual and his/her geographic community. While a majority of the ecomusicological literature to date has considered *classical music* representations of, or responses to place, the tools that have been developed for examining the relationship between composer and place are equally transferable to a popular music context. This transferability has already been demonstrated in my work on Butch Hancock (2011), as well as in Travis Stimeling’s (2012) research on musical responses to mountain top removal mining in the Appalachia. These articles will be discussed in the literature and theoretical framework sections below.

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<sup>9</sup> The discussion about a perceived “naturalness” also emerges in literature addressing issues such as gender, politics and style. Scholars have increasingly turned to issues relating to identity, gender and sexuality—especially with regard to shifting expectations on men and women within the country industry (Burns and Watson 2010; Pecknold and McCusker 2004; Wolfe and Akenson 2003). Barbara Ching’s *Wrong’s What I Do Best* (2008) studies hard country music and addresses issues related to masculinity, whiteness, and alternative country traditions.



### *0.3.2 Cultural and Human Geography*

In the mid-1970s, cultural and human geographers turned toward popular music for their inquiries into how artists define and respond to place and community. These discourses have focused on broader social relations and trends, “including identity, ethnicity, attachment to place, cultural economies, social activism, and politics” (Johansson and Bell 2009, 2). Early cultural geographic discourses initially explored the relationship between music and place through a mapping of regional styles and sounds (Carney 1974a, 1979, 1980a, 1998). Since the 1990s, cultural geographic studies have turned increasingly toward questions considering issues of regional and national identity. Scholars like Gill (1993) and Hudson (2006) have demonstrated that stylistic sounds and lyrical narratives often emerge as a response to local conditions and social tensions. Leyshon, Matless and Revill (1998), McLeay (1997), and Smith (1994) have focused on the ways in which popular music serves to express ideas of national identity. McLeay’s (1997, 12-13) article, in particular, demonstrates how popular music can “offer a critical commentary on dominant meanings of national identity and expressions of patriotism.” Focusing in Bruce Springsteen’s “Born in the USA,” the author shows how the song was first appropriated by Democratic and Republican candidates in the 1984 presidential election, while also functioning as a patriotic hymn for individuals in American society that maintain anti-establishment values (McLeay 1997, 15). In this way, McLeay considers the context of a song and the ways in which its message appeals to a variety of audiences depending on the viewpoint of the individual appropriating the song (and perhaps even the time in which the song is being used). Popular songs, as his article demonstrates, can quite often communicate complex and often contradictory messages about national identity that shifts through time and space.

Not surprisingly, country music has been a popular topic of inquiry amongst cultural geographers. This scholarship has focused on mapping and diffusion of musical styles and substyles (Carney 1974a, 1979, 1980a), defining country scenes (Carney 1979), examining the role of radio in diffusion (Carney 1974b, 1977; Lehr 1983); and surveyed lyrical themes (Thorpe 1970; Woods and Gritzner 1990). Woods and Gritzner’s (1990) article, in particular, considers the dichotomization of time and space into distinct realms of the sacred and profane, or rural and urban spaces. The most influential study from this field is

that of Blake Gumprecht (1998), who addresses the importance of the *sound* of music in place-based songs. His article looks at the music of artists from West Texas, revealing how they have captured the county's soundscape in their music, and how artists like Joe Ely, Butch Hancock, and Terry Allen create strong images of place through galloping rhythms, lonesome wails of the steel guitar, and gravely vocal warble (Gumprecht 1998, 68-77). With the exception of Gumprecht's article, the primary point of entry into popular music has been through song lyrics, and the ways in which words describe or construct images of place and shifting national and cultural identities, overlooking the powerful role that the music (both vocal performance and accompaniment) plays in communicating cultural messages.

The obvious lacuna in cultural geographic discourses is the absence of a true consideration of music's role in place-based song narratives. The consensus among cultural and human geographers is that sound plays an integral role in defining place, yet, with the exception of Gumprecht, scholars from this field base their analyses solely on lyrical narratives. Of course, it is not surprising that music would be overlooked in cultural geographic analyses (seeing as how such analytic observations often require a background in music theory), but this demonstrates that room remains for musicologists to enter into the discussion and examine the role that a musical setting plays in such narratives. And while issues of regional identity have been addressed, it seems that most authors have overlooked the role of music in constructing an artist's identity. Much of this literature demonstrates popular music's power in defining the character and identity of *place*, leading me to the following question: what do these songs reveal about an *artist*? In a genre like country music where place has been so integral to an artist's story, the next logical step for discussion is the role of place-based song narratives in aiding an artist construct and negotiate elements of their identity.

### **0.3.3** *Rap and Hip-Hop Studies*

Like country music, rap and hip-hop is a genre with strong ties to specific geographic locations. Not only are its origins (in the South Bronx) routinely stressed in literature and in

song, but artists seem to continually cement their music, career, and identity within the framework and cultural context of its various scenes (notably in New York and Los Angeles). In *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity* (2000), the late Adam Krims demonstrates how cultural identities are encoded in rap and hip-hop songs. Perhaps most importantly, he seeks to explain how geographically-defined identities are formed in rap and hip-hop as it spread to other urban environments in the USA. Through the example of Atlanta-based Goodie MoB, Krims (2000, 150-51) acknowledges the crucial component of geography in interpreting the artist's style. In particular, he argues that their softer beats, live-instrumentation, and singing in the chorus are an "index" of Southern authenticity. This appropriation of different sounds and styles demonstrates not just an effort to establish not just independence from New York, but also a regionally-centered cultural identity. Although those outside of the New York center may lack "linkages" to the genre's origins (whether stylistically or in a network of peers), they project a local authenticity. Krims's work on rap and the poetics of cultural identity formed a foundation for his later work in *Music in Urban Geography* (2007), which further theorizes the ways in which artists (of all genres) incorporate specific musical codes and conventions to highlight particular relationships to place. This work will be addressed in greater detail in section *1.1.6 Music and Space/Place*.

Murray Forman's work on rap and hip-hop offers a nuanced approach to examining geographic references in song. In *The 'Hood Comes First: Race, Space, and Place in Rap and Hip-Hop* (2002), Forman explores the geo-cultural and spatial origins of the genre's development (chapter 1), and then offers analyses of the evolution of spatial discourse within rap and hip-hop culture, contextualizing these discussions within the framework of social and cultural issues. Of particular importance for this dissertation, is his focus on (what he calls) the "extreme local" in rap and hip-hop songs (Forman 2002, xvii). His introductory analysis of Will Smith's "Freakin' It" (2000) offers an excellent example of this concept and the recurrence of place references in rap lyrics and video. Already a "megastar of music, television, and film fame," Smith's song works to connect the rapper lyrically and visually with his hometown of Philadelphia, PA. Forman (2002, xxi) notes that the video in particular functions as a "travelogue" of Philly neighbourhoods and important architectural and cultural landmarks. He acknowledges the video's low-budget

production values as a method by which Smith further reinforces the scenery and urban terrain that constitute his “home.” In so doing, Forman reveals the cultural and geographic environment that informs Smith, linking the celebrity not just to a city, but also to specific locales and institutions within that city.

The ideas presented in Krims’ and Foreman’s work are particularly relevant in a study considering country music and place. Like rap and hip-hop, many of country’s styles are strongly associated with particular geographic and cultural regions. The use of these musical codes and conventions to support place-based narratives articulate various types of relationships to place, including an artist’s acknowledgement of his/her attachment to the homeplace, a redefinition of his/her position within a specific community, and even a rejection of place. Forman’s work in particular, provides an important framework for considering extreme localized narratives. Especially relevant to the current study is the notion that markers of identity (class, gender, race, etc.) can be mapped through geographic and cultural affiliation in a lyrical or video narrative.

#### *0.3.4 Ecomusicology*

Over the past decade musicologists have turned their attention to geographic issues in both Western classical and popular music, examining music as it relates to the ecology of place and environmental issues. Christened “ecomusicology,” this interdisciplinary subfield of musicology “considers the relationships of music, culture and nature; [...] it is the study of musical and sonic issues, both textual and performative, as they relate to ecology and environment” (Allen 2001, 392). Following the pioneering work of Canadian composer R. Murray Schafer (1969; 1977; 2004) and Barry Truax (1974) among others, ecomusicological studies lie at the intersections of musicology, cultural geography, and ecocriticism to study this complex relationship between music and the physical environment. Motivated by his distaste for noise pollution in Vancouver, Schafer established *The World Soundscape Project* in the 1960s and 1970s at Simon Fraser University. Joined by a group of young composers and students, including Bruce Davis, Peter Huse, Barry Truax, Schafer sought to bring awareness to the city’s rapidly changing soundscape of

Vancouver and other Canadian cities through location recordings and environmental advocacy.

With a similar interest in the world's changing environment, ecocriticism emerged over the course of the 1980s and 1990s by scholars who sought a greater presence for environmental issues in literary disciplines (Waage 1985, viii). In her ground-breaking *Ecocriticism Reader*, editor Cheryll Glotfelty (1996, xviii) stated: "Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature for a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies." She follows this definition with a list of the types of questions that ecocritics and theorists think about "place" in their analyses literary works. Amidst questions concerning the representation of nature in literature, the role of a physical setting in a literary work, or the values and metaphors used to characterize nature, the author posits a provocative and important question (Glotfelty 1996, xix): "In addition to race, class, and gender, should *place* become a new critical category?" Although seemingly buried in the middle of her list of questions, Glotfelty points to an integral belief within ecocriticism, and indeed within this dissertation, that individuals are inherently influenced by place and environment in a similar manner to gender, sexuality, race, and class. This perspective elevates the role of place in shaping an individual or community's identity, acknowledging its significant contribution to shaping the ways in which humans see, understand, define, and engage with the physical environment. As Glotfelty (1996, xix) states "ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it." Thus, an individual's articulation of place can occur both consciously and *unconsciously*, demonstrating the importance of place within the "sense of self" or state of "being" in the world.

Ecomusicological studies have demonstrated that musical works have the ability not just to evoke the soundscapes of both natural (rural) and urban landscapes, but that they are also a catalyst for new conceptions of nature and place (Stimeling 2012, 2). While a majority of the literature published to date considers music of the "high-art tradition," musical analyses stemming from this field have demonstrated how musical works have the

ability to evoke the soundscapes of both natural (or rural) and urban landscapes. In the first large-scale ecomusicological study, *The Sounds of Place* (2003), Denise von Glahn does not simply track correspondences between topographical details of places to musical gestures, but rather, she considers what each classical composition reveals about the character and identity of place. Important in her study are questions that consider the composer's relationship to the place that influenced composition; what he/she considers the source of inspiration for the composition, how the composer related to place, and the compositional techniques employed to capture or connote place or environment. Whether one is studying music of the "high-art tradition," as Von Glahn, or of the popular tradition, instrumentation and musical gestures can be used as a method of evoking elements of place and landscape, or providing environmental context captured in the song lyrics.

Since the publication of this seminal monograph musicologists have had an increasing interest in the relationship between music, humanity, and the environment. In 2011, the *Journal of the American Musicological Society* published a special colloquy on ecomusicological research, featuring articles by scholars in this subfield of musicology. Following Van Glahn's lead, Daniel Grimley's article in this colloquy demonstrates the ways in which dissonance, octatonic scales, and tremolos in Jean Sibelius' tone poem *Tapiola* represent "a landscape of failed territorial conquest" (Grimley 2011, 398). Throughout his article, the author emphasizes the importance of "attunement" and the process of attuning one's ears to the acoustic environment, and, by extension musical soundscapes. Also influenced by Van Glahn's work, my own study of Butch Hancock's 1978 album *West Texas Waltzes and Dust-blown Tractor Tunes* reveals the ways in which the artist evoked Lubbock's landscape in songs about dry land farming. In this short article, I demonstrate the ways in which Hancock's vocal performance and the musical accompaniment supports and indeed enhances the lyrical narratives. I used spectrograms of the vocal performance to demonstrate not just Hancock's "evocation of Lubbock's rural landscape," but rather how the artist's songs reveal the musical means by which he negotiates the complex relationship between artist and region, or a farmer and his land (Watson 2011, 17). This study shows us how music can function for some artists as a way in which they can negotiate identity and place in society through geographic themes. In his groundbreaking article on musical responses to Central Appalachian mountain-top removal

mining, Travis Stimeling (2012) offers a critical framework for the ways in which ecomusicologists can interrogate the complex relationship between local country artists and place. In particular, he provides useful tools for examining how proponents and opponents use their music to engage in public debate (discussed further in section 1.1.6 Music and Space/Place).

While Catherine Lefrançois may not necessarily call herself an ecomusicologist, part of her dissertation from Université Laval on expressions of modernity in 1950s Québécois country music (Lefrançois 2011) certainly fits within the realm of ecomusicological studies. Drawing on the work of Peter Doyle (2004), chapter 4 considers the role that technology plays in creating and defining space in studio recordings. In her analysis of country-western recordings, Lefrançois expertly demonstrates how vocal and technological effects create a sense of intimacy (2011, 239-40). Particularly interesting is her discussion of reverberation and the ways in which recording strategies can recreate the acoustic characteristics of other spaces than that of the studio: for example, reverberation can be used to denote large natural spaces like plains or mountains (2011, 245). In her analysis of Paul Brunelle's "Le train qui siffle" (2011, 244-47), she demonstrates how variations in technological and vocal parameters allow the singer and recording engineer to play with the sense of space through a contrast in recording strategies in the verses and the refrains. Such a technique does not just establish intimacy between the singer and listener, but also creates a sense of two distinct physical spaces, and two distinct emotional spaces.

Ecomusicological literature takes an important step toward filling a gap in discourses on the relationship between place and music, that of the role of *music* in defining identity and place, but there is still a gap in the literature where popular music is concerned. Much of this literature to date focuses on works of the "high art" tradition, leaving much room for growth in the area of popular music studies and the exploration of how vocal qualities, musical accompaniment and recording techniques create and define spaces. As with cultural geographic discourses, there remains room to explore the role that place-based narratives play in defining not just place, but also an artist's own identity.

## 0.4 Objectives and Research Questions

The goal of this dissertation is to consider the role that music plays in constructing artistic identities. More specifically, I am interested in how “place” themes are invoked in country music narratives as a way of constructing what I will call a “geo-cultural” identity, and how such themes are used to share elements of one’s character, values and beliefs.<sup>10</sup> The term “geo-cultural” identity is adapted from new research in the political sciences that focuses on defining identity through geographic and cultural associations (discussed further below). In order to look at a variety of ways in which country musicians negotiate themes of identity, I will analyze the music, publicity, and music videos of Canadian alternative country artist, Corb Lund. Each chapter focuses on a different theme related to a specific place (Alberta, Canada), and will open with an examination of how country artists have explored these topics in their own music, providing genre context for the discussion of Lund’s music. While this project certainly could have been focused on country music in general, focusing on the music of *one* country artist will enable me to consider the *range* of place-based themes that emerge in an artist’s discography. Thus, rather than surveying a genre, I am afforded the opportunity to conduct a thorough investigation of these themes, how the artist relates to these themes through song, and, in the end, what his music says both about place and about himself. I am interested in how this one country artist uses music to shape and define the character and identity of his Albertan homeland, and how these narratives contribute to the construction of his own artistic identity. The research questions that I seek to answer are the following:

- 1) What geographic themes emerge in his music?
- 2) What do Lund’s song narratives reveal about his relation to place?
- 3) What does the musical setting reveal about the lyrical narrative? Does the setting enhance, support, contradict, or even critique the lyrical narrative?
- 4) What do these narratives reveal about the artist’s identity? How do Lund’s music, publicity, and music videos contribute to the construction of his geo-cultural identity?

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<sup>10</sup> The term “construction” is drawn from cultural geographic discourse, which argues that landscapes are *socially constructed* images, which, in turn, play a role in creating (or *constructing*) local/regional identities. See Feld and Basso’s edited volume, *Senses of Place* (1997) and Tuan’s monograph, *Topophilia* (1974).



5) How do Lund's place-based narratives fit in the larger context of the country music genre?

These questions will enable me to work toward interrogating the role that music plays in shaping an artist's identity and question how country artists construct *personalized* conceptions of place. To this end, I will be able to theorize a relationship that has not yet been explored with regard to country (and indeed popular) music identities.



## **Chapter 1. Theory and Method**

An interdisciplinary project, this dissertation will draw on the fields of popular (and country) music studies, cultural geography, political sciences, and ecomusicology in order to explore how musical responses to place contribute to the definition of both geographic region and artistic identity. For a study of this nature, which seeks to fully explore the range of issues relevant to an artist's place-based identity, it will be important to consider the multiple layers of signification surrounding a singer-songwriter/musician including genre, levels of artistic identity, and geographic-cultural ("geo-cultural") association. Each of these layers is imperative, as they enable us to understand the context in which a singer-songwriter exists—from the musical and cultural codes and conventions of the country music genre to the complex layering of self-representation in song lyrics, videos, and performance, and to the ways in which an individual understands and relates to the heritage and culture of their origins. In order to achieve this goal, I will analyze not just the lyrical and musical message of Lund's songs, but also the career and socio-cultural contexts in which they were composed. I will place each song within its historical and cultural (and indeed its geographic) context. To do so, literature on Alberta in general, and prairie, ranching and rodeo life in particular, will be integral as I seek to frame the songs within their socio-cultural and historical contexts. Ecomusicological research is grounded in the theoretical discourse of cultural geography, notably in the concept of "sense of place," which accounts for the bonds and feelings of attachments that individuals and/or communities feel about a particular place and its landscape and environment. While cultural geographers have considered the ways in which popular musicians used their songs to describe and define complex regional and national landscapes, ecomusicology explores the ways in which a song's musical setting contributes to the lyrical message. The ecomusicological perspective will enable me to investigate the ties between music and

environment, to consider the ways in which Lund’s music captures and defines Alberta and its heritage, while also defining elements of the singer-songwriter’s identity. The conclusion will synthesize my analyses according to this three-part perspective of genre, artistic identity, and “geo-cultural” association.

## **1.1 Theoretical Framework**

### *1.1.1 Genre*

The concept of genre is important to this study, as it will allow me to frame discussion of Lund’s music within a larger musical community and context. As Fabian Holt (2007, 2) has observed, “at a basic level, genre is a type of category that refers to a particular kind of music within a distinctive cultural web of production, circulation, and signification.” Thus, in addition to the musical (harmony, melody, instrumentation) and lyrical traditions that have come to define the sound of country music, the genre is also associated with particular cultural values, rituals, practices, territories (geo-cultural spaces), and traditions. Furthermore, the genre’s thematic content shapes human experience through “recurrent topics of discourse” (Frow 2005, 75). Within the discourse of country music’s social space, these topics are further demarcated by the traditions that define the subgenres or styles, including country-pop, alt-country, honky-tonk, etc. Each of these subgenres has its own set of codes and conventions, including elements such as instrument combinations, recording and/or performance styles, and lyrical themes that define the community of musicians working in these spaces.<sup>1</sup> These stylistic features, combined with issues relating to songwriting style and an artist’s origins, often play a larger role in an audience perceiving an artist’s identity or “voice” as authentic or artificial.

Defining musical style is often a challenging issue in popular music studies, as an artist’s style rarely fits within the boundaries of one style (or even genre). Mark Spicer (2010, 124) has recently put forth an argument for “stylistic *eclecticism*,” which provides greater freedom for analysts discussing genre and style of an artist whose music does not fit

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<sup>1</sup> While artists working in these subgenre cultural spaces live and work in a variety of locations today, each is associated with a specific geographic region: country-pop in Nashville, TN; alt-country in Austin, TX; honky-tonk in Bakersfield, CA; and bluegrass in the Appalachia region (Virginia, Kentucky, the Carolinas).

neatly into one style box. Drawing on Leonard Ratner's (1980) theory of style topics to define the eclectic musical language of the Police, his analyses demonstrate that the band's music cannot simply be described as "white reggae," but rather as an integration of various styles (or style topics) drawn from a range of musical influences.<sup>2</sup> Spicer's observations on style are particularly relevant in discussions of country music, especially artists working within the context of alt-country, a subgeneric space in which artists pull not just from various country styles, but also from styles outside of country music. Alt-country, as defined in *Oxford Music Online* (2015), exists outside of the genre's mainstream and blends traditional country music with elements of punk, rock, and roots music influences. Lund's alt-country musical language is a perfect example of this definition, as he and his band draw heavily on a variety of musical styles, including traditional country, western swing, rockabilly, honky-tonk, and even punk-rock. Spicer's work provides a framework for considering the diverse musical language of an artist in order to better define the space in which he/she occupies in a genre.

With a genre like country music, comprised of such diverse musical styles and voices, it is important to contextualize artists within their cultural spaces in order to better understand their perspectives on, and relationships to, place. The late Richard Peterson's (1997) work on country music authenticity offers critical observations on this aspect. Peterson adopted the terms "hard core" and "soft shell" to define two broader cultural spaces within country music. Hard country, Peterson (1997, 150) notes, "represents the authentic tradition of the music called country [...] for those steeped in the tradition." Subgenres such as alt-country, honky-tonk, Americana, and other roots styles fit into his definition of hard core, and include such artists as Fiddlin' John Carson, Hank Williams, Ernest Tubb, Loretta Lynn, Randy Travis, Merle Haggard, Willie Nelson, and Corb Lund. Soft shell, on the other hand, "melds country with pop music to make it enjoyable by the much larger numbers of those not born into or knowledgeable about country music" (Peterson 1997, 150). Music of the Nashville Sound era and contemporary country-pop artists operate within this sphere, and includes artists such as Patsy Cline, Eddy Arnold,

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<sup>2</sup> Spicer also adapts Kofi Agawu's concept of the "universe of topics" (from *Playing with Signs* [1991]), creating an intricate "universe of style" in which reggae occupies the central planet position surrounded by nine other musical styles that influenced the Police (2010, 126-27).

Kenny Rogers, Shania Twain, and the more current Lady Antebellum, Carrie Underwood, or Taylor Swift. Although both categories contain several subgenres (leaving room for overlap or cross over), the terms *hard core* and *soft shell* capture the general differences in performance style (rough/ragged versus smooth/harmonious), an artist's speech (accents/white Southern grammar versus standard grammar), singing style (untrained/nasal voice versus trained/full tones), and recording practices (lo-fi versus hi-fi) (Peterson 1997, 150-55). Perhaps more important, however, are Peterson's observations on lyrics, songwriting, and origins, three topics that are particularly relevant to this project.

Within the realm of lyrics and songwriting, Peterson's observations about soft shell and hard core artists highlight the contrasting levels of intimacy or specificity with regard to the lyrical narratives. According to his work, artists operating within the sphere of soft shell have been less likely to write their own songs, but instead select songs written by professional songwriters. While this is certainly true of many artists, this does not account for the increasing number of soft shell artists who co-write much of their material with professional songwriters.<sup>3</sup> Regardless, he points to a long tradition of the more mainstream artists relying on songs written by others for their albums. As a result, their lyrics tend to focus on either a "general situation or [a] specific situation stated in general terms," songs that Peterson (1997, 151) says "fit their media persona as this changes with the musical fashion". Perhaps because their audiences are larger and more diverse, these artists tend to record songs that appeal to the masses, in a way that does not alienate a segment of their audience. Hard core artists, however, tend to be singer-songwriters themselves, who write about their own real or imagined life experiences (or write songs tailored for others). As a result, for those who fall into the category of artists writing their own material, lyrics tend to involve concrete situations and use simple vocabulary. References, Peterson (1997, 151) states, tend to be "concrete and evoke specific personal experiences [...] that express a wide range of emotions, and these change with their own life experiences." Thus, for these artists, whether a song appeals to the masses or a particular audience, their songs

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<sup>3</sup> Some current examples of "soft shell" artists who write or co-write songs with professional songwriters include the members of Lady Antebellum (Hillary Scott, Charles Kelley and Dave Haywood), Carrie Underwood, Luke Bryan and Blake Shelton (to name a few).

communicate simple yet detailed/specific stories—often offering critical commentary on specific and current topics.

An artist's origins play a significant role in this discussion, not just with regard to potential influence on lyrical narratives, but also with regard to a more elaborate artistic identity (or *persona*). It is my contention that an artist's origins (the actual place) play an important role in defining identity, and that many artists use place-based song narratives as a way of unveiling these core elements. Peterson (1997, 152) notes that soft shell artists tend not to stress their origins, but instead speak of a "conversion experience to a country way of life." Conversely, those who actually grew up in the country tend to highlight "how far they have come from their youth of rural poverty." Thus, whether real or imagined, soft shell artists seek to define a connection to rural communities in a way that seems to highlight a respect for the lifestyle while maintaining distance from the actual cultures and traditions of country living. Hard core artists, on the other hand, strongly stress their origins as rural: "South, Southwest, farm or ranch [...] humble beginnings, little education (education downplayed), or from a family of musicians" (Peterson 1997, 152). Pamela Fox (2009, 114) echoes this observation in her work, arguing that country musicians refer to their origins in an act of "authentic sincerity." The published celebrity autobiography (and even autobiographical song narrative or interviews) affords artists the opportunity to abandon performative guises in order to honour their "working-class roots in (some variant of) the mythic rural past" (Fox 2009, 115). While autobiographical narratives often reflect nostalgically on a simpler way of life, they also reveal the hardships of rural living at a specific time and place, and reflect on issues concerning class marginality of the poor. This relationship is integral to understanding Lund's music, as the singer-songwriter continually pulls on the culture and traditions of his rural origins, despite not having lived in rural Alberta for nearly two decades.

Each of the elements that Peterson uses to define hard core and soft shell artists plays an important role in the discussion of a musician's artistic identity (or *persona*). An artist's performance and recording style, lyrics, songwriting, and origins play a significant role in establishing and defining an artist's sound, image, and larger artistic community to which he/she associates. What emerges in Peterson's observations regarding these

subgeneric categories of country music is an emphasis on “raw,” “untrained,” or even “natural” performance styles versus the “refined,” “trained,” or “produced” stylings of soft shell that may then lead one to perceive these cultural spaces as “authentic” or “artificial.” The codes and conventions attached to the hard core and soft shell communities represent just one layer of the complex web of an artist’s identity.

### *1.1.2 Identity Levels in Popular Music Performance*

The concept of “identity” in popular music performance can be quite complex—even (or perhaps especially) in cases where an artist’s image is strongly dependent on his/her own personal life experiences. Popular musicians (especially today) have at their disposal a variety of methods for communicating with their audiences, including song and music video, live performance, interviews, and blogs or other social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.). And while popular musicians do share personal information in interviews, blogs, social media, or performance as a way to introduce themselves to an audience, song and video narratives also play a significant role in defining artistic identities. Despite the fact that these narratives may indeed reveal intimate details about an artist’s inner world, we cannot assume that the singer is being him/herself in performance (Frith 1996, 186). In *Performing Rites*, Simon Frith (1996, 212) argues that popular musicians, like film actors, are “involved in a process of *double enactment*: they enact both a star personality (their image) and a song personality, the role that each lyric requires, and the pop star’s art is to keep both acts in play at once.” Frith’s observations highlight three distinct yet intermingling layers of an artist’s identity. Philip Auslander (2004, 6) systematized this tripartition in popular music performance as (1) the *real person*, (2) the *performance persona* (i.e. the star personality/image), and (3) the *song character*. Because all of these “identity levels” can be present simultaneously, the distinction between real person and *persona*, and even between *persona* and song characters can be ambiguous, even (as Auslander [2004, 6-7] observes) in the case of an artist whose work is autobiographical. For an artist like Corb Lund, who draws *heavily* on autobiography (as well as biography of relatives and prominent local figures) in his music, performance, and publicity, these layers seem to become, at times, indistinct. Indeed, “Lund the person” and “Lund the *persona*”



seemingly collapse on to one another, making it difficult to discern at times where one ends and the other begins. This is challenging precisely *because* Lund turns to his own life experiences to inform his songwriting. And while it is so easy to presume that Lund's song narratives are completely honest and accurate representations of his life and ideas, that they give us a true glimpse into his inner world, it is imperative to remember that his narratives (whether autobiographical or near-autobiographical) present a *version* of his world, the version that he would like his audience to see. As Frith (1996, 199) notes, in addition to an artist's performance

there is the character [personality] of the singer as star, what we know about them, or are led to believe about them through their packaging and publicity, and then, further, an understanding of the singer as a person.

Thus, however faithful Lund may be in depicting his "reality," a level of "autobiographical" construction in the image projected to his audience remains.

This project proposes that, in addition to the three levels outlined by Frith (1996) and Auslander (2004), two additional identity levels are present in Lund's texts. First, there is Lund the *person*, the man who was born and raised in Taber, who grew up immersed in the cultures and traditions of rural southern Alberta, who pursued an education and career in music. As an audience, we do not (and cannot) truly know this identity level; we can only know the information that Lund chooses to share with us through each of these texts. Lund the person is always present; not only did he participate in many of the stories he tells, but he also delivers these stories, embodying the multiple and complex levels of identity and representation as they play out in each song, video, blog, and interview narrative. Yet, it is important to remember that between participating in and delivering the stories, Lund *interprets* his experiences. As such, a *songwriter* identity emerges; that is, a level of signification that is separate from the real person and the artistic *persona*, but one that points to the act of artistic creation that pulls from the former to influence the latter. As a songwriter, Lund tells stories. Yet he does not relay all of the intimate details of an event: he alters some elements of his stories, not just to maintain some distance (and privacy), but also to communicate specific messages in his narratives as well as highlight certain issues for his audience. As such, the identity that songwriter Lund presents to his audience through song and/or video narrative (or other texts) is often a representation of his real self.

Auslander (2004, 6) offers a nuanced definition of the term *persona* in relation to popular musicians: he argues that it effectively describes a performed presence that is neither the song character, nor is it equivalent to the performer's "real" identity. Indeed, this *persona* projects an image closely related to Lund the person, but draws heavily on a lifestyle, cultures, and traditions in which he no longer participates on a daily basis. In many respects, the cultural (and geographic) spaces in which Lund's stories unfold are those of his youth; they represent the elements that contributed to the character, values, and beliefs of each identity level. An artist's *persona* is also strongly related to the image he/she projects and includes such characteristics as wardrobe and position within a genre. Lund's *persona* fits within Peterson's hard core cultural sphere outlined earlier, as an alt-country singer-songwriter whose music exhibits stylistic diversity, and writes about concrete personal experiences and emotion, and strongly stresses his rural southern Albertan origins in song, promotional materials, and on-stage.

Frith and Auslander refer to the character level as a personality portrayed by the popular musician's singing voice. This "personality" is the principal character in a song's lyrics: the song is, in effect, about this character, and not (necessarily) the singer him or herself. As Frith (1996, 169) notes, "[l]yrics [...] let us into songs as stories. All songs are implied narratives. They have a central character, the singer; a character with an attitude, in a situation, talking to someone (if only to herself)." Yet the role of "character" is much more complicated than either scholar accounts for. I propose that instead of simply labeling the personality in a song narrative as a "character," that it is important to more accurately describe the role being played by the "figure" in the song lyrics. As such, we can account for a singer taking on the role of a *narrator* relaying a story through song, as well as the *protagonist*—the central figure within a story narrative—or other secondary characters.<sup>4</sup> These three identity levels, often interacting within one song or video narrative, allow us to further characterize and define the multiple and complex roles that a singer portrays through his/her vocal performance. In most of his songs and videos Lund physically portrays a character representing himself or his artistic *persona*. But he also embodies or

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<sup>4</sup> Stéphane Hirschi (1995) designates the narrator in the context of a song as a "cantor." Because I am drawing from the work of Lori Burns (2010) in my methodology, I have chosen to retain the use of the word "narrator."

speaks on behalf other characters, including a set of family spurs (“We Used to Ride ‘Em”), a veterinarian (“Talkin’ Veterinarian Blues”), and so forth. The analyses in each chapter will clearly define the different character types in Lund’s songs, identifying where his performance enacts the voice (and physical body in video) of narrator, protagonist, and/or other characters.

Lund’s artistic identity (*persona*) projects a predominantly cowboy image and the majority of his songs unfold in rural space, even though he has lived mainly in the city of Edmonton for more than half of his life. Yes, he (the person) maintains strong connections to his family’s ranches in southern Alberta, and spends a lot of time in his cabin in Barrhead (north of Edmonton); but “Lund the person” does not live the cowboy life about which he sings. Thus, Lund seemingly constructs a *persona* founded on authenticity (emphasized by his desire to share his life experiences) through strong lyrical and visual associations with the countryside and his rural past. His narratives do not just reveal elements of this rural identity to his audience, but they also emphasize that he remains “just like” the men and women in his audience (Fox 2009, 115).<sup>5</sup> As a result, he has established a *persona* that his audience perceives as “real” and authentic (Peterson 1997).

Because this space between person, *persona*, narrator, protagonist, and character is so ambiguous, multiple “identity levels” interact, creating a complex web of meaning. Indeed, it is clear in analyzing Lund’s songs, music videos, blogs (written and video), and interviews that there are more than just the three main identity levels (person, *persona*, character) emerging in his artistic narrative. Thus, it is necessary to separate the various identity levels in order to fully explore all of the components that contribute to creating Lund’s artistic identity, which will, in turn, allow me to examine the ways in which he pulls from his geographic and cultural origins in southern Alberta to inform his songwriting and invest meaning to place as well.

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<sup>5</sup> The idea is further compounded by emphasizing the idea that without the good fortune of finding success with their musical talent, that they could very easily have been “a farmer, truck driver, housewife, or hairdresser instead” (see Peterson 1997, 153).

### 1.1.3 Sense of Place

While genre provides the musical context of an artist's style, sound, values, and traditions, geography—both as a physical place and cultural space—establishes an additional contextual layer of identification. Indeed, the ways in which individuals and communities respond to and interact with the physical environments, as well as the socio-political, cultural, and traditional structures of a particular region often reveal as much about that place, as it does the people that inhabit it. Cultural geographic discourse has demonstrated the myriad ways in which individuals have turned to song to negotiate or define their relationship to place, and interpret landscape and environment in a way that suits his or her own artistic goals.<sup>6</sup>

The concepts of “place” and “space” are integral to this study and country music in particular, a genre conventionally associated with geographic places and cultural spaces. The essays in Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso's edited volume *Senses of Place* (1997) investigate the differences between place and space and their links to sound (see Feld 1997, 91-37; Stewart 1997, 137-66). What emerges in this volume is a definition of place as a specific geographic location, and space as a general and unmarked locale, considering, in large part, a general awareness to understanding the cultural dynamics within a community and the social construction of landscapes. Music emerges as just one cultural artefact that documents how people live in, perceive, and invest the places and spaces they call home with meaning. Yi-Fu Tuan's *Topophilia* (1974) demonstrates that, while landscapes have no inherent meaning, individuals and communities ascribe or invest physical environments with meaning. This is an active process, one that renders spatial sites significant for

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<sup>6</sup> Of course, the concept of “scene” could also be of consideration in a topic of this nature. As defined by Will Straw (2004, 412), a “[s]cene designates particular clusters of social and cultural activity without specifying the nature of the boundaries which circumscribe them.” Scenes may be distinguished by several factors: location, cultural production, genre, or even a social activity. While scene is very important and useful in many popular music topics, in the context of this dissertation and its objectives, I have deliberately focused on this notion of geographic place and space. For more information on popular music “scenes,” refer to the special issues, “Scene Thinking,” in *Cultural Studies*, vol. 29, no. 3 (2014). See especially the introductory article “Scene Thinking” by Benjamin Woo, Jamie Rennie, and Stuart R. Poyntz (2014, 285-97) and the concluding “Some Things a Scene Might Be” by Will Straw (2014, 476-85). Other interesting works include Will Straw's “Scenes and Communities in Popular Music” (1996/2005, 494-505) and “Cultural Scenes” (2004, 411-22), Barry Shank's *Dissonant Identities: The Rock'n'Roll Scene in Austin* (1994), and Travis Stimeling's *Cosmic Cowboys and New Hicks: The Countercultural Sounds of Austin's Progressive Country Music Scene* (2011).

individuals. Tuan (1977, 12) describes place as a “concretion of values,” and becomes meaningful through the lived experiences of the individuals inhabiting the space. The term “sense of place” emerged from this discourse to describe the intangible and sometimes unconscious associations that individuals and communities feel about a particular geographic region. As James G. Cantrill (1998, 303) has observed, an individual’s relationship to place often becomes quite powerful in response to environmental policy, and “may serve to distance individuals from one another or the agencies that regulate the use of natural resources.” These responses to environmental issues suggest deep emotional attachments to place, magnified by the duration of tenure in a region, as well as one’s exposure or reliance on the natural world. This research is particularly relevant in connection to Lund’s music, where the singer-songwriter invests meaning in and affirms his bonds with his native prairie landscape through song, exhibiting strong protective instincts toward the place he grew up when that environment becomes threatened, especially by outsiders.

#### *1.1.4 “Geo-Cultural” Identity*

Cultural geographic discourse offers a rich understanding of the ways in which individuals negotiate their relationship to place and the intimate connection between their “sense of self” and “sense of place.” As Thomas Solomon (2000, 271) has observed, “landscapes have become central as sites for imagining collective identities.” One’s “[s]ense of self and sense of place are intimately connected—perhaps better described as a ‘sense of place-self’—and individuals’ shared sense of place-based identity becomes the basis of a sense of community.” The term “geo-cultural” identity is particularly useful in this discussion, as it captures the essence of place and cultural space within one’s sense of self. Md. Munir Hossain Talukder (2013) coined this term in an article that addresses the tensions between minority and majority cultures in a diverse, multiculturalist society. Talukder (2013, 422) defines cultural identity as an individual’s language, dress, food, festivals, norms, and values, and geographic identity as his/her living land. By fusing these two terms (geo-cultural), Talukder creates a space that allows for individuals/communities to participate in a set of cultural traditions, while living in a different geographic region. The example he

uses is that of an individual whose food habits, dress style, and language can be identified as “Chinese,” while living outside of China, stating “Chinese people in different nation-states have the same cultural identity, but different geographical identities” (Talukder 2013, 422). Thus, a Chinese Canadian has a Chinese cultural identity, but a geographic identity as a citizen of Canada. According to Talukder’s theory, cultural membership alone does not define an individual’s identity and thus needs to be expressed also through geographic affiliation. His goal with defining this term is to better define multicultural populations in a way that respects cultural diversity, but allows for the residents of a nation to share a geographic identity.

I will invoke this term in a slightly different manner. While I ascribe to Talukder’s notion of culture and geography influencing identity, this project will not be looking at individuals within a multicultural society. Instead, I will seek to explore the ways in which an artist within the cultural spaces of the country music genre pulls from the culture and geography of a specific place in order to define elements of their artistic identity. Indeed, place-based narratives do not just allow a country musician to communicate life experiences, but they also define elements of that artist’s identity, emphasizing the influence that family, community, culture, and geography have on their character, values, and beliefs. Genre, then, is the “multicultural society” of Talukder’s theory, as it represents a larger cultural space of musical styles and conventions in which artists work. Artists often invoke these musical languages as they negotiate their relationship to different geographic locations—often times through musical conventions associated with a particular region. Literature from cultural geographic and ecomusicological discourse will help elaborate how this term can be incorporated into lyrical and musical analysis, to consider how music, music video, and publicity contribute to the establishment of a geo-cultural identity.

### *1.1.5 Language of Place-Making*

The physical manifestations and ideological structures, customs, behavioural traits, and cultural practices that define a place are individual or social constructions. In his seminal work in cultural studies, Raymond Williams (1971, 291-97) argued that places, country, or

city in particular, are constructions of the imagination. The country tends to represent the past, old ways, and traditions, while the city represents the future, modernization, and progress. Yi-Fu Tuan's scholarship has continually demonstrated the ways in which individuals impart personality and character to places through their choice of words, which will be an integral component to considering the messages of Lund's lyrical narratives. In his 1991 article "Language and Making of Place," Tuan outlines a narrative descriptive approach to using speech to define place, which will be integral to this project and a discussion of how words are used to construct images and identities of place in country song lyrics. His approach draws on both the sociolinguistic and metaphorical power of language. The sociolinguistic component focuses on the use and effectiveness of speech in making or constructing place (Tuan 1991, 685). Although referring to the words used in urban planning, this is equally relevant in song lyrics, which rely on language to construct an image of place—both real and archetypal.<sup>7</sup> Songs lyrics, especially in country music, have been used to describe physical landscapes (mountain ranges, green fields, etc.), environment (climate, weather, etc.), and man-made structures (houses, barns, skyscrapers, etc.), creating strong visual images of place, and even defining its character through associative qualities.

The metaphorical component of the narrative-descriptive approach considers how language is used to give place an identity. Tuan (1991, 685) states that language has metaphorical power in "the way individual words and, even more, sentences and larger units impart emotion and personality [...] to objects and places." Words are used in a way that anthropomorphizes place—ascribing it human-like characteristics. This is as much as reflection of the descriptors used to describe social structure of place and is geographic location, as well as its people and their interactions within the global community. In literature, as D. C. Pockock (1981, 342) observes, places are often "considered as people through their associative quality, by which they come to represent particular persons, actions or events." As such, our understanding of a place is often attached to the ideologies

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<sup>7</sup> Dawn Bowen's article on Jimmy Buffet's "Margaritaville" (1997) discusses place as either real or imagined. Her article discusses a specific type of narrative in which the lyrics describe "Margaritaville" in a way that captures the reality of Key West or other tropical locales, while also creating an imagined place of the mind, "a refuge where worldly concerns disappear" (1997, 99). Undefined places in this dissertation will be discussed differently, not as an "imagined" locale, but rather as an archetype.

and characteristics of structure and people. Indeed, in popular music, places often become characters in a song narrative, revealing the complex relationship between person and place. In addition to anthropomorphizing place, some songs use human characteristics to define place. On the surface, the lyrical narrative suggests that the song considers a relationship between the protagonist (portrayed by the singer) and a partner—yet, closer examination reveals that the partner may not be a person, but a human representation of a town. Thus, metaphors are not used merely to give place and identity, but rather to create characters that represent place. As we will see, Lund often ascribes an identity to place, with the narrative of one song telling a lost love that “Alberta Says Hello” (2009), or drawing on descriptive elements of climate and nature to create a harsh personality for place, as in “Chinook Wind” (2009).

Murray Forman’s (2002) work on the “extreme local” in rap and hip-hop lyrics provides another layer to consider in the social construction of place in song. As discussed earlier, Forman introduced this concept through a short analysis of Will Smith’s lyrics and video for “Freakin’ It,” but his provocative analysis of an excerpt from philosopher, academic, activist, and recording artist Cornell West’s book *Race Matters* (Forman 2002, 1) offers critical insight into the importance of localized narratives. The extract in question outlines West’s experience as a black man standing on the corner of 60th Street and Park Avenue in New York City to catch a taxi. Even though he had driven into the city in a “rather elegant” car, he recalls the moment when taxi drivers ignored his gestures for their service, stopping only when well-dressed white female stepped up to the curb. By highlighting specific street names in this story, West provides information about the cultural locations of this journey. Through this and many other examples in his book, Forman emphasizes how artists articulate elements of race and class by mapping specific and *local* geographic and cultural terrains in their lyrics. This idea is especially relevant for the analysis of Lund’s music, as he continually describes his environment through precise local geographic and cultural reference points. Because he writes about rural regions (and not densely populated urban terrain), Lund’s lyrics do not get down to the level of street name; instead, he maps a wider territory of lesser-populated rural towns. This does not mean that Lund’s lyrics do not function on the level of “extreme local,” but that his geographic scale covers a wider surface area. While West’s excerpt defines his circulation



through downtown New York, Lund's narratives map his circulation through southern Alberta. Many of Lund's narratives, "No Roads Here" in particular, provide another way through which an artist can define their "extreme local" by mapping specific geographic and cultural references in his song lyrics.

### *1.1.6 Music and Place/Space*

Drawing on the scholarship of Adam Krims (2007) and Travis Stimeling (2012), I am interested in the idea that musical codes or stylistic conventions and production values can be used to communicate messages about place, not simply representing or characterizing geographic space, but also highlighting, embracing, and critiquing aspects of environment. Krims's monograph *Music and Urban Geography* (2007) was the first project to draw together music analytic techniques from the fields of music theory and urban geography in order to understand social meaning in *popular songs* within the urban context their lyrics describe. Integral to his analytic discussion is the idea that musical codes and stylistic conventions mark out place in a way that not only represents or characterizes geographic space. In his chapter on urban ethos, Krims (2007, 2) provides a brief analysis of the musical strategies used in Petula Clark's 1964 hit "Downtown" to outline how the harmonic movement and musical accompaniment supports and indeed enhances the sophisticated urban life presented in the lyrics. His studies reveal the integral role that musical accompaniment plays in marking out place, showing the ways in which it highlights, embraces, and/or critiques aspects of urban environment described in the lyrical narrative. These ideas are integral to the present project, which seeks to interrogate the ways in which the musical setting enhances or alters the song text.

Particularly influential for this study is Travis Stimeling's 2012 article on country music responses to Appalachian mountaintop removal mining and the ways in which this music invokes strong senses of place in the Central Appalachian coal region. Nancy Guy's (2009) work considering musical representations of Taiwan's Tamsui River was an important influence on Stimeling's study, as she demonstrates the ways in which lyrics, formal conventions, and performance practices of popular song can reflect and *affect*

contemporary attitudes toward the environment. Travis Stimeling's (2012) article on country music responses to Appalachian mountaintop removal mining (MTR) demonstrates the important role that popular song has played in helping proponents and opponents of the mining practice engage in public debate. His analyses show how both mainstream and local artists from the region draw from Central Appalachia's rich musical heritage in order to evoke highly personal understandings of local environment, culture, history, and regional identity (Stimeling 2012, 4). Perhaps most importantly for my work is Stimeling's (2012, 19) discussion of the deployment of nostalgia, wherein songs on both sides of the debate can be read through a nostalgic lens whether that be with regard to the exploitation of a working-class, the sacrifice of environment and society for the greater good of the nation, or for a sacred time when the land had yet to be touched by the industry. Such responses reveal the myriad ways in which a community responds to changes in their natural world, especially in a places like Central Appalachia, and indeed Alberta, where residents have competing understandings of local history, and where occupation and lifestyle results in varied relationships to landscape. Influenced by Stimeling's approach, my work seeks to extend this discussion to include music video and examine how images contribute to Lund's musical responses to environmental issues arising from fossil fuel extraction processes. Though Stimeling considers the music of multiple artists, my project will consider the discography of one artist, and in particular, an artist who draws on different musical stylings to support his song narratives. As such, the idea of considering how particular country music styles reinforce narratives ties in with Krims' work on musical codes and conventions.

Also important to my analyses is Mark Pedelty's (2012) observations on how folk idioms and production practices have influenced pro-environment songwriting styles. In reference to environmental songs by the Beach Boys ("Don't Go Near the Water" [1971]), the Eagles ("The Last Resort" [1976]), and Michael Jackson ("Earth Song" [1995]), Pedelty (2012, 72) notes,

to signal environmental themes, pop musicians tend to use more subdued rhythms than usual, create simpler timbral textures, incorporate acoustic instrumentation (or electronic sampling), and either bring lead vocals up front or drop backup

harmonies altogether, thus allowing the lyrics to be more clearly understood and producing a relatively spare, folk-vocal sound.<sup>8</sup>

Although Pedelty provides very little music analysis to support his observations (other than mentioning songs that fit this description), several of the songs addressing the environment or ecology do confirm his thoughts. Indeed, it seems almost indicative of Lund's style that songs exploring the climate ("Chinook Wind"), conservation issues ("The Truth Comes Out"), and the impact of oil sands development in rural Alberta ("This Is My Prairie") fall into a more country-*folk* style. Interestingly, however, although he uses more subdued rhythms and emphasizes lead vocals by bringing them upfront in the recorded mix, each song incorporates unusual instrumentation (for country/folk music) or uses instruments in a unique manner. Using instruments in these modified ways does not detract from the more folk-like stylings of these songs, but instead offers subtle commentary on place, environment, or community.

More to the goal of observing the ways in which artists draw on place as a way to define aspects of their artistic identity, I recently published an article on the Dixie Chicks' response to lead singer Natalie Maines' hometown of Lubbock, TX following the ongoing boycott of their music. Drawing on the work of Krims (2007) and Stimeling (2012), this article explores the ways in which country artists invoke musical codes and style conventions associated with specific geographic regions to negotiate their relationship to place. My analysis of the song "Lubbock or Leave it" (2006) demonstrates that while the lyrical message seemingly rejected the city and its religious and political structures, the country-rock musical setting actually pulled from regional influences, thus revealing that even though Maines's values and beliefs may clash with those of her origins, that the town and its musical heritage has left an indelible mark on her artistic identity (Watson 2014). This current project seeks to further define this relationship, and interrogate the ways in

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<sup>8</sup> An anthropologist, Pedelty's study extends the field of ecomusicology in new and exciting ways, notably through the thoughtful consideration of the impacts that the production and consumption of rock and folk music on local, national and global ecologies. More specifically, he explores the ways in which music *making* (recording, touring, etc.) has been deployed for movements of ecological protest, while at the same time contributed to the degradation of the environment. One of the examples he uses to support this argument is an analysis of the carbon offset programs to which many popular musicians (including U2 and Sheryl Crow) have ascribed in an effort to counteract the emissions generated by their tour buses, transport trucks, and airplanes. Pedelty (2012, 25-27) asserts that, while artists claim they have radically reduced their footprints and conserved massive amounts of energy, in actuality, a great deal of energy was expended for both the tour and production offsets.

which place songs (specifically those with autobiographical, near-autobiographical, or historically influenced) narratives, provide artists with a platform for marking out not just their relationship to place, but, more importantly, the “geo-cultural” aspects of their artistic identity.

## **1.2 Method**

The analytic approach of this dissertation takes into account a number of elements in order to fully explore the lyrical and musical ways in which Corb Lund addresses themes of place in his songs. In a topic of this nature, lyrical narratives are an important point of entry for analyzing a message communicated in popular song. As such, elements such as narrative voice (who is speaking: narrator, protagonist, other character) and the story message will be crucial to describing the way in which Lund’s songs relate to place/space. In addition to analyzing the lyrical narratives, I will consider elements of the musical setting such as the abstract, performance, and technical parameters of a song, aspects of musical style, and its recorded setting, as analytic goal here is to consider not just the message of the lyrical narrative, but the role that the musical setting plays in communicating that message as well. As such, I am interested in the relationship between the lyrics and the musical setting, and the ways in which the musical setting might conform, contradict, or complement (to borrow from Allan Moore [2005]) the lyrical message. Following the song analysis, I will then consider how Lund’s narratives unfold in music video (where relevant). As such, aspects of staging, colour, symbolism, and editing will be extremely important in discussions of video narrative and correspondence between lyrics, music, and images.

### ***1.2.1 Corpus***

Lund was chosen as the subject of this dissertation because he is a strong example of an artist deeply connected to the geography, traditions, and cultures of his origins in rural southern Alberta. In a project focusing on the relationship between a country singer-songwriter and his origins, Lund stands out as an artist with strong ties to his roots. He

addresses regional themes and issues in stylistically diverse ways, demonstrating not just an eclectic musical language, but also an interest blending the musical styles that have influenced him. Beyond his music, Lund has maintained his connection to rural southern Alberta through a number of other avenues. Thus, the singer-songwriter's discography and body of work outside of music provides a number of ways and themes through which we can explore the connection between country artist and place, creating a framework for fully exploring this important relationship within the genre's traditions.

The corpus of this dissertation will include songs from Corb Lund's seven studio albums. These albums cover a 17-year time span (1995-2012), in which the first 3 albums were recorded by the Corb Lund Band and the last 4 with the Hurtin' Albertans (more below). The songs were selected because they address one of the five topics: landscape and environment, ranching, rodeo, fossil fuel energy industry, and urban versus rural spaces. These specific topics were selected not just because there are a significant number of songs in his discography that fit within each theme, but also because they offer narratives that are representative of Alberta's history, culture, and industry in some manner.

### *1.2.2 Analytic Approach*

#### *Lyrics*

In a project like this one, *lyrics* are an integral part of the analytic discussion. Lund's music, as with most country (and indeed popular) music, is lyrically driven. Thus, the analyses will begin with an examination of the lyrical narrative to fully explore the story being told. Narrative stance will be an important aspect to consider; while most songs unfold in the first person, Lund is not always the narrator. For example, his rodeo song "We Used to Ride 'Em" is sung in the first person, but from the perspective of a pair of spurs. Lori Burns's (2010) work on narrative stance and agency provides an excellent framework for considering issues of authorial voice and perspective. Autobiography and documentary are also important elements to keep in mind, in the music of a singer-songwriter who actively records elements of his family and province's history. Pamela Fox's (2009) work on autobiography (discussed above) will be particularly useful when considering lyrical

autobiography, as well Terrance Cox's (2002, 282) work on the lyrical content of Ian Tyson's discography, which he describes as a sort of "cowboyography" or "a documentary of contemporary cowboy life." Cox discusses the canonical elements of the lyrics that describe the region of southern Alberta (including the Chinook wind) and the prominence of animals, especially horses, which appear as the "other" or Tyson's muse. He (2002, 282) highlights the documentary elements of Tyson's lyrics that describe the region of southern Alberta (including neighbours) in his music is way of naming the "real" figures in his life and documenting their shared life experiences. These ideas are integral to a project on an artist like Lund, who continually draws from the places and people around him in song narrative. In short, rather than focussing on formal aspects of the lyrics (e.g. rhymes, prosody, etc.) the emphasis will be put more on narrative aspects of the studied songs, the stories being told.

### ***Musical Setting: Abstract, Performance, and Technological Parameters***

While lyrics *tell* the story, the musical setting plays a crucial role in helping shape Lund's messages. The musical analysis will unfold through analysis of the abstract, performance and technological parameters, as defined largely by Serge Lacasse (2006; 2015, 64-65). It should be noted from the outset that each individual analysis will focus on the parameters that are relevant to the song in question. As such, I do not intend to explore every parameter in each song, but rather focus on the most pertinent musical elements as they contribute to the larger discussion of place and identity in Lund's discography. The parameters can be defined as follows:

The ***abstract parameters*** of form, melody, harmony and rhythm highlight the structure of a song. Transcriptions of the studio recordings will aid with discussions of how such musical structures contribute to the unfolding of the lyrical narrative. Likewise, Jocelyn Neal's (2007) work on narrative paradigms in country music songs will also be integral to discussion of abstract parameters, as she has laid the foundation for discussing the ways in which harmonic and melodic languages progresses through country song narrative.

The *performative parameters* of vocal gestures and musical accompaniment, allow one to consider the expressive qualities of a performance. The scholarship of Aaron Fox (2004), Serge Lacasse (2006; 2008; 2010), Leech-Wilkinson (2006), and Fernando Poyatos (1993) will be important in examining the role of the voice in the songs of this study. Poyatos' paralinguistic effects in particular, will be integral to understanding how the voice conveys emotions, or represents elements of environment and sounds of place. Where relevant spectrograms produced through the application Sonic Visualiser will be used to view aspects of the vocal performance, including yodel breaks, slides, tremolos, and breathing effects. With regard to the musical accompaniment, Alan Moore (2005) has revealed that in popular song, the musical setting can support, reinforce or contradict a lyrical message. In examining musical portraits of place, these accompanimental "environments" convey as much about place as the character in the song lyrics. Indeed, the accompaniment often plays an integral role in defining the sonic context of landscape in a way that evokes and defines place. The accompaniment can be used to reproduce environmental features or certain instruments or musical styles are incorporated or alluded to in the accompaniment to point to extramusical references. Drawing on the work of Krims (2007), Stimeling (2012), and Watson (2014, [2016]), I will discuss how musical style is used to impart identity and character to place or person, and even link Lund's narratives regional or genre traditions.

The *technological parameters* and other recording strategies used to alter the sound space of a studio recording are responsible for the "phonographic staging" of recorded performances (Lacasse 2000, 2006, 2010; Doyle 2004). Because vocal effects are at times altered through recording strategies, Serge Lacasse's concept of "phonographic staging" will be an important aspect of this study. Lacasse (2000, 4) defines vocal staging as "any deliberate practice whose aim is to enhance a vocal sound, alter its timbre, or present it in a given spatial and/or temporal configuration with the help of any mechanical or electrical process, presumably in order to produce some effect on potential or actual listeners." Here, Doyle's (2005) discussion of technological parameters will be an important part of the discussion in order to consider how Lund uses reverb, echo and even microphone placement as a way of defining space and his place within it. Specifically, I am interested in the relationship that emerges between lyrics and music, and the ways in which the

performance and recording techniques contribute to the communication of the song narrative.

### ***Music Video***

The lyrical and music analyses will be complemented by the examination of visual narratives as they play out in Lund's *music videos* (where relevant). Music videos provide an additional narrative layer to songs; while some videos simply play out the lyrical narrative on screen, others offer background information not present in the lyrics, highlight a specific element of the story, or present multiple perspectives of the narrative. Just like the song's lyrical narrative, the music video narrative has just a short amount of time to relay detailed or complex stories. Music videos can achieve this narrative depth through a variety of filmic techniques, including editing, staging, and symbolic imagery. I am interested in how Lund uses music video to offer additional commentary about his relationship with Alberta and its cultures and traditions that could not be elaborated upon in his lyrical narratives.

***Editing:*** Lund's videos (like many music videos) use predominantly *montage-style editing*, a technique created in the 1920s by Soviet directors Sergei Eisenstein and Lev Kuleshov, who sought to establish meaning through the juxtaposition of two or more images of close and distant relation. These images are paired in order to convey new, multiple, and complex meanings (Burns and Watson 2010; Eisenstein 1991). In a series of articles co-authored with Lori Burns, I demonstrated how montage editing could be used to (1) establish multiple narrative perspectives, (2) differentiate between narration and story action, and (3) develop complex relationships between multiple temporal periods or generations in a family (see Burns and Watson 2010; Burns and Watson 2013; Watson and Burns 2010). Editing can then be used to build relationships between the video's scenes by juxtaposing and alternating images in a way that creates strong visual correspondences between them. For example, the video narrative can present the singer-songwriter in a narrator role (singing the song), then transition to images of the video story, and then alternate between the narrator and story images in a way that establishes a moment of



contemplation as the singer reflects on the actions that influenced the lyric. Burns and I developed a method for tracking video edits in relation to lyrical narrative and musical setting in our 2013 article on popular music superstar P!nk. We juxtaposed video stills against the musical score to provide a map of the video, facilitating the analysis of multiple dimensions of the narrative, and highlight the interaction between the lyrical, musical and visual scores (Burns and Watson 2013, 121, 125-31).

In our article on the Dixie Chicks' video for "Top of the World," Burns and I (2010, 14-15) demonstrated how montage editing could draw connections between different time periods (or generations in a family) by alternating images that show three generations of women participating in similar activities as a way of commenting on changes within a family's behaviour over time. For example, "Top of the World" addresses the cycle of abuse in one family, and director Sophie Muller used the daily activity of preparing a cup of tea in the song's instrumental bridge to show the pivotal moment in this family's history that an important change was made with regard to abusive activity. She juxtaposed these images in a way that created flashback memories to show how such a simple gesture can be a catalyst to change within a complicated family dynamic. Muller used two transitioning techniques to highlight the "flashback" effect: she overlapped or superimposed images to create actual visual "flashes" at the image change (Burns and Watson 2010, 11-12).

**Staging:** The staging of each narrative layer plays an important role in defining the video's message. A scene's staging (wardrobe, setting, lighting, etc.) helps distinguish between the singer-songwriter playing the role of "narrator" and narrative layer (or layers) that unfold the story's action (Watson and Burns 2010, 326, 331-35). It can likewise play a significant role in defining place and time. For example, the setting can position video characters in the same physical place or in different geographic regions (the city and the country, for example). The staging can also establish a sense of time, as Muller had done in the tea scene from "Top of the World." As each character made their cup of tea, elements such as wardrobe, hairstyle, and furniture style, all helped to mark out the different eras of the three generations of women (Burns and Watson 2010).

**Symbolic Imagery:** Symbolic imagery of both artefacts and colour are crucial to helping advance the music video story narrative. In our article on the Dixie Chicks' video

for their song “Not Ready to Make Nice,” Burns and I discussed the role of colour and wardrobe to create symbolic imagery in music videos. In “Not Ready to Make Nice” almost the entire video is staged in black and white (background, props, prison-stripped dresses representative of a Southern American tradition). Staging the video narrative in this manner, the Dixie Chicks created a symbolic setting of imprisonment, “capturing the essence of a disciplinary society through references to a court trial [...], a punitive school system, and finally a macabre health institution, all of which work to contain the Dixie chicks as a consequence” of their political beliefs (Watson and Burns 2010, 339-40). The colour red emerges in one of the backdrops of the video, strongly associating these scenes in which the community judges the country music trio with feelings of anger and hatred. The colour has even deeper symbolic meaning, however. Red not only connotes blood, fire, damnation, and danger, it holds political affiliations with US conservatism, Republican political values, and Republican-voting communities (“Red” states). Thus, within a music video narrative, elements such as wardrobe, colour, and other objects can play an important role in characterizing individuals, place, or actions within a shot.

### **1.3 Chapter Outline**

The chapters in this dissertation will follow a similar format. First, they will begin with a discussion of country music songs that address the chapter theme. This section will elaborate on country music’s connection to the theme, highlight important songs, and examine the variety of ways in which artists within the hard core and soft shell spheres address issues in their lyrics. In so doing, this section will provide genre (music/culture) context to frame Corb Lund’s contributions to each theme. Each chapter will then outline the history of its particular theme in Alberta, setting the geographic and cultural backdrop for analyzing Lund’s songs.

Chapter 2 focuses on landscape and environment and analyzes Lund’s songs that describe specific physical and climactic features of the western Canadian province. Songs in this chapter start to tell Alberta’s story through its land and weather trends, while also marking out Lund’s deep familial roots in the region. From the land, the dissertation moves on to the

ranching (chapter 3) and rodeo (chapter 4) traditions that have remained at the core of Alberta's culture and, most importantly, identity. Lund grew up on his family's ranch in southern Alberta and participated in the family sport of rodeo as a steer rider. His songs reveal an ability to find humour in ranch life, and compassion for the men and women who devote their lives to cattle. His rodeo songs commemorate the careers of family members, marking out their prominent place within local and national rodeo history. Chapter 5 looks at Lund's songs about the fossil fuel energy industry in Alberta. This is perhaps the most controversial topic that the singer-songwriter's music addresses. His songs tell stories about the impact that natural gas and oil sands extraction processes have on the land, the agriculture industry, and, most importantly, the health of humans and animals. Yet the music reveals sensitivity to the topic: taking an observational role, Lund offers an even-handed assessment of the current situation and even finds subtle ways to highlight the history of working-class exploitation in the industry. Chapter 6 returns to the land and addresses the tensions between rural and urban spaces. Although much of the dissertation, and indeed Lund's discography, addresses the traditions and culture of Alberta's rural spaces, several of his songs offer commentary on issues like urban sprawl or encroaching industry. And while his discography is void of traditional love ballads, when he does address relationships he often does so through the traditional country music narrative type that juxtaposes urban and rural spaces. The songs included in each of these chapters, then, do not just tell stories about life in Alberta, they offer a lens into Lund's relationship to the land and, by extension, how integral geographic place and cultural space can be to defining an artist's identity.



## Chapter 2. Landscape and Environment

The Albertan landscape and environment maintain a significant presence throughout Corb Lund's discography. His songs serve as source material to understand the effects of climate on life and farming in southern Alberta, while also imparting character and identity to place. Lund's family history in the province dates back to the turn of the twentieth-century – predating the territory becoming an official Canadian province.<sup>1</sup> And he captures this journey in song, describing the landscape that his ancestors came across on their journey north from Utah to southern Alberta in “No Roads Here.” The long history of Lund and (maternal) Ivins families in southern Alberta contributes to the depth of the singer-songwriter's knowledge about provincial history, its landscape, environment, and weather, and how each of these affects the daily life of farmers and the changing ecology of the western Canadian province. Although the southern Albertan region from which Lund hails has been characterized by its dry summers, perfect for dry land farming, the region has increasingly suffered from significant torrential rainfall. Although the month of June is typically Alberta's wettest month, in 2013 the southern half of the province experienced catastrophic flooding of which they are still feeling the effects in July 2014. Thus, while Lund laments the presence of the “Chinook Wind” blowing the good dirt east, he has also addressed the impact of these isolated pockets of significant rainfall with both humour (“Truck Got Stuck”) and seriousness (“Blood, Sweat and Water”). Lund admires, mourns, and even chuckles at the varying types of landscape and weather his family has had to contend with in Alberta. He has also addressed serious issues such as conservation (“Truth Comes Out,” see chapter 6) and how land development and global warming has changed southern Alberta's ecosystem and led to a decreased animal population or, more

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<sup>1</sup> When Lund's family moved to Alberta at the turn of the twentieth century, the region was still part of the North-West Territories. Alberta became a Canadian province in 1905.

frighteningly for some, an increase of wild animals entering more urban areas. Of course, the land and environment find their way into many of Lund's tales, and will be addressed in other chapters including the description of ranch land (chapter 3) and rodeo riding (chapter 4), the rich resources found underneath the earth's surface, such as coal, oil/oil sands, and natural gas and the destruction of the land for those resources through mining (chapter 5), and the use of country and city as a metaphor for relationships (chapter 6).

The present chapter will consider the ways in which Lund describes southern Albertan landscape and environment in his songs, and how he imparts character and identity on this western Canadian province. I will consider how Lund evokes the landscape, weather, and human activity in these songs, not just in the lyrics, but in the recorded vocal and instrumental gestures as well. In particular, I will look at how his musical arrangements and recording techniques create a sense of space, especially in narratives that occur in the outdoors, where echo and reverb effects are used to simulate open spaces or his voice being carried by the wind. I will also consider how he frequently uses short repeated patterns to highlight the persistence of the elements or the spinning wheels of a truck stuck in mud. This chapter will demonstrate the how the singer-songwriter's songs capture the sound and character of place, and elaborate the relationship between the rancher and his land, and the complex ways in which Lund anchors his identity to southern Alberta.

## **2.1. Country Music, Landscape, and Environment**

Land and environment are important themes in country music. Many of the genre's artists have drawn on imagery of their surrounding landscape and environment to tell stories about their upbringing or daily life. Landscape emerges in country music narratives as the setting of activity, such as work on the family farm, leisure or family activities, or travel from one region to another (to name a few). It can also be an object of wonder, as artists have also honoured their homeland through descriptive narratives of the physical features of the landscape, including the green fields, blue skies, rolling mountains, and the wildlife that inhabits the land. These narratives reveal as much about the land as they do the relationship between artist and place (Watson 2014, 51-53). This tradition of drawing on landscape

dates back to songs of the singing cowboy, who sang about the places he traveled from the saddle of his horse (Malone 2002, 139-45; Green 2002; Stanfield 2002). While these songs tend to use a simple language of primarily monosyllabic words, they offer evidence of the cowboys' existence, their travels, thoughts, and activities and relate fundamental elements of the human experience, including love, loneliness, homesickness, an awareness of environment, day and night, starry nights, cloudy skies, and the rain and the wind (Scott 1982, 56). Perhaps the most stereotypical cowboy song is the traditional ballad "Home on the Range" (ca. 1870). Originally a poem called "My Western Home" written by Brewster M. Higley, the music was written shortly after by his friend Daniel E. Kelley. Alternate versions have been written by both William and Mary Goodwin (in 1904) and by John A. Lomax (in 1910), whose altered chorus is perhaps the most well known in today's pop culture (50States, 2015). "Home on the Range" provides not just a description of landscape, environment, and wildlife on the plains, but Lomax's version also comments on strained relations with the native communities in the western states: "the red man was pressed from this part of the west / he's likely no more to return." Thus, the song does not just describe place, but also documents social relations and even, in this verse, injustices against specific cultures. Over the course of the twentieth century, the song has been adopted by settlers and cowboys roaming around the vast territory that has come to be known as the American West, and is today the official state song of Kansas.

Early hillbilly recordings artists like The Carter Family and Jimmie Rodgers are full of references to place and landscape. Old cabins or homes were a common centerpiece for The Carter Family's place-themed songs, with narratives offering descriptions of the mountainous landscape, green fields, and pebbling brooks of their Virginia homeland in songs like "My Clinch Mountain Home," (1927), "My Old Cottage Home" (1930), and "Mid the Green Fields of Virginia (1931). Rodgers's songs also offer commentary on the land he roamed, as in "Away Out on the Mountain" (1927), where the quintessential rambler describes the landscape and wildlife he plans to encounter in the "land of the sky, away out on the mountain." Country singer-songwriter Dolly Parton is one artist who has continued this tradition; her 1973 autobiographical concept album, *My Tennessee Mountain Home*, contains her childhood recollections, many of which describe the rural Smoky Mountain landscape of east Tennessee. The album's title track, for example, offers a

description of a simple, peaceful lifestyle in east Tennessee, focusing on the sights of children running in a yard, the sounds of crickets and birds, and the smell of honeysuckle vines. In “Wrong Direction Home” she describes the clear water in the mountain streams, green fields, and rolling hills, the sights and sounds of nature linger in Parton’s memories of her childhood in Sevierville. While these song narratives indeed capture the visual beauty of various landscapes, the scenes come to life through descriptions of the elements and the weather conditions that had an impact on daily life.

Weather conditions are often prominent elements in narratives describing landscape and emerge as unpredictable forces that contribute to the hardships or successes of farming and survival (Watson 2011, 10). Cowboy songs, in particular, reveal a lot about how climate affected their life and work herding cattle; today, their songs serve as primary documents that recreate a real historical experience. Traditional songs like “Colorado Trail” evoke the weeping rain, the wailing wind, and the stormy nights on the cowboy’s travels, while also revealing his homesickness for a love back home. The feelings of longing are thus magnified by the harsh weather conditions this cowboy endured (Scott 1982, 56). Looking to Parton again, her 1969 song “In the Good Old Days (When Times Were Bad)” tells of the heartache and frustrations of watching a hailstorm beat their crops to the ground after working in the fields all day, and of harsh winds blowing snow through the cracks in their little log cabin in the winter time. An autobiographical song, “In the Good Old Days (When Times Were Bad)” allowed Parton to describe the hardships of growing up in the southern rural-mountain region of Sevierville, TN, and how the weather affected daily life. For Parton, the weather did not just disrupt crop growth and, by extension, their source of food and income, but rather it often had a significant impact on the quality of their living conditions.

Country-folk singer-songwriters from West Texas really explored their relationship to landscape and weather. Farmers on the West Texas plains in Lubbock County have historically had to contend with severe weather conditions including harsh west winds, and extreme heat dryness. They also have the highest incidences of tornados. Several musicians from the region have drawn on these weather conditions in a way that often describes Lubbock as inhospitable and unfriendly. What perhaps makes their music stand out is that



they have been known to evoke the sound of Lubbock's landscape through instrumentation that is both traditional and non-traditional for country music. Terry Allen, for example, uses a wind machine, tornado siren, and violin to simulate a ferocious windstorm in the opening of his song about the two F5 tornados that devastated Lubbock, TX, on 11 May 1970 ("Lubbock Tornado (I Don't Know)" [1980]). And the Flatlanders incorporated a musical saw, mandolin tremolo, and pedal steel to evoke different shades of the wind throughout the narrative of the 2002 song "South Winds of Summer" (Watson 2014, 63). But it is the music of Flatlander member and former farmer Butch Hancock that has captured a more intimate relationship with land and environment. Rooted in narratives of defining territory and place, his 1978 concept album *West Texas Waltzes and Dust-Blown Tractor Tunes* explores the hardships of dry land farming through musical portraits of Lubbock's environment and landscape. Hancock not only captures the many sides of Lubbock County's climate in the album's lyrics, but they resonate through the recorded vocal and instrumental gestures as well, capturing the sounds and character of the West Texas plains. Two of the album's songs in particular evoke contrasting images and sounds of West Texas wind. His hoarse, warbly vocal performance on "Dry Land Farm" captures the area's hot, dusty landscape (and sounds like he is singing with a mouthful of dirt), while his forcefully played harmonica produces the sympathetic frequencies of a piercing "doubled" pitch that sounds like the whistle tones of a strong west wind. Although Hancock's performance on "Dry Land Farm" paints a picture of the harsh realities of dry land farming in a region known for its dust storms, he also finds peace and appreciation in Lubbock's environment in "Texas Air." On this song, an ode to West Texas land, the piercing quality of the harmonica subsides, and Hancock produces more focused, clean sound that evokes a sense of a gentle breeze. What emerges in these songs, and those mentioned previously, is not just the appreciation of landscape and environment, but rather, a relationship or bond between the individual and his/her surrounding environment (Watson 2011, 10-18).

For artists like Parton and Hancock, who have so intimately captured the sights and sounds of their homeland through concept albums about their experiences growing up or working in regions of the southern United States, their songs become a part of their geo-cultural identity. That is, their songs help define their identity through a particular geographic lens as being rural and southern, one that is uniquely East Tennessean (Parton)

or West Texan (Hancock). Their music demonstrates the hardships that they had to endure as a result of living in these specific regions, and at a specific time. Parton's songs speak specifically to a segment of the poor working-class population that lived in geographic and social isolation in the Appalachian mountains in the 1950s and 1960s; her songs revealed much about what it was like growing up with little to no money, and demonstrate the importance of family and regional traditions in her personal growth and identity (Watson, forthcoming [2016]). Hancock's album captures the socio-political tensions of being a dry land farmer during the Nixon era and reveals a general distrust of the government in the 1970s. Landscape and weather often take on larger roles within these narratives; Hancock draws on these elements to capture his complicated relationship to place. As a dry land farmer, he is both frustrated by the challenges of farming the hard dry land, while also appreciative of the unique landscape. His songs on the entire *West Texas Waltzes and Dust-blown Tractor Tunes* album express the tension between rural and urban values. They allow the singer-songwriter to become a voice for dry land farmers in Lubbock County, whose hard work is often ignored by government and overlooked by a society increasingly determined to develop rural spaces. Hancock's album pays tribute to the land and its people, lamenting and rejoicing the West Texas region of his childhood, capturing the many shades of wind that he encountered from the seat of his John Deere (Watson 2011, 17).

Songs by soft shell artists tend to lack the geographic or narrative specificity of the landscapes and environments of which they speak. Brooks & Dunn's 2003 hit "Red Dirt Road" is an example of this use of a place-narrative to describe "anyplace" USA. Written by Kix Brooks, Ronnie Dunn, and Mark Wright, the song opens with the song protagonist revealing that he grew up "off of old Route 3." Aside from describing the "red dirt road" of his origins, this song does not describe the landscape, but instead highlights the simple lifestyle and religious values often associated with small rural towns. Dunn recounted the naming of the album, stating: "I knew we were going to call this album *Red Dirt Road* before the song was even picked. I wanted that thread, that growing up in rural America and all the universal touchstones we all go through" (Country Music—Capital News 2015). Place, in such a narrative, is described in a way that would appeal to the sensibilities of individuals in many small, rural towns across the southern USA; indeed, this song could be

reflective of growing up in any small town. The same can be said of the narrative of Little Big Town's "Boondocks" (2005), which extols growing up in the middle of nowhere and all of the hard work and religious values that (stereotypically) define such cultural spaces. Thus, like the "Red Dirt Road," the "Boondocks" could be any number of geographic places. "Boondocks" became Little Big Town's first top 10 country hit (Dugger 2007) and quickly turned into a Southern anthem of rural pride.

More recently, former peanut farmer from Leesburg, Georgia, Luke Bryan sang about the importance of rain in facilitating the growth of high-quality corn crops in the opening verse of his first number-one hit, "Rain is a Good Thing" (2010). Co-written with Dallas Davidson, the narrative indicates that weathermen in the city complain about the clouds, but that "rain is a good thing" where he comes from. Moreover, beyond the observations about rain revealed in this opening verse, the remainder of the song narrative focuses mainly on the affect whisky has on making "baby a little bit frisky" (in the chorus). Although a bit of a narrative leap, Bryan and Davidson use the chorus to highlight the cycle of production: rain helps corn crops grow, corn (along with several other grains) makes whiskey. This process, in turn, has an impact on livening up his girlfriend's mood. Yet, the narrative does not name the place. Although the audience knows Bryan's background from interviews and publicity materials, his song lacks the details to strongly attach his narrative to weather patterns and farming practices of his southern rural origins (not to mention that his family farms peanuts, not corn). Thus, even though only verse 1 and the chorus point to this cycle (without any geographic specificity), Bryan uses this song to honour his rural roots in a way that underscores his respect for the lifestyle, but puts temporal (and geographic) distance between his current position and his past.

Narratives of hard core artists offer not just colourful descriptions about a particular region, but they also shed light on fundamental aspects of daily life, work conditions, and social relations. They serve as important source material to understand how the elements impact the human experience. Place songs that are autobiographical in nature often reflect nostalgically on a simpler way of life; they also reveal the hardships of rural living at a specific time and place, and reflect on issues concerning class marginality of the poor (the specifically *southern* poor in the case of Hancock and Parton). The songs become a

powerful vehicle for social commentary as an expression of the hardships of working-class culture. While the narratives of soft shell artists also describe life, work, and social relations with regard to place, the absence of specific place markers create a generic space, defining archetypes to which a wider audience can relate. Corb Lund's music, to which I will now turn, offers an Albertan perspective on these narrative types. Lund sings about what he knows, and what he knows most intimately is the Albertan landscape, how the weather affects life and work on the family farm, and the impact of human activity on the province's ecosystem. I will turn first to the history and biophysical description of the diverse regions of Alberta. The following discussion will be integral to the dissertation's argument, as it will provide the not just the cultural, but also the geographic context in which Lund composes his songs about Alberta. Description of the land, environment, and weather will be pertinent for each chapter, as it helps frame the history and/or location of activities addressed in his song narratives.

## **2.2 Alberta's Diverse Landscape**

Alberta may have become a province in 1905, but its geological formation reveals that the land's history began billions of years ago in the Archean Era. The province's history has been preserved in its soil, revealing not just its age and the activities that have taken place on land, but also a rich collection of fossils from the province's earliest inhabitants. Geologists working with the Alberta Transect Project (part of LITHOPROBE, Canada's National Geoscience Project funded by the National Research Council) investigated the history of Canada's geological formations in the 1990s. Their research has revealed that Precambrian crustal block exist deep beneath the surface of Central Alberta, the Peace River Arch, and Southern Alberta, with Medicine Hat's basement being characterized by crust dating between 3.3 and 2.6 billion years old (Cook, van der Velden, Hall and Roberts 1998). In the Proterozoic Era (roughly 1.7 billion years ago) Alberta was the westernmost tract of the land on the supercontinent of Pangaea, bordering the seashore of the body of water that eventually became the Pacific Ocean (Van Herk 2002, 6). Shifts and collisions in the earth's plates over the course of the Proterozoic Era continually shaped and reshaped the landscape and ecosystem of the land. Traces of early inhabitants in the Cambrian Period

(500 million years ago) including soft-bodied worms, jellyfish, and squid have been embedded in the fossil graveyard of the Burgess Shale on the present-day Alberta–British Columbia border. The region is one of the most significant fossil discoveries not only because of their age, but also the quality and detail of their preservation, which has afforded palaeontologists the opportunity to see what these animals actually looked like (The Burgess Shale Geoscience Foundation 2010). As the sea began slowly moving eastward and oxygen content continued to increase, plant and animals began to move inland and make Alberta their home.

During the late Cretaceous Period, the climate of what is now southern Alberta was subtropical (similar to present-day Florida), with lush forests and rivers. The climate and landscape created the perfect conditions for the mammals, birds, reptiles, and dinosaurs that roamed the land. One of the richest locations in the world for dinosaur fossils, palaeontologists have discovered 35 species of over 34 genera of 12 families of dinosaurs in Dinosaur Provincial Park in Drumheller, “including specimens from every known group of dinosaurs from the Cretaceous period” (UNESCO 2015a).<sup>2</sup> Most of the excavated fossils are on display at the Royal Tyrrell Museum, a venue dedicated entirely to palaeontology and the province’s rich fossil heritage. Another significant event of the Cretaceous Period was the slow emergence of the Rocky Mountains and British Columbia through a series of shifting and colliding plates. With the shifting and tilting of the land throughout the Cretaceous period and those that followed, the decaying vegetation, mudslides, and shifting sediment allowed for the accumulation and decomposition of peat – the great coalification process that over the course of millions of years left deep pockets of energy resources in the form of coal, natural gas, and the bituminous oil sands (Van Herk 2002, 21). The Ice Ages left their trace on the land as well; the advance and retreat of glaciers blanketed the Rocky Mountains in ice and altered the contours of the mountains, and the movement of ice sheets scraped and scoured the land, leaving behind rivers along the eastern side of the mountains. To this day, the blue-green water of Lake Louise and Peyto Lake in Banff National Park

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<sup>2</sup> According to UNESCO’s website, a total of 23,347 fossil specimens were collected between 1979 and 1991. This includes 300 dinosaur skeletons. On 26 October 1979 UNESCO named this southern Albertan region, home to Dinosaur Provincial Park, a World Heritage Site (UNESCO 2015a).

remain a constant reminder of the Ice Age as rock flour particles are carried into the lake by meltwater from glacial erosion (Fletcher 2015).

The activities that took place over the course of these two to three billion years created a diverse landscape for this western Canadian province. Alberta can be divided into six distinct biophysical regions (each with their own set of subregions) as a result of physical geography, climate, soil, and vegetation (Fig. 2.1). The Canadian Shield extends from Labrador through Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, the Northwest Territories, and the northeast corner of Alberta. Despite its small surface area in Alberta, the Canadian Shield actually forms the foundation of the province, as it plunges deep beneath the plains and the mountains. As a result of the repeated glaciations of the Pleistocene epoch, hard Precambrian rocks, angular lakes, and marshy depressions characterize Alberta's segment of the Canadian Shield. The landscape is dotted with pockets of Jackpine forests, and sparse vegetation in the cracks between rocks, including reindeer lichens, green sage, and bearberry. As a result of the region's arctic temperatures, rocky and sandy surfaces, and the poor drainage, the Canadian Shield does not have agricultural value; instead, hunting, fishing, and trapping provide subsistence and income to residents (Downing and Pettapiece 2006, 168; Green and Laycock 1971, 83). The Shield borders the vast boreal forest region, which covers the northern half of the province. The boreal forest actually sweeps around the entire northern hemisphere, interrupted only by ocean. Arctic tundra lies to the north of the forest (in the Northwest Territories), with parkland and grassland lying to its south. This immense region can be further divided into large subregions that contain a variety of deciduous poplar and evergreen white spruce trees, tall spruce trees and lush shrubs, expanses of slow-growing muskeg and swamp, and even an area with a landscape similar to the Canadian Shield with its exposed Precambrian bedrock, Jackpine trees, and lichens (La Roie 1971, 151-68).<sup>3</sup> Many birds and mammals call the Boreal Forest region home, including the mule deer and wapiti (elk) that live there year-round. The Woodland caribou retreat to the Boreal Forest in the winter. The Caribou Mountains lay in northern Boreal Forest, housing Wood Buffalo National Park, which is a wetland region that is home to a variety of protected bird species, the threatened woodland caribou herd, and wood bison

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<sup>3</sup> "Taiga" is a Russian term for wooded vegetation in northern latitudes, notably those that lie between arctic and alpine tundra regions.

(Hampson 1971, 169-72; Fuller 1971, 172-83).<sup>4</sup> While the boreal forest is cultivated for timber productions, trees are increasingly being cleared for oil and gas exploration, notably for the oil sands surface mining projects near Fort McMurray (see Chapter 5). Bodies of water in the northern part of the province flow toward the Arctic Ocean: the Athabasca River empties into Lake Athabasca and Slave River, and passes through Great Slave Lake and into the Mackenzie River.

The western wall of the province consists of the Rocky Mountains, a massive series of mountain ranges that extend from New Mexico north to British Columbia, passing through southern Alberta. The landscape is characterized by row upon row of massive mountain ranges (some reaching an altitude of 12,000 feet), with deep valleys and magnificent blue-water lakes lying between them. Alberta's Rockies are notable for their glacier and ice fields, which are significant not just for the presence of ice-capped mountains, but also for the effect of glacial erosion on the bodies of water lying in the mountain ranges, specifically in the national parks in Banff and Jasper (Green and Laycock 1971, 70-74). Year-round, the highest peaks in the Rockies are snow-capped. Thus, in the summer visitors can experience sun-warmed valleys or climb to alpine tundra, glaciers, and snow. While coniferous forests cover the majority of the mountainous region, trees cannot grow in the areas between the mountain forests and the bare rocky peaks, leaving behind the alpine tundra: herbaceous plants that flower and fruit in the heat of the summer. This is the area in which one can find flocks of bighorn sheep, mountain goats, and herds of wapiti grazing in the summer (Boag and Evans 1971, 218-19). Flanking the Rocky Mountains to the east lies a rugged hill country known as the Foothills. This region is a transitioning zone between the Rocky Mountains and the Boreal Forest (to the north) and the Parklands (to the south). Robert Green and Arleigh H. Laycock (1971, 76) describe the region as possessing its own unique character, "being chiefly a ridged, heavily forested country with scattered grasslands in the broader valleys and sparse trees along the highest crests." Flat-topped mountains, long ridges, and rolling hills of coniferous forests (lodge pole pine, white and black spruce, and fir trees) mark the look of the foothills landscape.

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<sup>4</sup> Wood Buffalo National Park is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. For more information on its status as a World Heritage Site, see UNESCO 2015c.

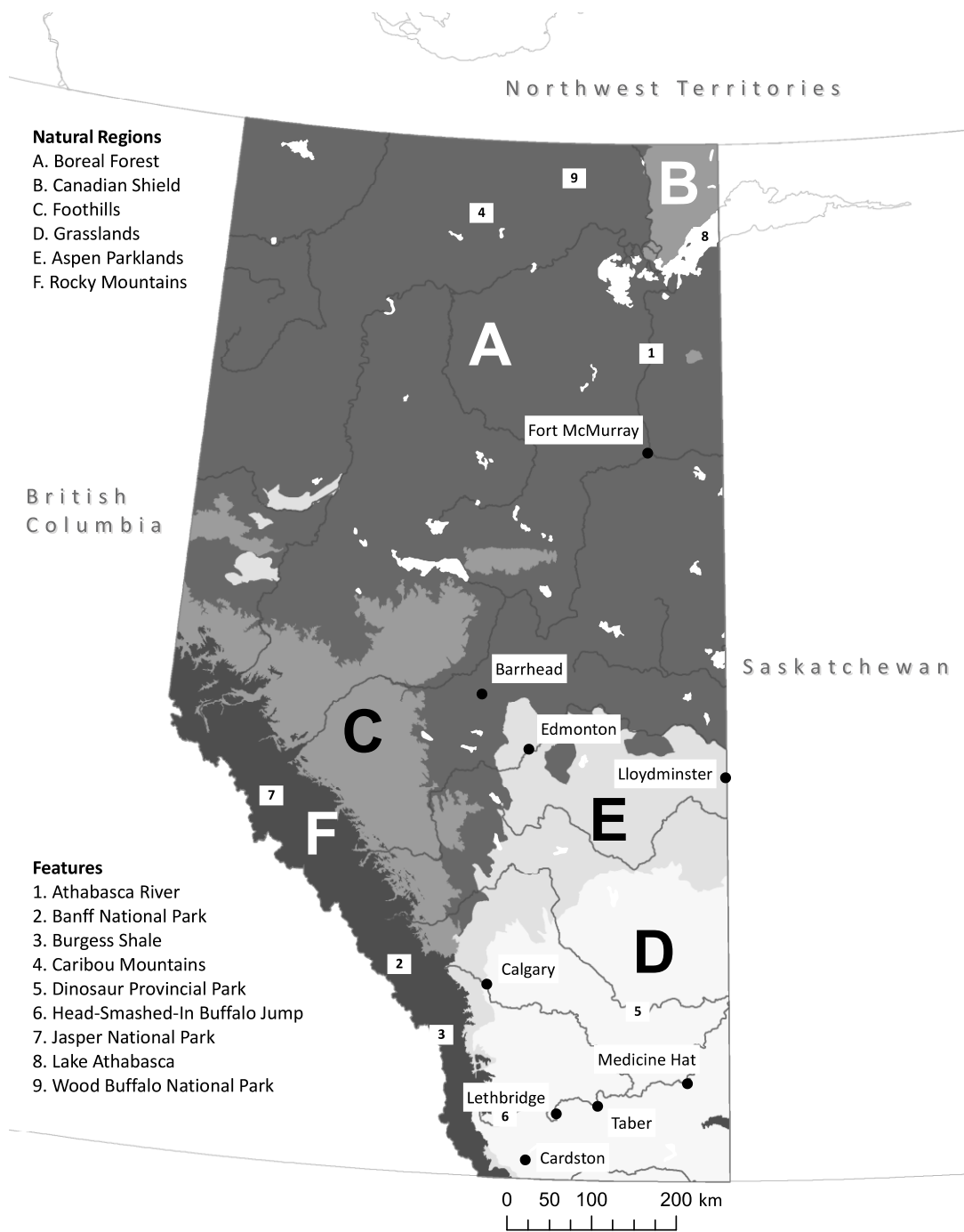
The Aspen Parkland region is another transitional zone in central Alberta between the southern Plains and the northern Boreal Forest. The natural vegetation of this region is an aspen-grassland mosaic; islands of aspen forest occur throughout the northern part of the region, while grasslands are dominant in the south. A small percentage of the region remains undeveloped, as the remaining portion has been developed into urban and agricultural landscape. The most densely populated of the six regions, both Edmonton and Red Deer lie in the middle of the Parklands. Despite this urban development, the Parkland is one of the richest agricultural areas in the province, and has been extensively cultivated for crop farming since the 1800s. Toward the Foothills region the main crops are hay or feed grains, while wheat, barley, and canola are the dominant crops in the central and eastern subregions (Downing and Pettapiece 2006, 104, 116). The Parklands are not free from petroleum exploration; heavy oil and strip coal mining activities occur throughout the region, as does gravel extraction. The final region, the Grasslands (or Plains), lie to the south of the Parklands. The region includes some of the most productive croplands in the province, perfect for dry land farming (wheat and fallow), and has rolling grasslands on which cattle graze (Downing and Pettapiece 2006, 90). The region is also noted for two distinct landmarks. One of the world's oldest, largest, and best-preserved buffalo jumps is located in the south-west corner of the province, where the foothills of the Rocky Mountains meet the Grasslands. Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump has been used in buffalo hunting practices by aboriginal peoples of the plains for over 6,000 years. As a result of their extensive knowledge of the region and understanding of bison's behaviour, the Plains People of Alberta developed a hunting practice of stampeding bison over the precipice of the buffalo jump (Alberta Culture 2015).<sup>5</sup> And finally, bedrock exposures and badland terrain mark the river valleys of Red Deer River and Drumheller. The badlands hold the dinosaur treasures of the Cretaceous period, and ancient rock strata, low valleys, and mushroom-cap hoodoos mark the this part of the region's landscape.

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<sup>5</sup> In 1981, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) named the buffalo jump a World Heritage Site (UNESCO 2015b).



Figure 2.1 Natural Biophysical Regions of Alberta<sup>6</sup>



<sup>6</sup> *Natural Biophysical Regions of Alberta*. Scale 1 cm = 55 kilometres approx. Natural Region and Subregions of Alberta, 2005 – Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, Alberta Environment, Alberta Community Development and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and ArcCanada 3.1, ESRI Canada. Ottawa: Sarah Simpkin, University of Ottawa, June 2014.

### ***“No Roads Here” (2002)***

Having grown up in southern Alberta between his family’s ranches in Taber, Rosemary, and Cardston near the foothills, Lund has a deep appreciation for the landscape and environment of the region. Although Edmonton has been his primary residence for the past twenty years, his southern Albertan home has maintained a hold on Lund and remains sacred territory for the singer-songwriter: “I am not an organized religion kind of guy. So for me that place is probably about as spiritual as it gets... getting out of the city and getting into the trees, it does something to you” (Waugh 2012). He has referred to his family’s land in the foothills as a heaven, as his favourite place to be in an up-tempo Western swing number, “Little Foothills Heaven” (discussed further in chapter 3). And while he certainly has an intimate relationship with the land, Lund has lamented the fact that he never really knew southern Alberta like the “old boys did” in his mournful song “Especially a Paint” from *Horse Soldier! Horse Soldier!* (2007). This song reveals a deep regret over the slow disappearance of this sacred ground; it was “a cathedral then and the cowboys, they all knew that you can’t keep a loop on paradise.” The songs discussed here tell a different story about Alberta: they relate dark tales about the land from the first travelers to the province to the changing ecology and conservation issues. They also share stories about how weather conditions affect life in southern Alberta. From the warm, dry Chinook wind to the unexpected floods of June 2013, Lund has addressed their impact on ranching and life in rural southern Alberta with both serious issues and humour.

The spirit of the cowboy resides within Lund’s discography and is most evident in “No Roads Here” from his 2002 album *Five Dollar Bill*. This dark tale loosely recounts the travels of his early ancestors who migrated north from Utah into southern Alberta around the turn of the twentieth century (Lund 2013c). The album’s liner notes (Lund 2002) contain a dedication to his family:

Both sides of my family, the Lunds and the Ivinses have been in Alberta punching cows, breaking horses, ranching and rodeoing for four generations from back when it was still the Northwest Territories at the beginning of the last century, and before that, down in Utah. So this song is for my ancestors.

Alberta was not a province at this time, but rather part a large tract of land known as the North-West Territories, which included Alberta, Saskatchewan, and part of Yukon. The land was slowly undergoing transformation as settlers from the east (and the south) made the trek west on promises made by the Canadian government of farmable prairie land and the chance to take part in building a new community. Drawing on Leo Thwaite's (1912, 8) contemporary assessment of the types of individuals migrating to Alberta at the turn of the century, Geo Takach (2010, 262) observed, "Alberta cultivated the reputation early on as a destination for builders, capitalists, hunters, scenery lovers and folks 'who are seriously thinking of improving their condition by emigrating to a land where steady honest work meets with certain and speedy reward'." In 1872 the Canadian government passed the Dominion Lands Act, which divided up and sold settlers 160 acres of land for a \$10 filing fee, giving them three years to build a homestead and cultivate no less than 15 acres of land each year. Should they succeed, settlers were granted a permanent title to the land; if they failed, however, they had to forfeit their money and land. To individuals and families seeking a new life and land of their own, this seemed to be a good deal, but they were not warned about the state of the land, the hours of back-breaking work required to work the land and build even a one-room cabin home, or the severe weather conditions they would face in desert-like summers and harsh winters (Van Herk 2002, 182). Nor did they realize that there would be a lack of resources to help them with their tasks.

The settlement of Albertan land had both positive and negative side effects. Migration to this territory gave many individuals and families a fresh start and the opportunity to own their own land. Once an empty and presumably unused land, Alberta slowly became a leader in agriculture, fossil fuels, and lumber. But settlement came with a cost. When the Canadian government began selling off pieces of Alberta land for settlement, they ignored the fact that the territory already "belonged" to several tribes who relied on the land, trees, vegetation, rivers, and lakes for survival. With the migration of settlers from the east and south, the aboriginal population was slowly pushed off of their land and out of their nomadic lifestyle and onto reservations; they suffered from starvation as a result of disappearing bison herds. With agricultural settlements encroaching on the southern parklands and grasslands, and lumber and mining companies desiring access to the

northern Boreal Forests, bison and other hunted wildlife were also pushed out of their home.<sup>7</sup>

The song opens with the chorus, a dark and ominous lyric introducing the land through its absence of roads, signposts, history, and laws to keep its few inhabitants in step. Lund immediately paints a picture of a large empty tract of land, not yet fully explored, but dark and dangerous in its vast nothingness. The verses offer a deeper description of the land that settlers came into contact with when they first arrived in Alberta. In the first verse he points out the remnants of the land's prior inhabitants, traces that people had indeed moved through or settled in the area at one point, including the "grewed over wagon trail" heading to the west from previous settlers and a tipi ring near Purple Springs, a sign of aboriginal settlement predating the settlers. Aboriginals used tipi rings point to favourable campsites through circular or V-shaped stone patterns; while the stones were used to hold down tipis to keep living quarters dry, they also marked the territory as a prime location for water, fuel, good hunting, and travel. The absence of people on this western trail and at the Purple Springs campsite suggests that travelers were merely passing through or had already tapped the resources of the area, leaving nothing but traces of their existence. The grown over nature of the trail and abandonment of the tipi rings suggests that the land had been empty for some time. The lone individual on these southern plains is the shepherd out in Vauxhall, but even his existence seems questionable, since his sheep shack is "old and leaning." The narrative here in the first verse suggests that the land is void of life and activity, maintaining the foreboding tone of the chorus.

The second verse describes the type of people seeking refuge alongside the cowboy-narrator in this unknown land, as desperate settlers seeking to escape oppression and new life chances from the promise of farmable land out west. Like the cowboy narrator, his fellow travelers are also fearless of the unknown that lies en route to the Promised Land. The final verse points to the cowboy tradition and to his family heritage, starting with the mention of the famous cowboy song "Strawberry Roan." This cowboy song holds significance for Lund as the first cowboy song that his grandfather taught him as a young

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<sup>7</sup> Throughout the 1880s southern, central, and northern bands signed treaties with the Canadian government exchanging their rights to the land for aid to deal with starvation and disease. Treaties 6, 7, and 8 outlined their agreements (Bryan 1971, 292; Van Herk 2002, 78-80, 88-90).

boy (Morris 2015). The verse considers the type of work undertaken out in this land including hunting, whiskey trade, and herding cattle, activities in which his family members participated (Lund 2013c). These final two verses seek to map out his family's long history in the region as well as other aspects of his heritage (notably their Viking roots) and the traditions that they brought with them on their journey into the territory. "No Roads Here" offers a cowboy's map of an unsettled territory. Through the narrator's travels, the song marks out the land in the same way that anyone would do for a region without signposts and roads by describing the landmarks that he comes into contact with during his journey. The tipi ring near Purple Springs, the coulees (and sheep shack) in Vauxhall, and Milk River Ridge just south of Raymond mark out place, while also documenting the landscape (flat camping land, deep ravines, mountainous ridges) and the activity (or lack of activity) on the land. These landmarks also map out the small corner of southern Alberta in which the Lunds and Ivinses settled at the turn of the century near Taber and Cardston (south of Calgary, see Fig. 2.1). While not necessarily the "extreme local" in comparison to Cornell West's circulation through downtown New York (Forman 2002, 1), this song maps out what would have been the "extreme local" of the largely unsettled territory that was turn of the century southern Alberta. By mapping out the land in this manner, Lund tracks his ancestor's travels over the "grewed over wagon trail" and marks out their territory and their long history in the region. Lund's family migrated to this prairie province before there were roads, signs, populated regions, and laws; this song marks their entry into the land's history, the path of the early Mormon settlers, and highlighted the cowboy culture that were also present in the region.

The musical setting of "No Roads Here" creates a vivid picture of a cowboy exploring an unknown and mysterious territory. The song opens with an instrumental prelude that immediately establishes an ominous feel with a bit of a Western cowboy film aura. The introduction begins with the upright bass bowing a low D drone, followed shortly after by the wispy sound of the fiddle also bowing a high D drone, and then, finally, Lund plays the opening riff (a free-moving version of the chorus melody) on the acoustic guitar (Ex. 2.1).<sup>8</sup> Bass player Kurt Ciesla tuned the lowest string on the upright bass to a D

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<sup>8</sup> Ciesla uses the German bowing technique, where the frog sits in the palm of the right hand and the tip of the thumb wraps around on top of the stick. The index and middle fingers then lie against the side of the stick

(instead of E) on the recording, allowing him to produce a buzz sound as he pulls his bow across the open string. The fiddle produces a contrasting sound to the deep bass buzz, as Tammy Rogers uses bowing and fingering techniques that produce sympathetic frequencies by lightly touching the string with the left fingertip on a fret node while slowly dragging her bow over the strings near the bridge of the instrument. This technique results in a piercing sounding pitch and its overtones.<sup>9</sup> Combined, these low and high-pitched drones establish a dark, foreboding atmosphere, as well as a sense of empty space through bowing techniques that create a natural reverberation. These drones also provide a harmonic framework for the guitar, as the introduction lacks a sense of metre. Lund manipulates the metre of the chorus melody in the introduction through longer periods of rest between phrases. He also ornaments the guitar melody with slight pitch bends produced by fingers moving the string up or down on the fret board after being plucked with the rich hand (Ex. 2.1). The melody has an ominous mood in large part because Lund uses the natural minor, reaching down to a C natural in the last segment of each phrase. The long pauses between phrases and ornamented melody enhance the tension already established by the drones; they also help create anticipation for each fragment of chorus melody. The combination of the extreme registral drones, the bowed and plucked string timbres, the D minor key, and use of reverb creates both atmosphere and space. While the string instruments have a natural reverberation as a result of their extreme register and bowing techniques, the use of additional reverb—notably on the guitar—creates hazy or pillowy aura around the sound. The drones envelope the guitar, and create a sonic impression of a dark and ominous territory for the natural minor melodic inflection. The guitar, centered in the recording mix, represents the cowboy; like the character in a Western film, the guitar strides into view and explores the scenery surrounding him. Lund’s song bears strong resemblance to the main theme that Ennio Morricone composed for Sergio Leone’s *Once Upon a Time in the West*, which also opens with a drone in the double bass that supports a short fragment of a melody that expands through the addition of other instruments (from a keyboard instrument to including horns). At the close of the introduction, the bowed strings taper off and Lund

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and the pinkie finger presses on the bottom of the frog. This can be viewed in the *Memphis Sun* special on Lund’s *Counterfeit Blues* DVD (Lund 2014b).

<sup>9</sup> The sound produced is similar to that of a violin being tuned, especially during an orchestra performance.

sings the opening line of the chorus alone before the acoustic guitar enters with its shuffle. With this instrumental introduction and the first line of the chorus about the absence of roads, Lund paints a musical portrait of a desolate landscape, a dangerous territory, but also one full of mystery and potential for a young daring cowboy to explore.

Example 2.1 “No Roads Here,” instrumental introduction

Freely, without fixed rhythm

The musical score is arranged in three systems. Each system contains three staves: Acoustic Guitar (Ac.Gtr.), Violin (Vln.), and Double Bass (D.B.). The key signature is one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 3/4. The first system is marked 'Freely, without fixed rhythm'. The Acoustic Guitar part features a melodic line with a pitch bend (~) and a triplet (3). The Violin part plays a series of sustained notes with slurs. The Double Bass part provides a harmonic foundation with sustained notes and slurs.

Note: The “~” sign indicates a pitch bend on the acoustic guitar.

Lund's vocal performance and the sparse accompaniment of the first chorus prolong the ominous atmosphere and space established in the instrumental prelude. After the instrumental prelude, the song begins with only Lund and the acoustic guitar performing the chorus. Lund, as mentioned above, sings the first line of the chorus unaccompanied, with the acoustic guitar entering the setting with an oom-pah shuffle beat on the word "here." Although it is a stripped down accompaniment, the first chorus builds on the mood of the eerie opening, and generates the imagery of a lone cowboy entering an unknown territory for which he knows there are no roads, history, or written laws. Both the guitar and Lund's microphone have a short reverb effect, which remains through the entire song. On Lund's voice, this has the added effect of a slight echo, which is more noticeable on longer held words including "roads," "signposts," and especially "laws." Lund also sings this chorus at a lower volume, with a slight breathiness to the vocals, and tapers off at the ends of phrases as though he is intending to remain quiet. This is most noticeable on at the end of the phrase "there are no roads here." All of these elements combined—the short reverb effect, slight echo, and soft volume of his breathy speech-like delivery—create an image of a man standing alone in the middle of a vast territory. He is intending to remain quiet, not necessarily because he's afraid to be heard, but because he's wary of his unknown surroundings. The protagonist forges onward, entering the "dark land" with a certain intrigue in this mysterious, empty land.

The fiddle, bass, and drums join Lund and the acoustic guitar in the first verse. Although the tempo does not change from the chorus to the first verse, the full arrangement gives the impression of increased movement. The combination of the drum kit's fast "train beat" played on brushes and the bass and acoustic guitar's oom-pa accompaniment on the recorded performance creates a sonic image of Lund's caravan traveling through the vast space that they just paused to observe. The image that emerges is that of an old Western drama. While the instruments do not necessarily represent the individuals or the landscape, they generate an image of men traveling across the open land on horseback: the horses' hooves pounding the dry, hard ground as they cross the grown over wagon trail, with nothing around them but open plains and a few markers of earlier inhabitants who have abandoned their camps.



The violin is used to great effect throughout the song's musical setting in maintaining the dark mood of the song and capturing the character of space and its people. After the instrumental prelude, the violin drops out of the musical setting, re-emerging in the second and third chorus with its wispy overtones supporting the first two lines and then echoing Lund's vocal performance by playing an augmented version of the "there are no roads here" phrase under the last two lines of text. In the second verse, Rogers plays a sombre fiddle tune in the musical accompaniment. The violin enters at the mention of desperate settlers seeking refuge from their oppressive past and "certain serfdom," and creates a strong visual image of the traveling caravan. The fiddle tune provides narrative support to describe the character or mood of a venue or geographic place. In this verse's "scene" the fiddle tune gives a European folk-style character to the settlers and also brings them to life; they are not necessarily a memory from the narrator's past travels, but rather they appear to be part of his present as he watches their caravan pass by.

"No Roads Here" marks out not just Lund's family history in southern Alberta, but it also seeks to map out the region and landscape. As he is known to do in his songwriting, Lund likely drew from stories passed down from his great-grandparents about their migration to Alberta or anecdotes of local history. While he does not reveal specific details about his family (aside from Viking roots), he loosely recounts their path and maps out their area of settlement; more importantly, he shows the depth of his roots in the region by describing an empty landscape that pre-dates the birth of Alberta. Without explicitly recounting the details of the province's history, he describes the type of people who settled in the region, including individuals and families desperate for a new start and land to call their own, cowboys, and men engaged in whiskey trade. The tipi ring is a symbol of the province's very first inhabitants: the aboriginals. The fact that the tipi ring has been vacated highlights the aboriginal tradition of leaving markers of good campsites, and also suggests that they perhaps abandoned the camp to escape the influx of white men entering their territory.

## **2.3 Southern Alberta's Climate**

Lund has addressed Alberta's weather with both seriousness and humour. Having grown up on ranches in the southern Albertan grassland region (the prairies), he has an appreciation not just for its diverse landscape, but also the climate and weather patterns that affect life and work. The grasslands are the warmest and driest regions in Alberta, due in large part to the presence of the "Chinook" wind that blows across the prairies from the Rocky Mountains. As a result of these winds, the winters are milder here than in the rest of the province. Precipitation varies throughout the region (in relation to proximity to the mountains), with the maximum rainfall occurring in June, and a "pronounced deficit during the latter part of the growing season" (Downing and Pettapiece 2006, 82). The grasslands are divided into four subregions, the Dry Mixedgrass, Mixedgrass, northern Fescue, and the Foothills Fescue Subregions, each with their own temperature and precipitation patterns. The Dry Mixedgrass Subregion, where Lund grew up, has the driest and warmest temperatures, and grows wetter and cooler moving westward toward the Foothills Fescue Subregion. The subregion is used principally for agriculture; Downing and Pettapiece indicate that 55 percent of the land is used for grazing, while 35 percent is under dry-land farming of wheat and fallow. Roughly 10 percent of the subregion is irrigated, mainly in Taber, Brooks, and Medicine Hat (Downing and Pettapiece 2006, 90). Oil and gas exploration is also extensive throughout this region (see chapter 5).

### **2.3.1 *The Chinook Wind***

Alberta's climate is determined in large part by its geography and its topography. The province lies in the northern cool temperate zone with cold winters and short, cool summers, between the 49<sup>th</sup> and 60<sup>th</sup> parallels. The combination of altitude, latitude, distance from the Pacific Ocean, and direction of its prevailing winds influence the climate and weather patterns in the province (Longley 1971, 53-67). The Rocky Mountains play a significant role in determining weather conditions for southern Alberta. Not only do the Rocky Mountains themselves exhibit fascinating climate regions with their year-round snow-capped mountains and glaciers, but they also impact temperature and precipitation.

The height and width of the Rockies, coupled with the direction of prevailing winds can cause temperature to rise or fall within 24 hours (Longley 1971, 54). Warm, moist air from the Pacific Ocean cools as it moves up the western side of the Rocky Mountains, loses its moisture and becomes warmer as it descends down the eastern side. This process of moist air cooling as it climbs the western slopes and warming as it descends the eastern results in the beloved “Chinook” wind.<sup>10</sup> Although these descending winds can hit hurricane force (up to 120 km/h), they are a welcome phenomenon—especially during frigid winter temperatures, as these winds cause the temperature to rise as much as 40 degrees within 24 hours and remove snow cover from the ground (Longley 1971, 54). While the effects of these winds are more noticeable in the winter (rising temperatures and loss of snow cover), the atmospheric processes that produce a Chinook occur year-round, resulting in increased plant water stress in areas of low precipitation (Alberta 2014). In contrast to the Chinook, south blowing Arctic air from the Northwest Territories produces bitter cold winds that can cause temperatures to drop 30 degrees.

As a result of the Chinook wind, winters in southern Alberta (as far north as Calgary) may be bitterly cold, but the ground often remains bare, lengthening the grazing season for cattle. The rest of the province is blanketed by snow, with approximately 5 feet in northern Alberta and 10 feet in the valleys of the Rocky Mountains. Winter temperatures range from 20 to 30 degrees below zero degrees Celcius in the south, to 30 to 40 below in central Alberta, and there have been instances of 70 degrees below zero in the north. Although the season officially begins in December, winter temperatures and snowfall can begin as early as late October, and last until as late as May. As a result, spring can often feel like a very short season. The greatest amount of precipitation occurs in the summer, but in some areas of the province it is still not enough.

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<sup>10</sup> The term “Chinook” is derived from a First Nations tribe that lived along the Columbia River. Originally, the term referred to the wind that blew from the direction of the tribe’s camp (Alberta 2015).

### ***“Chinook Wind” (2009)***

The tenth song on *Losin’ Lately Gambler* reflects on the impact of the “Chinook Wind” on farming in southern Alberta. The lyrics draw on imagery of the Rocky Mountains, dry climate, wild western winds, and, most importantly, the lonesome rancher trying to work in the fields. Lund describes one aspect of the reality of life and work in the Grassland region of southern Alberta, outlining the effect of the Chinook wind and its moisture-ridden west winds, calling it “Rocky Mountain gusty shit” that has “dried” him out for years. While most welcome the Chinook for a brief respite from bitterly dry cold winters of southern Alberta, Lund’s protagonist has a complicated relationship with the western wind, viewing it as a pesky critter that he cannot escape. Lund even imparts gender on the Chinook wind in the chorus, referring to it by the feminine pronoun, “her.”<sup>11</sup> In so doing, he anthropomorphizes the western wind, giving it identity and character as it “howls” in his ear (verse 1), “whispers” things, “blows” away illusions, and “melts” the drifting snow (chorus). He describes the wind’s speed and moisture level as “gusty shit” that dries him out in the first verse and as a “moisture sucking west wind” that “roars” off the Rocky Mountains in the third. In the second verse, Lund establishes a source of tension for southern Albertans, by comparing their situation to those who “sweat in the blazing sun” or “rot in the rain.” Although he paints just as negative a picture for these individuals, there is a jealous tone to the lyric; he may recognize that these are not necessarily desirable weather conditions either, but their climates seem more attractive from his vantage point. In so doing, his lyrics establish a boundary between southern Albertan farmers contending with the Chinook wind and those more fortunate to have sun and rain in other regions of the province.

In addition to its dry nature, the wind’s speed also poses a problem for Lund’s protagonist. As he reveals in the second verse, the Chinook wind can move so quickly off of the mountainside that it sends “the good dirt east,” leaving him with nothing but a “terrible migraine.” The migraine is not only a result of both losing his good topsoil, but it is also the neurological effects of the Chinook. Regionally, headaches that occur during a

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<sup>11</sup> This pronoun is used in a way similar to the popular redneck phrase, “git ‘er done,” where ‘er is short for “her,” and refers generically to “it” or “something” like a job or other menial task. When Lund sings the line “let her blow,” it sounds like “let ‘er blow.”

Chinook wind are called “Chinook headaches.” Researchers from the Department of Clinical Neurosciences Faculty of Medicine at the University of Calgary found an increased probability of migraines on both pre-Chinook and high-wind Chinook days (The Canadian Press 2011; Cooke, Rose, and Becker 2000, 302-7). In addition to “Chinook headaches,” regional lore also blames the wind for irritability and sleeplessness, as many individuals claim that they become restless during Chinook winds (Huffington Post 2013a). Lund’s narrative captures this relationship and the impact that the Chinook has on the neuroses of southern Albertans. In the third and fourth verse, he claims that the wind “blew [him] crazy,” and that he let it carry him away. He also reveals that he had been warned that the wind had a reputation for driving other individuals insane. In the liner notes Lund (2009b) indicated that “Chinook Wind” was “For all the southern Albertans who’ve had their lives smoothed, shaped and eroded by the ever present western wind. It kind of does something to you after a while.”. Waiting for a change in the weather, by the final verse, Lund seems almost nostalgic for the “Rocky Mountain gusty shit,” concluding the song by claiming that maybe if he’s lucky, the Chinook will blow him home again. Here the singer-songwriter draws on the country music tradition of longing for home, despite having already escaped the region and the hardships of rural life.

The musical setting captures both the sound and character of the Chinook wind, as well as the psychological state of the narrator, through both the arrangement and the use of delay and reverb. Drawing on a Waylon Jennings-esque outlaw-style setting, the song opens with Lund playing a repeated strumming pattern on the acoustic guitar over drummer Brady Valgardson hitting a steady beat on the bass drum and high hat. Lund plays a phased acoustic guitar so that the root chord tone of D continues to resonate after he hits the full chord on the first beat of the first, second and fourth bars in the introduction. The D resonates like a drone over Lund strumming the chord through the rest of the bar. In so doing, the phased acoustic guitar creates a soft “howling” effect that mimics the sounds of blowing wind. The song’s introduction remains on the D tonic chord, producing a sense of stasis like the calm before a storm; this creates the effect of hearing or feeling the wind approaching from off in the distance. Lund strums this same pattern throughout the entire song, playing predominantly D tonic chords, shifting to IV and I, and then V and I at the ends of the third and fourth lines of the verse (Ex. 2.2). The electric guitar and upright

bass accompany Lund's riff from the second verse onward, playing a two-note galloping pattern (again, emphasizing the D tonic). The combination of the continual repetition of Lund's riff and the electric guitar and bass line with the emphasis of the D tonic centre enhances the persistent and repetitive nature of the blowing wind that the singer-songwriter wishes to escape. The constant repetition also captures the craziness or insanity of the protagonist. As Serge Lacasse (2000, 195-208) discussed in his dissertation on vocal staging, phasing effects, and flanging in particular, seems to express psychological stresses, including inner 'turmoil' or even spiritual uncertainty. In "Chinook Wind," the repetition on the phased guitar also suggests the inner stresses of the farmer frustrated with the Chinook, desperately needing a break from its frequent and constant presence in his life.

The lap steel enters in the song's chorus to capture the wild spirit and sound of the Chinook. The instrument functions in this arrangement as a response to Lund's lyrical command to "let her blow." The lap steel's melody whips around the vocal line, mimicking the quick-moving pace of the west wind and creating an image of an untameable critter that Lund seeks to restrain (Ex. 2.3). The instrument's short pitch bends further define its wild character as though the Chinook is changing direction to quick avoid being caught. The longer pitch bends at the end of the chorus seem to create a moment of calm before another gust of wind blows through the prairie landscape. Combined with the repetition of Lund's acoustic guitar and the electric and upright bass, the musical setting captures many aspects of this Chinook wind: its persistent and driving character, its recurrent nature, and its quick movement through the prairie landscape. The quasi call-and-response between the lap steel and Lund in the chorus creates an image of the western wind taunting this frustrated farmer.

Example 2.2 “Chinook Wind,” verse 1

The musical score consists of three systems, each with a vocal line and a guitar accompaniment line. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#) and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are: "I was born with the Chi - nook wind how-ling in my ears That Ro-cky Moun-tain gus-ty shit it dried me out for years Way back I think my grand-pa had a rope horse by that name All I know is, God, here comes that old west wind a - gain." The guitar accompaniment features a steady eighth-note pattern with occasional triplets.

The effect of the Chinook wind and resulting environmental conditions, such as the dry nature of the air, can be heard in Lund’s vocal performance. His voice has a short echo effect on it, which is more audible in the first and second verses. The echo occurs on the entire vocal performance with a slight reverb applied, at a fixed delay of approximately an eighth note (between 100 and 200 ms), with only one repetition and fades at the end of each phrase. The echo captures the atmospheric conditions surrounding the protagonist on the prairies; the fading repetition of the vocal line gives the impression that Lund’s voice is being carried away by the wind—as though his voice is trailing off behind him. Lund’s voice type has a rough, dry, and hoarse quality that is also very nasal. Fernando Poyatos (1993, 216) has indicated that a hoarse voice implies “a quality acquired through some negative activities.” Lund’s dry, hoarse vocals give the impression of abused vocal cords as a result of the dry (probably sandy) environmental conditions produced by the Chinook

wind. Lund has an intensified strained voice in several locations throughout the song (almost like a “missed” yodel break), notably on the first word of the song (“I”) and on words beginning with the letter *h*, such as “howlin’” (verse 1), “here” (verse 2), “had my fill” and “hills” (verse 3), and “here,” “have,” and especially “home” (verse 4). With the echo effect (and phaser on the acoustic guitar) creating the atmospheric conditions surrounding Lund, the vocal performance sounds even more strained, as though the singer struggles to project his voice through a dry, thick, fast moving wind. Lund’s strain against the wind emerges also through his cry breaks, which occur on the following words: “lotsa/” (second verse), “cra/zy” (verse three), “Chino/ok,” “ha/ve,” and especially on “ho/me” (verse four). Overall, the paralinguistic qualifiers in Lund’s performance seem to further enhance the effect of the environmental conditions on the singer’s body as he struggles both physically and emotionally with the Chinook wind. The dry, hoarse character of Lund’s voice gives the impression that his vocal cords have been damaged by the dry weather that he endures during the Chinook, which is likely sandy as a result of its high speed picking up and moving dirt east. The cry breaks in the last line of the song captures the character’s lonesomeness and longing for a return home.



Example 2.3 “Chinook Wind,” chorus

The musical score is arranged in three systems. The first system includes a vocal line and three instrumental parts: Steel Guitar, Acoustic Guitar, and Double Bass. The second system includes a vocal line and two instrumental parts: Acoustic Guitar and Double Bass. The third system includes a vocal line and two instrumental parts: Acoustic Guitar and Double Bass. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are: "Let 'er blow — let 'er blow — whis-per me things — that I don't know. — Let 'er blow — let 'er blow — let 'er blow a - way il - lu - sions like she melts the drif - tin snow." The instrumental parts feature a consistent bass line with triplets and a treble part with chords and triplets.

Vocal Line:  
 Let 'er blow — let 'er blow — whis-per me things — that I don't  
 know. — Let 'er blow — let 'er blow — let 'er  
 blow a - way il - lu - sions like she melts the drif - tin snow.

Steel Guitar  
 Acoustic Guitar  
 Double Bass

Ac. Gtr.  
 D.B.

Ac. Gtr.  
 D.B.

### 2.3.2 *Precipitation and Flooding*

Despite the fact that this is one of the driest regions in the province, the grasslands and parkland regions have recently suffered from devastating floods in June 2005, 2010, and 2013.<sup>12</sup> The 2005 floods were a result of three major storms that washed out roads and parks, destroyed sewers and bridges, wrecked buildings, and drowned livestock (Environment Canada 2013, 2014). The 2013 flood was even worse than those preceding it, and was ranked Canada's costliest natural disaster. And again, in June 2014, southern Alberta prepared for another flood as local communities declare state of emergency (CBC 2014a/b).

#### ***“Truck Got Stuck” (2005)***

On his 2005 album *Hair in My Eyes like a Highland Steer*, Lund included a humorous tale about his truck getting stuck in mud after significant rain, and the convoy of four wheel drive trucks that in turn got stuck trying to pull him out. “The Truck Got Stuck” is arguably Lund's most popular song, one that gets the crowd going at most of his shows. The song was a breakthrough for his career, marking the point where people started to take notice of him. As a result of its popularity, he won the CCMA's 2006 Album of the Year, Album Design of the Year, and Roots Artist of the Year for it. He also won the 2006 Juno award for Roots & Traditional Album of the Year.<sup>13</sup>

The song begins with its chorus, an amusing account of truck after truck getting stuck in the mud, each getting hilariously stuck trying the help the one before it. In interview Lund revealed that the narrative is a true story, “some stuff is embellished a bit, but that song is verbatim, exactly true” (Mullins 2013). From a Chevrolet, to a Ford, to a Dodge, each four-wheel drive truck got stuck at some point in this humorous tale until they found, at the end of the narrative, canola seed to spread under the trucks for traction. The whole calamity began, as the first verse reveals, after a significant downpour more rain than

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<sup>12</sup> Alberta's 2005 and 2013 floods were named Environment Canada's top weather events of the year, both taking the number 1 spot on the annual list (Environment Canada 2013, 2014).

<sup>13</sup> This is the only Juno award that Lund has won. He has been nominated five times. See history results here, <[http://junoawards.ca/awards/artist-summary/?artist\\_name=corb+lund&submit=Search](http://junoawards.ca/awards/artist-summary/?artist_name=corb+lund&submit=Search)>.

they had “seen for a thousand years” that rendered the “old brown prairie dirt that had been so dry for so long” very “muddy, boggy, and sticky.” Drawing on the country spirit of community and lending a helping hand, each friend willingly shows up to help Lund out of his predicament, each spinning tires, sinking down into the mud. As a result, Lund misses band practice, Chavez misses work, Reggie stood up his ex wife, and Holtman, “didn’t have nothing better to do, ‘cept ranch.” The only individuals unwilling to help were the Hutterites who drove by in their four wheel drive truck, a trait that Lund sarcastically claimed was “mighty neighbourly, mighty neighbourly.”

These men tried everything, from jacking up trucks, snugging the chains, and even timber under the wheels—everything, that is, except shovelling! And then, they got their hands on “two sacks of the best modern canola seed” and finally found the key to getting all of their trucks out of the mud. Layer upon layer, Lund wittily spins a tale about the comedic events of the day he got stuck in the mud. And while the song plays as a novelty song, as a big joke, he manages to make a veiled political comment about the “genetically modified canola seed.” Lund refers to Monsanto’s controversial seed product used on the prairies that was “genetically modified for controlling the weeds.” A “Roundup Ready” seed (first soybean, then canola, cotton, sugar beets, corn, and more) was created that had genetic resistance to Roundup herbicide. The seed produces not just efficient and a comprehensive weed management system, but also holds greater yield opportunity (Latzke 2014). Lund mentions these yields (“genetically modified ...for big old yields and margarine oil”), but points out briefly that it “raised hell all over that prairie soil.” While most of the major legal battles surrounding the use of or accidental use of Monsanto’s genetically modified seed has been in neighbouring Saskatchewan, the issues are certainly relevant to all organic crop farmers of the prairie provinces. The most prevalent issue for organic crop farmers was outlined best in the case of Hofman versus Monsanto (2006) in which the plaintiff farmers argued that “the release of the [genetically modified] varieties of canola has resulted in the spread of the plants and modified genes such that it is impossible to grow organic canola” (Garforth and Ainslie 2006).<sup>14</sup> As a result of these “volunteer”

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<sup>14</sup> Perhaps the more famous case is that is Schmeiser versus Monsanto, in which Monsanto sued Saskatchewan-based farmer Percy Schmeiser for planting the genetically modified canola seed without paying the licencing fee. Schmeiser testified that he found Monsanto’s Roundup Ready Canola plants in his field (claiming that the wind had carried loose seeds into his fields from a nearby farm using the product). He

genetically modified canola plants appearing in the fields of organic farmers, the plaintiffs argued that they became unable to claim complete organic crop quality, and that they had lost their European market (Garforth and Ainslie 2006). The use of canola seed is, in fact, the only fabrication in Lund's tale, and in adding it into the narrative established a veiled political statement in an otherwise light-hearted and comical song (Mullins 2013).

The song has a 1930s Woody Guthrie style and his ease of moving between spoken and sung word and a rambling guitar accompaniment. "The Truck Got Stuck" actually has a strong musical resemblance to Guthrie's "Talking Dust Bowl Blues" from his 1940 album *Dust Bowl Ballads*. Not only do both narratives unfold as a result of unexpected (but welcome) rainfall, both songs use a circular guitar-picking pattern as the main accompaniment and have spoken melodies. In "The Truck Got Stuck," the entire song is built variations of a five-note rising bass line moving from tonic to dominant (D-F#-G-B-A), which enters first in an embellished acoustic guitar part, and then moves to other the upright bass and fiddle. The constant repetition of this circular moving pattern as the accompaniment of the spoken-word verses mimics the song narrative by continually getting "stuck" in this pattern. In Ex. 2.4, the vocal line was transcribed as rhythmic notation (as opposed to exact pitches) in a way that represents the spoken-word recitation. Lund's delivery has a sense of relaxed ease to it, as a result, the rhythmic values are not exact, but rather, represent an approximation of his style of spoken delivery. What is perhaps most important in this example is the sense of circularity that emerges with the continual repetition of the rising-note motive through all instruments, and the incorporation of the drum's "train beat" (not notated in the example). Like "Chinook Wind," the accompaniment has very little forward movement; by this I mean that the accompaniment's repetitive pattern suggests stasis. In this case, it creates a musical representation of spinning tires, of being unable to advance without the next musical fragment getting stuck. Each instrument gets "stuck" in the pattern, just as each truck gets stuck in the boggy mud.

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then intentionally replanted the seeds the following year without a licence. The Supreme Court of Canada found Schmeiser guilty of intentionally replanting the saved seeds, but did not have to pay damages or Monsanto's lawyer fees (Supreme Court decision, *Monsanto Canada Inc. v. Schmeiser*, [2004] 1 S.C.R. 902, 2004 SCC 34).

Example 2.4 “The Truck Got Stuck,” verse 1

Well more rain than we'd seen for a thou-sand years caused fi-nan-cial joys and bib-li-cal fears, it

Acoustic Guitar

caused some smiles, it caused some fears but more to the point of our sto-ry. For the

Ac.Gtr.

D.B.

first time in the co-llec-tive mem-ory that old brown prai-rie that had been so dry for so long was ve-ry mu-ddy

Ac.Gtr.

Fiddle

D.B.

bo-ggy sti-cky We'd pull one truck out and get a-no-ther stuck in mo-tors would roar and ti-res would spin we'd

Ac.Gtr.

Fiddle

D.B.

Ac.Gtr. Fiddle D.B.

sink right down down to the diff, and we'd al take turns and do it a - gain till

Detailed description: This system contains the first two lines of the musical score. The top staff is the vocal melody in G major (one sharp), with lyrics: "sink right down down to the diff, and we'd al take turns and do it a - gain till". The second staff is the Acoustic Guitar accompaniment. The third staff is the Fiddle accompaniment. The fourth staff is the Double Bass accompaniment. The music is in 4/4 time. The vocal line has triplets under "down to the diff" and "do it a - gain".

Ac.Gtr. Fiddle D.B.

no one could move, we'd call one more friend, Come out here we need you... Bring your truck

Detailed description: This system contains the next two lines of the musical score. The top staff is the vocal melody with lyrics: "no one could move, we'd call one more friend, Come out here we need you... Bring your truck". The second staff is the Acoustic Guitar accompaniment. The third staff is the Fiddle accompaniment. The fourth staff is the Double Bass accompaniment. The music continues in 4/4 time. The vocal line has triplets under "one more friend" and "Bring your truck".

Ac.Gtr. Fiddle D.B.

Detailed description: This system contains the final two lines of the musical score. The top staff is empty. The second staff is the Acoustic Guitar accompaniment. The third staff is the Fiddle accompaniment. The fourth staff is the Double Bass accompaniment. The music concludes in 4/4 time.

The banjo is used to great comical effect in the musical setting to draw out character and identity from the song narrative. The banjo enters at the ends of verses, on the beat following Lund’s conclusion of the verse lyric with a circular pattern that, like the guitar bass line and the drum’s “train beat,” also gets “stuck” and creates a musical representation of the spinning tires of these four wheel drive trucks. The banjo line can also be heard,

though, as delivering the punch line or commentary to the witty verses, mocking the singer's request that his friends "bring their truck" (first verse), poking fun at the fact that each friend had nothing better to do (second verse), taunting them for the number of tactics they tried to get the truck out of the mud (verse 3), and laughing, in the end, that it was the canola seed that saved the day. With each entrance, the banjo points to the hilarity of the situation through an almost musical "slap-stick" humour through its "spinning tires" motive. One might also interpret the banjo's interjections as a characterization of the backwardness or ruralness of these comical events (Connell and Gibson 2002, 31; Malone 2002, 355). Since the 1972 release of the award-winning film *Deliverance*, the banjo has become a symbol of inbreeding and rural backwardness. The film's popular instrumental composition "Dueling Banjos," in particular, is used repeatedly in pop culture to invoke such a character. The fiddle has the same effect on the colouring the song with licks that sound like they could be part of a hoedown or square dance. The combination of the banjo and fiddle in the musical setting of "The Truck Got Stuck" emphasizes rurality and the country "hick" traits of the characters involved in the saga, and with the hilarity of the events as they unfold throughout the song narrative.

Although Lund does sing the round-about chorus outlining the sequence of trucks getting stuck, it is his delivery of the verse lyrics that captures the satire and wit of song narrative. The singer imparts musicality to his spoken word delivery through effective use of different vocal inflections and timing. Lund keeps a fairly steady tempo to the spoken-word verses, but takes liberties in slowing down or drawing out certain words to emphasize key moments in each verse. In the first verse his strained, dry voice on the drawn out "thousand years" and "so dry, for so long" shows the effect that the previously dry weather had on his body. The slowed down line about Holtman having nothing better to do, just pokes even more fun at his friend. Perhaps the most comical aspect of his delivery are the sarcastic asides at the end of each verse, such as "bring your truck" (verse 1), "'cept ranch" (verse 2), "mighty neighbourly, mighty neighbourly" (verse 3), and "that oughta give us some traction" (verse 4), all of which enhance the humour of his story. The song even concludes with an amusing political aside about Agriculture Canada being on the lookout for these men for using the canola seed.

Although many may see the song as nothing more than a novelty or joke, it is, in fact an important song in Lund's discography. Lund has jokingly stated that "The Truck Got Stuck" is his "Copperhead Road," comparing the song to Steve Earl's classic hit (Fortems 2014). Not only was this his breakthrough song as a solo country artist, but it also demonstrates his ability to make light of a frustrating situation, as well as poke fun at his friends, the community, the weather, and the government – everything and everyone is fair game in this song. "The Truck Got Stuck" also demonstrates his understanding of musical styles and conventions and the effective way in which he can use specific styles and particular instruments to impart identity and character to his narratives. The Woody Guthrie style harkens back to an era of social activism and political satire, allowing Lund to perfectly align himself with an important historical era in folk music history. While the song certainly makes fun of those involved in the story as though they are silly country "hicks," Lund lumps himself in with this cast of characters and takes punches alongside them. It is also interesting that, in a song so focused on telling a funny story, he manages to mark out regional identity through description of the continued dryness that typically characterizes southern Alberta – until the significant rainfall of this narrative, that is. The fact that he used genetically modified canola as the ingredient to save the day demonstrates not just his knowledge of what materials would make good traction to pull heavy machinery out of mud, but also his ability to make a veiled political statement that the agricultural community would appreciate. He jokingly gives them another use for the genetically modified bean that otherwise wreaks havoc on their attempts to produce organic crops.

Not all rainfalls provide the same level of comedy and relief from the stresses of farming in southern Alberta. The great floods mentioned earlier have had catastrophic effect on life, safety, and work for most communities in the south. Even Calgary, which is often spared during floods, suffered greatly during the 2013 flood, as the one of the main rivers to overflow, the Bow River, did so in the downtown core. Environment Canada called this disaster the "super flood of 2013," and stated that the disruptive flood cut off more than a dozen communities throughout the southern half of the province and "prompted the largest evacuation across Canada in more than 60 years with up to 100,000 Albertans told to leave their homes" (Environment Canada 2014). To put the flood in



perspective, it was more costly than the 1998 ice storm in eastern Canada, with recovery costs exceeding \$6 billion. Alberta had a significant amount of snow in winter 2012-2013, with the first snow fall occurring before Thanksgiving in 2012, and the last about a month after Easter. Southern Alberta sat under torrential rains for three days, which were then trapped over the Rocky Mountains delivering 10 to 20 mm/h in higher elevated areas with an average of 75-150 mm in just two and a half days. The snowpack in the mountains was so large in May 2013 that when the torrential rains hit the region in June, the combination of snowmelt and rainfall led to bloated rivers. Both the Bow and Elbow rivers engorged and flowed at 10 to 30 times their usual volume, causing significant damage and permanent changes to the landscape (Environment Canada 2014).

Life in southern Alberta was at a standstill once the rains stopped. Businesses were flooded, homes were destroyed, cattle had drowned, and crops were under water. The Calgary Stampede, an annual rodeo, exhibition, and festival, had held its centenary celebrations in July 2012, and organizers were likely worried that they would have to cancel the ten-day event. Stampede Park was submerged under water overnight on 20 June 2013 (Calgary Stampede 2014a):

- Blue bridge washed away;
- Infield tunnel and Indian Village submerged;
- Tracks, barns, Stampede Foundation buildings, Big Four Building, Agriculture Building, Headquarters Building and People Centre flooded; and
- Saddledome flooded to row 10.

Despite two world wars and the Great Depression, the Calgary Stampede, according to Stampede president and board chairman Bob Thompson, had never been cancelled, and 2013 would not be an exception:

Last year the theme of our centennial was: ‘We are greatest together.’ A year later this motto could not be more true. We are greatest together. We will be hosting the greatest show on Earth come hell or high water (CBC News 2013).

Although several other events had to be cancelled, organizers worked hard to reschedule or relocate events (Toneguzzi 2013). Thanks to the efforts of employees, relief workers, and volunteers the Stampede went on (Calgary Stampede 2014a).

***“Blood, Sweat and Water (A Song for Southern Alberta)” (2013)***

Lund was one of an all-Canadian line-up set to perform on the Coke Stage at the 2013 Calgary Stampede. The announcement was made on 23 May 2013 at a Coca-Cola Covert Concert at Flames Central that Lund would be performing on 7 July 2013 (Beacon Reporter 2013). He revealed later in the summer, on 15 August, at the Alberta Flood Relief Concert that he had been so moved by the event that he wrote a song to capture the moment of community and togetherness in Calgary. Lund, an artist who has a long history of family participation in the rodeo and his own performance there (see chapter 4), drew on the image of the Stampede as a metaphor for the strength and resilience of southern Albertans. Lund had performed at the Stampede during its Centennial celebrations alongside fellow country-folk artist Ian Tyson in July 2012.<sup>15</sup> In response to the hard work and dedication of southern Albertans who worked together not just to clean up their own land, but to make the Stampede possible, Lund wrote “Blood, Sweat and Water (A Song for Southern Alberta).” Released as an iTunes single download, “Blood, Sweat and Water” captured an important moment in Calgary’s history. On his blog, Lund (Lund 2013a) wrote the following:

My song, “Blood, Sweat and Water” uses Stampede as a metaphor for the city’s courage, hard work and resilience. It’s a tribute to everyone who’s been toughing it out dealing with the flood damage in southern Alberta. The idea occurred to me after seeing all the work people had done to make the Stampede happen this year. I wrote it in the last few days, and me and some of my Edmonton musician friends went into the studio and recorded it in a day.

I was really moved by how the organizers in Calgary were able to bounce back so quickly from the flood and go forward with the Stampede despite challenges I can’t begin to imagine. I think it did a lot for the morale of the city, and I know playing the Coke stage this year was a very moving and special experience for me and the

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<sup>15</sup> The two joined up for a five-show event entitled *100 Years of Calgary Cowboys: An Evening of Stories, Songs and Memories with Ian Tyson and Corb Lund* (Wilton 2012). The concerts were such a success that Tyson and Lund embarked on a small tour to continue sharing their western Canadian cowboy tales around the country.

guys in my band. I remember seeing the ‘Come Hell or Water’ graphic just days after seeing the worst of the flood photos.

Nice job Calgary; you handled yourself through this thing with a lot of class.

The song featured local musicians Shannon Johnson on fiddle, Miah McDade on mandolin, Chris Brzezicki on bass, Kris Glabush singing background vocals, and Peter Hendrickson on drums.

Lund incorporated the “hell or high water” slogan into the song’s chorus lyrics – modifying it as “hell or high rivers,” pointing to the continued resilience of Stampede organizers and Albertans for staging the event through anything Mother Nature could throw at them. Lund’s lyrics do not outline the extent of the damage, but he does mention crumbled riverbanks and uprooted trees in verse 1 and the overflowing Bow and Elbow rivers in the modified final chorus. Instead of dwelling on the damage, he focuses on the beauty of the flood recovery process: the coming together of southern Albertans in a time of great need. Thanks to the hard work of volunteer labourers, friends, neighbours, and the mayor, the “horses at Calgary will buck” for those hit hardest by the flood, including those living on ranches and in small towns surrounding Calgary and the Blackfoot of the Siksika First Nation (north-east of Calgary). A year later, many are still affected by the floods. Almost 1,000 Albertans remain in government-subsidized housing communities or in hotels, and less than half of the 10,486 insurance claims have been paid out (Tait 2014a/b; Cotter 2014). Perhaps the most frustrating issues are those surrounding the relief funds for the First Nations, who have been caught between three levels of government, none of whom can provide these communities with answers.<sup>16</sup>

The Stampede, as will be discussed in chapter 4, has been a part of Alberta’s cultural heritage for nearly as long as it has been a province and it will take more than a little high water to cancel the event, or, to put it in Lund’s terms, to stop those horses in Calgary from bucking. For Lund, this moment in Calgary and Stampede history emerged as even more important than the Centennial celebrations the previous year. Despite the fact, as the lyrics say, that it was a “hell of a Centennial” in July 2012, the events surrounding the

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<sup>16</sup> As of July 2014 on the Siksika First Nation, 335 people remain in relief shelters, while 357 live in interim housing on Stoney Nakoda First Nation (Tait 2014a/b).

2013 flood and community spirit was more memorable, and that they'll "remember the hundred and first." In the song's chorus, Lund drew on the image of a bucking horse to represent not just the Stampede, but also life going on after the flood. The "horses have bucked" through world wars and the Great Depression, and will continue to buck through everything that Mother Nature can throw at them (including high rivers, droughts, and blizzards). The image of a bucking horse is a strong visual representation of Alberta's resilience and fighting spirit, and became a symbol of moving forward and overcoming catastrophes. Lund even used the image of a bucking horse for the single's artwork, appearing in the largest of three raindrops, which also look like tears (Ill. 2.1). Through this narrative, Lund highlighted the importance of this cultural tradition in Alberta in general, and Calgary in particular, revealing how the annual event provided the community with something positive to focus on while surrounded by devastation. Southern Albertans needed the Stampede to go on. As Premier Dave Hancock stated on the anniversary of the floods, "It's not that the Stampede was the most important thing in peoples' lives – it was the symbol" (Cryderman 2014). While, in most years, the Stampede is regarded as a huge tourist event that brings millions of people to Calgary, and generates high revenues for the city and surrounding area, in June 2013 it stood as a stark reminder of how important cultural traditions are for a community. The Stampede gave the community a reason to work together to show the country and the world that they could not be beaten by the floods, and that life would—and had to—go on. Lund's song captures the significance of the cultural tradition, and preserves the actions of those who came together in this tragic moment in Calgary's history.

Illustration 2.1 “Blood, Sweat & Water” (artwork)



Composed in D major, the song opens with just Lund and the acoustic guitar for the first two lines of the chorus, joined for the final two lines by the fiddle, mandolin, double bass, and drums. The song has a mournful almost militaristic feel as a result of the straight waltz beat (in 3/8 time) and of the steady drum beat in the verses and bridge of an eighth note followed by four sixteenth notes. The fiddle contributes to the mood of the song through its plaintive melodies in the chorus and second verse. There are two moments where the militaristic tone is most prominent, namely, in the second verse and the bridge. In the second verse, all of the instruments drop out except for the acoustic guitar as Lund sings “it was a hell of a Centennial, but this is what’s memorable,” with the drums, bass, and mandolin entering together on the word “remember” as Peter Hendrickson produces three cymbal crashes like in a militaristic march. At the bridge the fiddle holds a high D drone, as Lund sings the lyrics with a strained, at times raspy, voice over the same strumming pattern as he played throughout the song (Ex. 2.5). This arrangement holds for the first two phrases of the bridge as Lund sings about the overflowing “Bow and Elbow” rivers and then the “water subsiding.” The mandolin, bass, and drums re-enter the

arrangement, as Lund moves on to reveal who all of this hard work of staging the Stampede is for: the surround ranches, small towns, and Siksika Nations. The bridge continues to build, increasing in volume through the final two phrases of the bridge as Lund honours the workers making sure that the “horses at Stampede will buck.” The violin holds its high D drone through this entire bridge section, slowly crescendoes as more instruments join the arrangement and their volume increases through to the end of the bridge. The use of reverb on Lund’s voice throughout the song, and especially the bridge, creates a sonic space similar to that of a voice carrying through a stadium. In the bridge, the snare drum’s beat (described earlier) enhances the subtle militaristic feel of the song, as the accompaniment to Lund’s tribute to the flood victim and volunteers. In this regard, the drum beat and Lund’s vocal delivery creates a strong impression of a voice reading names off of a Roll of Honour.

Lund released “Blood, Sweat and Water” on his website on 12 July 2013, and then made it available as an iTunes download four days later. Fan response on his website was immediate. Fans thanked him for the moving song, claiming it gave them goosebumps and brought tears to their eyes, and wanted to know where they could download it. John Brown indicated that the song “captures the spirit of the city and surrounding region,” while Kenneth Graham (a former Calgarian) revealed that he was “impressed by the spirit and energy that [put] it all back together” following the disaster. An anonymous comment was posted several months later, in November 2013, stating, “you make every Albertan proud to be part of the whole recovery process and even prouder to be an Albertan who can show we will get through ANYTHING. Hell or High Water, Calgary and Southern Alberta will always buck!” And finally, Larry Smith thanked Lund “for being an Albertan who inspires and gives back,” claiming that he helps “represent the spirit and talent that resides within the province.” Lund performed the song at the 15 August 2013 Alberta Flood Relief Concert, and a video that captured the moment showed Mayor Nenshi proudly applauding the singer-songwriter (Gandia 2013).

Example 2.5 “Blood, Sweat & Water,” bridge

The banks o - ver - flowed \_\_\_\_ the Bow and El - bow, but the hor-ses at Cal-gary will buck.

Fiddle

Acoustic Guitar

And when the wa-ter sub - si-ded, I saw with some pride, that the hor-ses at Cal-gary will buck. For

Ac.Gtr.

all the su - round - ing ranch land and small towns, the hor-ses at Cal-gary will buck. For our

Ac.Gtr.

Mdn.

D.B.

S.Dr.

Black - foot rel - a - tions of Sik-sik-a — na - tion the hor - ses at Cal - gary will buck. Through

Ac. Gtr.

Mdn.

D.B.

S.Dr.

vo - lun - teer la - bours, through friends and through neigh - bours, through blood, sweat, and wa - ter, through the

Ac. Gtr.

Mdn.

D.B.

S.Dr.



ma-yor His Hon-our, through flood and down-pour, a ci-ty made sure the hor-ses at Sam-pede will buck.

Ac. Gtr.

Mdn.

D.B.

S.Dr.

The colloquial expression “Hell or High Water” that Bob Thompson used when announcing that the Stampede would not be cancelled became a slogan for the year’s event: no matter how difficult the challenge may be, the Stampede was going to happen. It was, perhaps, made more suitable for the Stampede because their problems were the result of high water. New “Hell or High Water” T-shirts were made for the event, with proceeds going to the Canadian Red Cross Alberta Flood Fund. Organizers saw this t-shirt as a symbol for bringing the community together, and raised \$2.1 million for the Canadian Red Cross in just over two weeks of sales (Stechyson 2013). Lund was not alone in his musical response to the 2013 Flood, and in fact, he was not the first. Several other Albertan musicians, and one Montreal native, offered their own tributes to the flood victims (Jolivet 2013). A fifth generation farmer from Cremona, AB, country singer Blake Reid was perhaps the first to come forward with a musical tribute. He posted his song “Hell or High Water” to *YouTube* on 26 June 2014, with a montage of flood images accompanying it. As reported in *Metro News*, Calgary Mayor Neheed Nenshi retweeted the song and it exploded in popularity and was viewed over 10,000 times in one day (Fletcher 2013). On 1 July 2013 *Global News* featured Reid’s song with a moving montage of video of the flood waters and of community coming together, using the song, this time, as the soundtrack to southern Albertans working together to rebuild their communities and lives (Global Calgary 2013).

Canadian Christian Rock musician Marc Martel wrote “Hell or High Water” as an unofficial anthem Alberta’s post-flood rebuilding process (The Canadian Press 2013). The song was available as a free download on the Stampede website and performed at the Stampede as part of the TransAlta Grandstand Show (Calgary Stampede 2013b). The Calgary-based indie-rock group, The Nessmans, also wrote a song called “Hell or High Water.” They released their version, an up-tempo number, on iTunes on 6 July 2013, with proceeds going to the Alberta Flood Relief.<sup>17</sup> Canadian country artist Paul Brandt also released a song commemorating the occasion. “Alberta Strong (Flood Montage)” was released on iTunes Canada with proceeds going toward the Alberta Flood Relief (Roberts 2013). Brandt did not write a new song for Alberta, however; instead, he took his 2005 hit “Alberta Bound,” changed the title, and inserted clips of people affected by the floods talking about their experiences, and of Brandt himself offering inspirational messages about working hard and together to overcome the tragedy. With this release he sought to demonstrate how the words of his popular song could remain the soundtrack for the province through good times and bad.

All of these songs demonstrate the importance of community building during a time of great devastation. Each artist sought their own way to connect with the southern Albertan community and provide a vehicle for their shared grief. Lund’s song offers, some might argue, even more for southern Albertans; “Blood, Sweat and Water” does not just describe the disaster, the song also documents the important moment in Calgary’s recent history and applauds the community coming together to find something positive to word toward. The Stampede, a long-standing southern Albertan cultural tradition, became a symbol of strength and resilience in Lund’s song and captured their triumph over this adversity.

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<sup>17</sup> For more information see The Nessmans’ website, <<http://nessmans.com/about/>>.

## 2.4 Summary

As Geo Takach (2010, 262) has aptly stated in his monograph *Will the Real Alberta Please Stand Up?* “So much of Alberta is rooted and reflected in her landscape.” Her fortunes have been tied to the land since its birth; Alberta has been both blessed and cursed by its diverse landscape, environment, wildlife, and the resources hidden beneath the earth’s surface—all of which have attracted the attention of outsiders. The once untouched prairie land was parcelled off in the late 1800s and early 1900s; and while these settlers moved west with visions of farming and building a community, the cultivation of the parkland and grassland regions have, over the course of the twentieth-century, decimated the natural vegetation and taken the home of the bison and pronghorn and of other animals that relied on the region for nourishment. These animals, and others, have also attracted fur traders and hunters from outside the region’s borders; many of the original animals were verging on extinction at the turn of the twentieth century, saved by government intervention with the creation of designated conservation areas. And although the deep reserves of heavy oil, oil sands, and natural gas deposits have brought international attention and money to the province, they have likewise contributed to the destruction of the landscape and environment, not to mention the ecosystem and water resources throughout Alberta. Residents of southern Alberta are aware of the value of their land to big oil companies, but they are perhaps more aware of the cultural and ecological value of the region and the importance of preserving it for their children and grandchildren in the hopes that they too can grow up on this land.

The sights and sounds the Lund experienced growing up in southern Alberta provided the rich source material for about his homeland’s landscape and environment. That environment permeates his performance in each of these songs in different ways. “No Roads Here” paints a bleak and desolate picture of the empty and mysterious landscape that was turn of the twentieth-century Alberta. While “Chinook Wind” captures the restless energy and the farmer’s frustration with the warm, dry westerly winds off the Rocky Mountains, “The Truck Got Stuck” provides a humorous snapshot of the shenanigans that take place after a significant rainfall turns the soil into boggy, sticky mud. Rain, however, is not always something to laugh at, and Lund’s “Blood, Sweat and Water” tribute to the devastating floods of 2013 captures an important moment in southern Albertan history. These songs evoke contrasting characterizations of a diverse landscape and environment, from its first settlers entering the vast, empty territory to the city of Calgary coming together in their time of need.

These songs are not just evocations of a rural landscape; rather, they enable Lund to negotiate the relationship between artist and region, or a rancher and his land. Drawing on imagery and landmarks of southern Alberta, he anchors his heritage and identity in the traditions of the region, presenting diverse conception of rural space. He reveals the dynamic nature of southern Alberta as having once been desolate in “No Roads Here,” yet (as discussed in chapter 6) bountiful and with wildlife in danger of being pushed out of their habitat in “The Truth Comes Out.” His songs about weather conditions characterize the region as inhospitable due to dry westerly winds or torrential rains yet beautiful in the way that his community worked together to overcome hardships. Despite any frustrations they reveal about the negative effect of weather on ranch life in southern Alberta, these songs suggest that the singer-songwriter actually finds comfort and beauty in the region’s

environment. For many southern Albertans, Lund in particular, the land is a sacred place. As will be discussed in the next chapter, Lund associates his region's landscape with his family ranching heritage, which has a significant presence in his discography. The songs in this chapter describe his family's ranch land in Cardston, Bar X ranch, and his love and appreciation for the scenery, as well as address the reality of cattle ranching, revealing that it is not always a fun and easy job (for the rancher *or* the veterinarian). The cow emerges as a central figure: cattle are at once a marker of his family's ranch land ("Little Foothills Heaven") and the pesky beasts that make ranching and rural veterinary medicine stressful jobs ("Cows Around" and "Talkin' Veterinarian Blues").

## Chapter 3. Ranching and Veterinary Medicine

A fourth-generation rancher, Corb Lund grew up in the foothills of southern Alberta's exceptional ranching territory. Both sides of his family (the Lunds and maternal Ivinses) ranched in Utah and Nevada before making the trek north to southern Alberta, where his great-grandfathers each built homesteads and raised their families. Lund's childhood was spent riding horses and participating in rodeos, chasing cows, and swimming in the creek on the Ivins family's ranch (Wheeler 2012). When he was not working on the ranch, he was helping his father, D. C. Lund, in his veterinary practice. Although he has not lived the life of a rancher in roughly two decades, the traditions remain a strong part of his heritage and identity. Instead, Lund sings about it, and draws from his childhood experiences, family stories, and Alberta's rich ranching heritage. Agrarian themes and references and a rural lifestyles are woven throughout the singer-songwriter's discography, including those in chapter 2 dealing with his family's pilgrimage to the western land, the unpredictable environmental issues that farmer's face on a daily basis, and urban sprawl. The songs in this chapter deal more specifically with ranching life, from his ode to his family's ranch land ("Little Foothills Heaven," 2005) and his "love" of cattle ("Cows Around," 2012) to his songs about veterinary medicine ("Horse Doctor, Come Quick" and "Talkin' Veterinarian Blues," 2009), capturing many aspects of ranching life in southern Alberta.

This chapter will consider the ways in which ranching emerges as an important theme in Lund's songs. While ranching and farming were certainly important aspects of songs discussed in chapter 2, the songs chosen for this chapter deal more specifically with ranching and caring for cattle. Here I will consider how elements of style play an important role in marking out the western Canadian ranching tradition. In two of the songs discussed here, Lund invokes a western swing style to capture both his longing for his family's

foothills ranch and the “joys” of raising cattle from the perspective of the rancher and the rural veterinarian. In all songs discussed here, vocal delivery and recording strategies remain key component to conveying the sentiment behind the lyrical narrative, whether affection and homesickness, sarcasm and frustration, and even boredom. Interestingly, cows have an important role in these songs; not only are they characters in each song narrative, but they are also featured or imitated in two of the tracks discussed. This chapter will illustrate the importance of ranching in Lund’s family and heritage, and how the singer-songwriter draws on this theme to define southern Albertan culture, while also grounding his identity in the rural cultural tradition.

### **3.1 Country Music and Agriculture**

Ranching, farming, and cowboys have long been held as important symbols in country music culture. Although current research has demonstrated that country music’s roots were not solely a product of southern farms or mountain hollows, but that it also emerged from urban factory communities in the south (Huber 2008), agrarian imagery continues to permeate the genre. Part of this image has to do with wardrobe, which has pulled usable symbols of cowboy culture, including at the very least a cowboy hat and boots or, for others wearing decorative clothes, a cowboy scarf (kerchief), and posing in publicity photos or album artwork alongside a horse with a western saddle, truck, tractor, or open fields. Country artists have used these symbols throughout the genre’s history to create a country or cowboy *persona*, whether or not agriculture played any part of their real history (Peterson 1997, 83, 90). While some artists came by their rural or rancher/farmer roots honestly (including Ernest Tubb, Johnny Cash, Porter Wagoner, Dolly Parton, Reba McEntire, Butch Hancock, Eastin Corbin, and Corb Lund), others, such as Tex Ritter, Patsy Montana, Patsy Cline, Garth Brooks, Kenny Chesney, Brad Paisley, Blake Shelton, and Jason Aldean have drawn on cowboy or western garb as a visual symbol of rural culture by which they wished to be accepted. Tex Ritter and Patsy Montana, in particular, consciously cultivated their images by changing their names from Woodward Ritter and Rubye Blevins to their popular stage names, with the latter crafting an identity with the state of her assumed family name (Peterson 1997, 90). This was common throughout the 1940s, as

Richard Peterson (1997, 91) has observed, when country artists dressed in western wear “and tried in every way to project a cowboy image” to distance themselves from the “hillbilly” *persona* that had prevailed in popular culture.<sup>1</sup> The cowboy and cowgirl image, he argues, increased the legitimacy and appeal of artists at this time—a tradition that has remained part of the genre today. Just as they did in the 1940s, contemporary artists don part of the cowboy/girl regalia functions as both a nod to the artists before them, and to continue to cultivate an image based on rural cultural artefacts. However, not only do these artists wear the clothes that pop culture associates with rural cultures, they also incorporate agrarian themes into their music; it is quite easy to find country artists who have never actually driven a tractor, singing about ploughing the fields on a John Deere. It would seem that these artists are employing these markers of rural culture to create a *persona* that appeals to their target audience, as Ritter and Montana had done before them.

Just as the hat and boots have found their way into the genre as the visual references to a cowboy culture, we see that farms, ranches, cattle, ploughs have been woven into the lyrical themes of a number of songs. The tractor and the combine, big heavy machinery used on the farm have replaced the horse in agricultural narratives. These machines became a symbol of country’s farming culture and of the cowboy on his modernized steed. Table 3.1 provides a chart of songs referencing tractors, or use the vehicle as a metaphor for personality traits and relationships, just to demonstrate the sheer volume of songs on the topic. Tractors have been incorporated into narratives as a way of describing the quality of friends and neighbours in small towns, as (soft shell artist) Rodney Atkins has reveals “Friends with Tractors” (2009), who are more likely to help a man out when he is in need. Interestingly, John Deere machinery, and its signature green colour, has been the predominant visual image in songs and videos. In 1993 Joe Diffie had a number-five hit with “John Deere Green” that draws on the company’s colour to represent the agricultural roots and strength of the love of the song’s characters, Billy Bob and Charlene, who had painted their names inside a John Deere Green heart on their town’s water tower. Likewise, Sawyer Brown drew on the durability of the tractor in “Like a John Deere” (1995) in a song

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<sup>1</sup> This was not just in wardrobe and lyrical content, however; many bands and artists had names with identifiable geographic locations (Patsy Montana, Blue Ridge Ramblers, West Texas Rangers), a tradition that has prevailed throughout the genre’s history (Alabama, Florida Georgia Line, Corb Lund’s Hurtin’ Albertans).

about hard relationships, claiming that hearts and relationships would never fall apart if they were strong, true, and tough like the John Deere. Interestingly, tractors have also become a sexualized symbol for some, with soft shell artists Kenny Chesney proclaiming “She Thinks My Tractor’s Sexy” (1999) and Jason Aldean offering to take his date for a ride on his “Big Green Tractor” (2009). While both songs talk about their tractors like a phallic symbol, as an extension of their manhood and bodies, Chesney takes it further in his music video. The video opens with the country singer driving his green John Deere through the fields when out of nowhere a beautiful brunette in a short black dress approaches him (carrying her high heels in hand) and climbs up on the tractor for a ride. She appears later on in jeans, cowboy boots, and a tank top riding on the engine like a cowgirl on a bull (Fig. 3.1). This is perhaps most fascinating because the first verse of the song actually paints an image of a young woman bringing him a basket of fried chicken and sweet tea on a hot day, not a big city girl in her finest clothes prancing through the fields. In the song and especially the video, the John Deere becomes not just a site for sexual activity, but also a machine that (as the lyrics proclaims) arouses the object of Chesney’s desire.

Figure 3.1 “She Thinks my Tractor’s Sexy” (1999)



[0:05] City-girl prancing through field



[0:08] Chesney riding the John Deere, standing up to take a look



[0:45] City-girl dancing on the tractor



[1:36] Straddling the John Deere engine



[2:45] Riding John Deere engine like bull



Planting and harvesting crops has emerged as a theme in country music. From Hancock's woes of being a dry land farmer to more current songs about the joys of driving a combine, these tunes have become anthems for crop farmers. Craig Morgan's 2007 song "International Harvester" defends the activities of a farmer driving an International Harvester brand combine down a highway. Because combines move at a slow speed, the farmer is causing a line of traffic of angry drivers behind him, but he remains calm and sings about his lot in life as a third-generation farmer and a proud member of the FFA, with children in 4-H clubs. Morgan's song, written by Jeffrey Steele, Shane Minor, and Danny Myrick, uses this small moment in a combiner's day as he drives to and from the fields to extol the virtues of an often-overlooked job, highlighting the aspect of family tradition in this line of work, the commitment and dedication to the job, and revealing that it is a lot of hard work for little pay. He also hints at the lack of control that he has in producing a good crop. Blumenort, Alberta brothers Brad, Curtis, and Bryan Rempel formed the country band High Valley. In 2010 they released "On the Combine," a nostalgic reflection on the traditions of combining throughout the song protagonist's life, from a young kid missing a school day to work in the fields (presumably with his father and other family members), to his first time trying to combine on his own, and then finding love for the first time. The combine for this song protagonist becomes a symbol of a time and place in life that mattered most to him, to the hard work, the lessons learned, and the value of taking things slowly. Like the songs mentioned earlier, "On the Combine" highlights the John Deere, not just in the opening words of the first verse, but also in the accompanying music video, where following the bridge a field full of John Deere-brand combines are lined up to plough a field.<sup>2</sup> The video also shows images of the Massey Ferguson-brand combine.

One of the most well-known examples of a song about farm life is John Denver's "Thank God I'm a Country Boy" (1975). Written by John Martin Sommers, the song was an instant hit when Denver released its live version in March 1975, topping the *Billboard* Country Chart in May of that year. While the song has all of the markers of the rural

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<sup>2</sup> In High Valley's video there are flashes of a poster for the Harvest for Kids program, an organization that raises money for developing communities. The video actually used footage from the 2010 Harvest for Kids event, including this scene of John Deere combines in a field. The 2010 event actually set a Guinness World Record, with 200 combines harvesting the same field simultaneously in Winkler, Manitoba (Harvest for Kids 2010). Following the joint-effort on the music video, High Valley has continued to work with the organization, performing concerts at their 2011 and 2012 events.

stereotype, from the lyrical mention of early mornings and bedtimes, to the fiddle licks, vocal cry breaks, and cattle call-like shout-outs, the narrative oversimplifies the life of a farmer and paints a rosy picture of days filled with “easy country charm.” Denver’s single is a strong marker of soft shell artistry. Luke Bryan’s 2011 song “Harvest Time” (co-written with Rodney Clawson) describes the typical daily life during the harvesting season, from the peanut dust in the air, the late nights, and the rows of combines in the fields. The song emphasizes the importance of this time of year, one that is so important as to be the only time of year that they miss church on Sunday—further demonstrating the long hours during the season. This song is an example of a soft shell artist pulling from his life experiences to write a song narrative about this important season in a farmer’s year. Like “Rain is a Good Thing,” this song lacks geographic markers, offering a more universally appealing narrative. This time, however, Bryan does reference peanut harvesting, which is his family’s main crop. Although most farmers do feel a sense of pride and passion for their work, feeling blessed that they are able to work so intimately with the land and with animals, their reality is not the simple and easy lifestyle painted in these songs. Farming and ranching are physically demanding jobs, made more challenging by the temperamental nature of farm animals’ personalities, unpredictable weather conditions, and a range of other unforeseen issues surrounding machinery maintenance, the quality of materials (soil, seed, fertilizer), and more. As demonstrated in my article on hard core artist Butch Hancock (and discussed in chapter 2), “Dry Land Farm” laments the sand-filled west winds that blow across his farm while he is plowing the fields. These winds contribute to the difficulties of trying to plough a field while being whipped in the face by sandy winds, and also contribute to the region’s dry climate (Watson 2011, 10-18). Likewise, Merle Haggard’s 1994 song “In My Next Life,” relates a touching story about a man giving up on his family farm because a severe lack of rain has resulted in the death of his crops. Devastated by this loss, the man tells his wife that he wants to be her hero in his next life, “somethin’ better than [he] turned out to be.” Hard core artists (such as Hancock and Haggard) effectively demonstrate the farmer’s desperation of his/her inability to make farming a success—a story all too familiar with many in the agriculture industry, as each year farmers and ranchers across North America pray for the perfect weather conditions to produce strong, bountiful crops so that they can provide for their families.

Throughout the genre's history, artists and bands have continually addressed the hardships of farming and ranching, with songs emerging about being a poor cotton farmer during the Depression, to the lack of rain—or too much of it, or encroaching urban and industrial development. While all of these songs provide a vehicle for social commentary, it is often those written and sung by “real” farmers, that is, artists who grew up on a farm or ranch (many of whom are hard core artists deeply entrenched in the traditions of the genre), that provide a unique perspective to the agrarian profession. Their experiences, communicated through song, share information about the hardships of farming/ranching in a specific region, often demonstrating a rural, working-class sensibility. While these songs relay stories about one individual or family, they are often representative of the challenges that many ranchers/farmers face on a daily basis, becoming an important text documenting local histories. These songs, highlighted with an asterisk next to the artist's name in Table 3.1, relay stories about life experiences on the farm and point to specific regional practices. Songs by soft shell artists (also included in the table) cannot be disregarded or tossed aside as trivial representations of agricultural life. While many songs may not speak to the practice and tradition of farming or ranching with any real specificity or emotional depth, they do speak of the profession with a great deal of pride that is equally important. Indeed, these songs fill an important function in country music of highlighting and honouring an underappreciated profession. As will be demonstrated in Lund's songs, ranching life can be described through the landscape and environment (as in chapter 2), the pride over one's property, and, humorously, through a tirade about the challenges working with cows. While some of these stories may be representative of ranching more generally, Lund always manages to establish a sense of regional identity in his narratives, allowing him to speak on behalf of southern Albertan ranchers. Before turning to his contributions to this topic, I will first outline the history of ranching in Alberta to provide context to his songs.

Table 3.1 Country Songs Referencing Agricultural Topics and Themes

Note: *Italicized names indicate songwriters (when lyrics not written by the singer/band).*

Theme	Artist	Song (Date) <i>Songwriter</i>	Narrative
Harvesting Ploughing	Craig Morgan	“International Harvester” (2007) <i>Shane Minor, Danny Myrick, Jeffrey Steele</i>	(International Harvester) Defence of combining.
	Blake Shelton	“Country Strong” (2008) <i>Rhett Akins, Dallas Davidson, Ben Hayslip</i>	Strength of farmers who work long hours
	High Valley*	“On the Combine” (2010) <i>Paul Brandt, Brad Rempel</i>	(John Deere/Massey Ferguson) Reflection on combining as part of family tradition.
	Luke Bryan*	“Harvest Time” (2011) <i>Luke Bryan, Rodney Clawson</i>	Describes the long hours of work during harvest season
	Blake Reid*	“Fuel Fertilizer and Deere” (2013)	(John Deere)
Hardships	Woody Guthrie	Dust Bowl Blues (ca. 1927)	
	Woody Guthrie	Talkin’ Dust Bowl Blues (ca. 1927)	
	Woody Guthrie	I Ain’t Got No Home Anymore (ca. 1927)	
	Woody Guthrie	Dust Can’t Kill Me (ca. 1927)	
	Merle Haggard*	“One Row at a Time” (1971) <i>Red Lane, Dottie West</i>	
	Tom T. Hall	“Who’s Gonna Feed Them Hogs” (1971)	Man overcomes illness to be able to care for his hogs.
	Dolly Parton(*)	“In the Good Old Days (When Times Were Bad)” (1973)	Unpredictable weather on crop management
	Butch Hancock*	“Dry Land Farm” (1978)	Impact of dust storms/lack of rain on dry land farming
	Merle Haggard*	“Amber Waves of Grain” (1985) <i>Merle Haggard, Freddy Powers</i>	Contemplates future in a world with no farmers
	Alabama	“Song of the South” (1988) <i>Bob McDill</i>	About a poor southern cotton family during Depression.
	Alabama	“Down Home” (1991) <i>Rick Bowles, Josh Leo</i>	Homage to simpler times.
	Chris LeDoux	“Cadillac Ranch” (1992) <i>Chuck Jones, Chris Waters</i>	Turning family ranch into party local to deal with financial issues.
	Montgomery Gentry	“Daddy Won’t Sell the Farm” (1999) <i>Robin Brenda, Steve Fox</i>	Impact of urban sprawl; refuses to sell land to developers
	Merle Haggard*	“In My Next Life” (1994) <i>Max D. Barnes</i>	Emotional impact of being unable to farm as a result of lack of precipitation.
	Marty Stuart	“Farmer’s Blues” (2003) <i>Marty Stuart, Connie Smith</i>	A farmer laments unpredictable nature of weather
	Corb Lund*	“The Truth Comes Out” (2005)	Impact of urban sprawl / conservation issues

	Jason Aldean	“Amarillo Sky” (2006) <i>Big Kenny, John Rich</i>	Farmer enduring drought on Texas plains
	Corb Lund*	“Chinook Wind” (2009)	Effect of Chinook wind on crop farming
	Corb Lund*	“This Is My Prairie” (2009)	Impact of encroaching oil industry on agriculture
	Corb Lund*	“Long Gone to Saskatchewan (2009)	Impact of encroaching oil industry on price of ranching land
	Luke Bryan*	“Rain is a Good Thing” (2010) <i>Luke Bryan, Dallas Davidson</i>	Importance of rain in facilitating crop growth
	Gord Bamford	“Where a Farm Used to Be” (2014) <i>Gord Bamford, Phil O’Donnell, Buddy Owens</i>	Urban sprawl: describes the commercial district where there used to be a farm
Farm Life	John Denver	“Thank God I’m a Country Boy “ (1975) <i>John Martin Sommers</i>	Describes the peaceful, easy charm of farm life
	Colt Ford	“Farm Life” (2014) <i>Clare Dunn, Benjamin Caver, Blake Bollinger</i>	(John Deere; International Harvester) Describes farm life activities.
Leaving farm for city	Travis Tritt	“Where Corn Don’t Grow” (1996) <i>Roger Murrah, Mark Alan Springer</i>	Young man leaves home for a city, is robbed of his only possessions.
Ranching and landscapes {?}	Butch Hancock*	“Texas Air” (1978)	Describes the calmness and tranquility of Lubbock, Texas through ode to air
	Corb Lund*	“Little Foothills Heaven” (2005)	An ode to his family ranch land in southern Alberta
Cows	Deryl Dodd	“Cows” (2002)	The blues about how the protagonist would be alone with cows in the absence of his lover.
	Corb Lund*	“Hair in My Eyes Like a Highland Steer” (2005)	Compares his appearance to that of the wooly banded cow
	Trace Adkins	“Brown Chicken Brown Cow” (2010) <i>Casey Beathard, Kenny Beard, Rivers Rutherford</i>	Romantic escapades in a barn.
	Ashton Shepherd	“More Cows than People” (2011) <i>Bobby Pinson, Ashton Shepherd</i>	Describes the rural community and farm
	Corb Lund*	“Cows Around” (2012)	Describes the annoyance of working with cattle
Country pride	Alabama	“Born Country” (1991) <i>Byron Hill, John Schweers</i>	Expression of pride for country
	Keith Urban and Ronnie Dunn	“Raise the Barn” (2006) <i>Monty Powell, Keith Urban</i>	Pride in community coming together to raise a barn
Vehicles	The Judds	“John Deere Tractor” (1991)‡ - John Hammond, Larence Hammond	(John Deere) Homesick for country side
	Joe Diffie	“John Deere Green” (1993)‡ <i>Dennis Linde</i>	(John Deere) Tractor/Colour symbol of strength of human bond

	Sawyer Brown	“Like a John Deere” (1995)‡ <i>Mark Miller, Bill Shore</i>	(John Deere) Wishes hearts were built strong, true, tough like a John Deere tractor
	Lonestar	“John Doe on a John Deere” (1997) <i>Don Cook, Conley White, John Rich</i>	(John Deere)
	Kenny Chesney	“She Thinks My Tractor’s Sexy” (1999)‡ <i>Jim Collins, Paul Overstreet</i>	(John Deere) Tractor arouses a woman
	Fred Eaglesmith	“John Deere” (2002)	(John Deere)
	Danny Hooper	“John Deere Tractor Keys” (2003)	(John Deere)
	Cris Williamson	“John Deere” (2003)	(John Deere)
	Rodney Atkins	“A Man on a Tractor” (2006) <i>Kent Agee, Michael Lunn</i>	
	Rodney Atkins	“Friends with Tractors” (2009) <i>Dallas Davidson, Ben Hayslip, Rhett Akins</i>	Describes friends in rural communities (with tractors) as being loyal, honest friends
	Jason Aldean	“Big Green Tractor” (2009) <i>Jim Collins, David Lee Murphy</i>	(John Deere) Tractor as location of date; possible phallic metaphor
	Bryan Kennedy	“Tractor” (2010)	
	Dustin Lynch	“She Cranks My Tractor” (2012) <i>Dustin Lynch, Brett Beavers, Tim Nichols</i>	Tractor as metaphor for being aroused.
	Blake Reid*	“John Deere Hat” (2013)	(John Deere)
	Richard Martin	“John Deere” (2013)	(John Deere)
	Howe Gelb	“John Deere” (2013)	(John Deere)
	Tim Hicks	“Greasy John Deere Cap” (2013)	(John Deere)

### 3.2 A History of Ranching in Alberta

When compared to other regions of North America, the history of agriculture in Alberta is still relatively young. Ranching and farming did not officially begin in Alberta until the 1870s, when cowboys and settlers introduced horses, cattle, and crop farming to the province. The aboriginal people of Alberta were nomadic, moving around the province to track bison and collect native fruits and vegetables. They did little, as Alan Bryan (1971, 276) has revealed, to disrupt the “delicate checks and balances of the natural world” and did not initiate their own attempts at ranching and farming until the late 1800s (Dempsey 1978, 25, 33, 40). As a result of the near extinction of the bison, aboriginals were forced to find new sources of food (some hunting different animals such as the pronghorn), and alternative ways to make a living, including ranching and farming (Bryan 1971; Dickason

1997; Ward 1995). Aboriginal groups tended to have more ranching, than farming, largely a result of the land that they worked.

The history of agriculture took its first small step with Peter Pond, a fur trader from the USA who lived just south of Fort Chipewyan from 1778 to 1779. Credited as having been the first white man to successfully cultivate the soil in Alberta, the writings of Scottish explorer, Sir Alexander Mackenzie, mention that Pond had “formed as fine a kitchen garden as I ever saw in Canada” (Van Herk 2002, 45). Despite this small achievement, the region’s agricultural potential was not truly tapped into until the late 1800s, when settlers began moving westward to the promise of an abundance of empty, fertile land. Following the construction of the CPR, settlers moved to the region by train, paddle-wheeler boat, ox-cart, and covered wagon from eastern Canada, the United States, and as far away as the British Isles, Germany, Poland, Russia, and Ukraine.

The convergence of several factors led to the creation of a promising agricultural industry. First, the creation of the Dominion Lands Act (1871) encouraged agricultural settlement of Canada’s western provinces and territories. Second, the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway reached Alberta by 1883, providing at least one route to the new west. As a result of disappearing frontier lands in eastern Canada and demand for grains both south of the border and in Europe, the Canadian government saw the new west as a solution to its growing economic problems (MacGregor 1971; Voisey 2004, 6). In addition to creating a political entity of the region, naming it the North-West Territories, the government established the North-West Mounted Police (NWMP) in 1874, signed treaties with the aboriginals and established reserves, surveyed the land, created townships and plotted out homestead land, and launched a campaign to promote a new life in the land (Voisey 2004, 7). Despite the government’s best efforts, early settlers faced significant challenges trying to farm on the southern grasslands. In addition to periods of severe drought, early frost and low grain prices caused problems for homesteaders. Ranching, however, proved far more successful than farming. The combined features of the sheltered foothills region, ample water supply from the mountain’s streams, abundance of grasslands, and southern Alberta’s warm Chinook (which cleared snow from the prairie so that cattle could graze year-round) were far better suited to ranching. The discipline also required less

machinery and daily manual labour than farming. Because early ranchers were fortunate to have mild winters as a result of the Chinook, they were able to graze cattle well into the snowy season, and so feeding cattle remained inexpensive for many ranchers (Voisey 2004, 7-8).

Ranching began in southern Alberta in the early 1870s, with the first ranches being modest and consisting of small herds that were driven north from Montana into the foothills. The arrival of the NWMP in 1874 created a market for beef, as well as the protection against cattle rustling. In 1877, H. A. Kanouse and John Miller imported cattle from the western USA, with George Emerson and Tom Lynch following a year later, and sold their herds to men already on the frontier (Elofson 2000, 3-4). As David H. Breen (1973) has observed, most of the cattlemen around this time were former officers of the NWMP, British-Canadians from the eastern provinces who wanted to stay in this western territory once their three-year term had concluded. The influences on ranching styles in southern Alberta has been debated over the last thirty years; while Breen's important 1983 study of the western Canadian ranching frontier has stressed that the majority of individuals who ranched in the region were of British origin, the majority of scholars argue that the region's history has been more directly influenced by immigration from the US (Evans 1983, 19-91; Elofson 2000, xiv-xx). Although both arguments provide convincing information about the early era of ranching in western Canada, what actually emerges from this research is that the region was equally influenced by *both* ranching cultures. Although the region had already witnessed small waves of immigration from rural Ontario and Britain, Elofson has pointed out that the first cattle driven into the region came from Montana, with the first ranchers in the region incorporating techniques developed in Texas, California, and Mexico of grazing cattle on an open range in summer and winter. They did much of their work from the saddle of a horse, watched over their herd, and rounded up their cattle at certain times of the year for branding, vaccinating, sorting, and marketing (Wiseman 1992, 641-655; Elofson 2000, 3, 6). These smaller operations remained in the lower plains area, where cattle grazed on native grasses that helped put weight on the animals.



Ranching history changed drastically in 1881 with the era of “great ranches.” The owners of these operations knew that southern Alberta was prime rangeland and “came intending to set up on a grand scale and to garner what they believed would be immense rewards in this former wilderness” (Elofson 2000, 5-6). When agricultural settlers failed to move west, the Canadian government was persuaded to confer legal status on ranching; because leases were awarded by order-in-council, individuals needed both the financial backing and connection with the then ruling Conservative party (Voisey 2004, 9). While Matthew H. Cochrane became the first individual to lease ranch land in 1881, the North West Cattle Company—known by its cattle brand, Bar U—was the most successful (Van Herk 2002, 164-66). This new system created what Paul Voisey (2004, 11) has called “mammoth ranches.” They expected, as the literature shows, to expend little effort and financial layout, hoping the thousands of cattle they had driven north would breed, multiply, and fatten on the resources of the open range, keeping their costs to a bare minimum. These great ranches were established near the foothills, Milk River Ridge, and Cypress Hills, where a wetter climate produced larges quantities of grasses, and the abundance of rivers, streams, and lakes provided ample drinking water for cattle.

Although these ranches bore a distinct British-Canadian identity in management, a majority of the cowboys who drove the herds hailed from the mid-western states and learned their train from Texan cowboys, bringing with them their own skills and techniques for cattle ranching (Mather 2013, 199). They used a double-cinched Texas saddle and roping style, and, at first, an open range ranching system. It slowly became evident that the plains were not suited for this open range system; not only was the region filling up with farmers wanting to grow grain, but occasional bad winters also decimated cattle population who could not graze into the winter months (Voisey 2004, 200).<sup>3</sup> Farmers on the plains erected fences to protect their crops, but in so doing prevented cattle from reaching sources of water and even shelter. Ranchers and settlers battled over the region, with the government intervening in 1892 by cancelling ranching leases. They allowed ranchers to purchase a small percentage of their ranges, but government still had hopes of agricultural settlement and, while they did not wish to destroy ranching, they would not allow it to

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<sup>3</sup> The latter is especially true of the winter of 1906-1907, which had been the worst on record (Mather 2013, 200).

thwart agricultural settlement (Voisey 2004, 18). Because farming was difficult or near impossible in the sheltered foothills, this, for some (including the great Bar U ranch), became the preferred region for raising cattle. To cope with cold winters, ranchers soon started raising their own feed, began raising more horses, some dairy cows, and even used fences to control their herd. The era of the “great ranches” slowly died out in the early 1900s, unable to manage their large herds, which were affected in large part by killer winters and a lack of financial resources to sustain operations. Bar U, however, outlived all of the great ranches, its properties being split up and sold in the 1950s. Over the course of the early 1900s, “land-extensive, open-range ranching evolved toward more labour-intensive, mixed-stock farming” (Mather 2013, 19-20). As cattlemen from the USA and eastern Canada continued to migrate to the area, two ranching traditions evolved side by side and eventually converged on the prairies, creating an Albertan style of ranch.<sup>4</sup>

Sir Charles Edward Saunders, agronomist and inventor of the Marquis Red Fife wheat, can be credited in part with the success of crop farming on the prairies. This hard spring Marquis Red Fife wheat ripened ten to twelve days earlier than any other on the market, giving farmers a glimmer of hope that crops could be harvested before the first frost in this region. Today, Alberta’s crop farmers produce roughly 29 percent of the country’s wheat, 34 percent of its canola, 44 percent of its barley, and 20 percent of its oats. In addition to these grains, farmers also produce sugar beets, hay, clover, honey, and dry peas. Wheat and cattle remain the province’s largest agricultural exports.

### **3.3 Lund’s Ranching Songs**

Growing up on his family’s ranch has provided a unique perspective for Lund’s music. His songs demonstrate a deep love and appreciation of the land, while also sharing stories about ranching (in general), and the joys of working with cattle (in particular). Like fellow western musical cowboy, Ian Tyson, livestock play a prominent role in his songs. While

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<sup>4</sup> One element that sets the Canadian range apart from its southern neighbour is the role of the national government in promoting and regulating the industry and land use. While the USA’s Homestead Act (1862) lured farmers westward, it did not provide legal framework within which ranching could be pursued, as in Canada’s Dominion Lands’ Act (1881) (Evans 1983, 79-91).

this chapter will focus more specifically on cattle, he has written even more songs about horses and rodeo riders, as will be discussed in chapter 4. These animals often emerge as the “other” in his narratives, the muse for this former rancher. In fact, Lund has even written a song in which he compares his own appearance and personality to animals native to Alberta. In “Hair in My Eyes like a Highland Steer,” he likens himself to a highland steer, claiming that he has hair in his eyes just like the long wooly banged cattle. And while one would assume a more sullen personality for this shaggy haired young male, Lund proclaims that he has “a spring in his step like a white tailed deer,” a “hitch” in his “hip like an old sheep dog,” and that he puffs up his “chest like a big bull frog.” Through this song narrative, he assumes the physical traits of the animals of southern Alberta’s ranching tradition and the personalities associated with them. Even his popular “Truck Got Stuck” (2005) displays elements of rurality, not just in the prairie scene and musical setting, but also in the display of rural macho culture of men taking pride in their four wheel drive trucks. The song’s chorus provides a roll call of the US-brand trucks most used in ranching/farming work, displaying the rural masculine pride in big trucks and the bragging rights that come with owning and maintaining these vehicles. The songs in this chapter share the joys (both honest and sarcastic) of ranch life and working with cattle, from the perspective of the rancher and the veterinarian.

### ***“Little Foothills Heaven” (2005)***

An ode to his great-grandfather’s Ivins’ ranch in southern Alberta, “Little Foothills Heaven,” from Lund’s 2005 *Hair in My Eyes like a Highland Steer*, is featured as a representation of his ranching roots in his 2013 Glenbow Museum exhibit. In the exhibition, Lund (2013c) described his pride in this family tradition, and the long history of Lund and Ivins ranchers in the province:

Alberta’s known for its beef. Despite the difficult climate, the prairie grass and foothills provide an ideal setting for raising cattle and sheep, and ranching has been one of the prime industries in the area since the first European settlements. American cowboy culture blended with the traditions of the British Commonwealth to create Alberta’s unique Western Canadian flavour.

Large operations owned by moneyed interests from England and Eastern Canada flourished alongside small family owned homesteads, and ranching still makes up a large part of Alberta's regional identity.

My great-grandfathers Lund and Ivins both migrated north from the American West to settle here, and spent their lives raising livestock and families on homestead ranches in the "Little Foothills Heaven" of southern Alberta.

An up-tempo western-swing number, "Little Foothills Heaven" describes both the landscape of his great-grandfather's ranch and his emotional connection to the region. Sung from the perspective of being away from the region (presumably in the city), Lund reminisces about his "favourite place to be," his "little foothills heaven on that northern rocky range," and prays to the old Chief Mountain (in Montana) that he will be back again someday. He sings about being able to see as far as Montana from his foothills cabin (verse 2) and about the presence of grazing cattle who (he thinks) are fortunate to be able to graze northward up to Valhalla (verse 3); finally, he praises his great-grandfather for picking the ranch land and the tranquility of the little cabin for his he yearns (verse 4). While the song praises the region and landscape, it also refers briefly to the ranching traditions of the region. First, it points to the cattle branding traditions adopted from both Britain and Spain that influenced the practices in North America, eventually converging in Alberta's system, and his own family's cattle brand ("a bar-x on the rib of every critter you can see").<sup>5</sup> The song also suggests the open-range approach to raising cattle that migrated north with Texas cowboys in the late 1800s. While the open-range approach became a thing of the past in Alberta (as a result of harsh winter weather conditions), many ranchers in southern Alberta allow their cattle to graze in the foothills regions.

Recorded at Treasure Isle studio in Nashville, TN, "Little Foothills Heaven" draws on a traditional western swing style reminiscent of the Nashville-based group The Time Jumpers. In addition to the Hurtin' Albertans of Kurt Ciesla on bass, Brady Valgardson on drums, and Grant Siemens playing lap steel, Lund included a stellar line-up of Nashville-based musicians to fill out the western swing sound, including fiddler Stuart Duncan of the Nashville Bluegrass Band, prolific session pianist Gordon Mote, and background vocals by

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<sup>5</sup> Both traditions used their own form of cattle branding in the 1800s (British ranchers used their family coat of arms). Branding was permanent and a legal mark of ownership; cattle were registered with governments (Mather 2013, 11). The Ivins family ranch is known as the Bar X Ranch (Lawrence 2014).

producer Harry Stinson, Time Jumper Ranger Doug, and Too Slim.<sup>6</sup> Western swing is the rural cousin of the big band jazz style that proliferated in the 1920s and 1930s. Designed for southern dancehalls in states like Texas and Oklahoma, western swing was “played in rural settings or for transplanted rural people in urban venues” (Boyd 1998, 7). Like jazz, it does not assume a fixed arrangement of form, but instead varies from one band to another, and is characterized by multiple layers of distinctive, but also interlocking rhythmic patterns. Perhaps the most important characteristic of traditional western swing is the prominent place given to fiddles in arrangements; the fiddle was the lead instrument, and every other instrumentalist adjusted to the fiddler’s stylings (Boyd 1998, 208). “Little Foothills Heaven” builds on the idea of layering patterns with piano, bass, acoustic guitar, and drum’s “train” beat played on the brushes providing the song’s rhythmic foundation. The lap steel and fiddle are layered on top of this, with western-inflected pitch bends and fiddle licks. Despite their place within the arrangement as solo instruments, neither the fiddle, nor the lap steel plays the role of bandleader in this song. None of the instruments stands out as having a role more prominent than another, except, of course, for Lund as lead singer. Not only does he open the song basically on his own with very little accompaniment (save for a few chords on the acoustic guitar), but his performance also leaves little room for another instrument to lead.

The song opens with Lund singing the first verse while playing single chords on the acoustic guitar where the changes occur on the underlying harmonic structure. He plays with the tempo in the opening lines, stretching out the phrases and using slight rubato through the first lines, building anticipation for the final line of the verse, where he settles into the shuffle of the western swing 4/4 beat (Ex. 3.1). On the final line of the verse the lap steel enters with an ascending E major triad landing on the top pitch on the down beat of the first chorus, where the full band enters with its dance beat: the train beat on the drums; the bouncing bass line, the piano and acoustic guitar’s block chords on the half beat, and pitch bends on the lap steel and fiddle. The drums, bass, and piano hold their parts throughout the song’s verses and chorus, allowing the lap steel and fiddle to add western

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<sup>6</sup> Gordon Mote has appeared on the records of numerous Nashville Country recording acts including Blake Shelton, Martina McBride, and Brad Paisley (to name a few), and even the albums of Willie Nelson. Ranger Doug and Too Slim are also members of the western swing band Riders in the Sky.

colouring or solo over top of this foundation. At the instrumental section, the lap steel, fiddle, and piano are each given their time to solo over the steady acoustic guitar, bass, and drum beat. They improvise the verse melody, each taking over where the previous instrument left off when they taper out of the arrangement, like they are finishing each other's sentence or passing a musical baton, ending with the Mote playing a run up and down the upper end of the piano keyboard and ending on a trill to signal the rest of the band to start the fourth verse. In this final verse, the piano emerges from its place in the rhythm section, with Mote "tinkling" on the keyboard with little skips and jumps in response to Lund's vocal line.

Example 3.1 “Little Foothills Heaven,” verse 1

slight rubato, with a Western swing feel (Swing ♩ = ♩<sup>3</sup>)

It's my li - ttle foot-hills hea-ven on that nor-thern ro - cky range My

favou-rite place to be and mis-ter that ain't go - nna change And I pray to Old Chief

(A tempo)

Moun-tain I'll be back a - gain some d - ay Just in time for you to hear me

say It's my li - ttle foot-hills hea-ven on that nor-thern ro - cky

range and I hope that I get back a - gain some d - ay

Chord symbols: V6, ii7, V7, I(7), V6, (A tempo), iii7, vi7, ii7, V, I, I, ii, ii, V7, V7, I

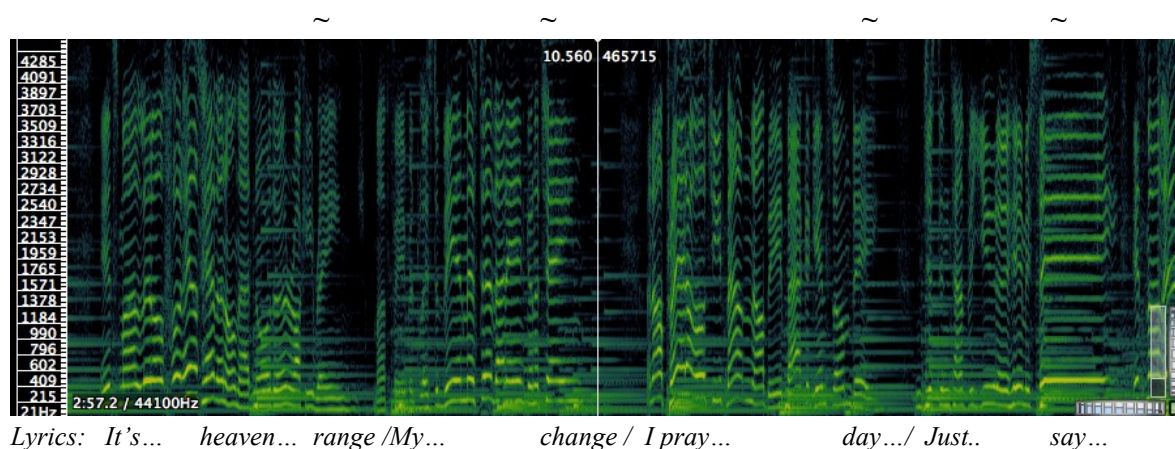
Lund's vocal performance is perhaps the smoothest or focused sound in his discography. Not only are the conventions of western swing style at play in his vocal performance, but the melodic shape and lyrical content also seem to require this vocal sound. Unlike songs discussed in chapter 2 (of which several moved fluidly between spoken and sung word, or had more static melodic lines), "Little Foothills Heaven" has a more legato melodic line, with several rises and falls throughout the first verse. In many ways, the melody is more "singable" than those of the songs considered up to this point. The more static lines of the previous songs also lent themselves to a rougher, more hoarse deliver (as in "Chinook Wind"), as did their darker, more ominous lyrical narratives (like "No Roads Here" and "The Truth Comes Out"). "Little Foothills Heaven," however, paints a more contrasting picture of southern Alberta's landscape than the preceding songs; it is not a dark, mysterious place with unpredictable weather or conservation issues, but rather a heavenly landscape of mountains, blue skies, and sacred Chief Mountain on the horizon. The song is a joyous celebration of his family ranch, an ode to the foothills region, and a nostalgic reflection on the land for which he yearns. All of these elements combined result in Lund's "country crooner" performance in the opening verse and throughout the song. A spectrogram of the opening verse (Ex. 3.2) shows a more solid looking vocal line that has a slight tremulous voice (vibrato) at the end of each phrase. The vocal performances seen so far have a much more hoarse sound, with a slight tremble on each sung pitch (see performance of "The Truth Comes Out," Ex. 6.2). Another convention of western swing (and country in general) invoked in the song is the harmonies that emerge in the chorus and in the third verse. These harmonies help to enhance the "heavenly" quality of the landscape, notably in the third verse, the "ooo" of the fifth verse, and the yodels. The harmonies are almost wistful, evoking a sense of yearning and even hopefulness that Lund will be "back again someday."

Another important genre convention deployed in this song is the yodeling at the end of the second chorus and close of the song. Yodels (and cry breaks) have long been a convention of country and western swing music and considered as musical symbols of "crying." As Aaron Fox (2004, 280) has indicated, such crying effects are a generalized aspect of a subgeneric country style and are "specifically coordinated with 'sad' songs,



verbs of crying, and affectively potent moments.”<sup>7</sup> In “Little Foothills Heaven,” these yodels (performed in harmony with Stinson, excellent yodeler Ranger Doug, and Too Slim) signify Lund’s nostalgia for the region of his youth. Lund’s yodels are perhaps “cleaner” than a typical country yodel, which tend to be characterized by cry breaks (the sudden microtonal shift from a “normal” register to falsetto, as he had done in “Chinook Wind”).<sup>8</sup> Thus, instead of vocalizing actual crying, these yodels seem instead to capture his sadness and an extreme sense of longing for the foothills—echoed in the harmony vocals.

Example 3.2 “Little Foothills Heaven,” spectrogram of verse 1



Note: Instances of tremulous voice are marked by an “~”

It seems fitting that Lund invokes the western swing style in a song about his beloved family ranch land in Canada’s west, a genre that tends lyrically to espouse the virtues of life in a specific region. Although western swing has come to signify the “American West” and the dancehalls of Texas and Oklahoma (the states from which the subgenre emerged), Lund’s arrangement suggests a western Canadian flavour through his

<sup>7</sup> Cultural anthropologist Greg Urban (1988) has also discussed the cry break as an aspect of ritual wailing Amerindian Brazil, calling them “icons of crying.”

<sup>8</sup> To see the slight different between Lund’s smoother yodel and one with a cry break, compare his performance with Ranger Doug’s yodel in his performance at River City Music Festival: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=306aLfbZEHA>> (see around 00:37). See also the classic yodel example of Jimmie Rodgers’ “Blue Yodel No. 1,” ><https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qEIBmGZxAhg&feature=kp>> (see around 00:30).

thematic exploration of ranching culture in southern Alberta. Lund abandons the tradition of having a lead fiddle player (which is only natural for a band adopting the style for one song), and instead makes reference to the style by drawing on its basic structural components: the rhythmic foundation in the drums, bass, and guitars, the 4/4 up-beat swing, and the instrumental solo section. Instead, Lund directs the band through his strong vocal performance, using techniques such as changes in tempo (verse 1), slight rubato (verse 2), and yodels (refrain 2) to usher the instrumentalists through the song. Like western swing, Lund celebrates the virtues of southern Albertan life through nostalgia for the ranching landscape of his youth. Working with some of the subgenre's leading musicians, he captured the spirit of the foothills and the joy and happiness that he has only found on his family's ranch. "Little Foothills Heaven" is the first song in which a cow is included in the recording. At the end of the third verse, after Lund has proclaimed that the foothills landscape "don't get much better for a cow," a deep cattle "moo" is inserted into the track, becoming part of the song accompaniment. By including the cattle "moo" here and, as discussed next, in "Cows Around," he also suggests that the sounds of ranch livestock are part of the region's soundscape, providing a soundtrack for daily life on the ranch.

Ranching and farming come with a host of challenges, especially as a result of weather conditions. As outlined in chapter 2, the Chinook wind is often a frustrating presence in the life of the crop farmer. Although it is a blessing for ranchers, as the warm winds blow off snow cover so that cattle can graze into the winter months, Lund's ode to the "Chinook Wind" suggests that its high-force nature can also "blow the good dirt east." Thus, the Chinook is both a beloved and possibly hated weather condition to the region. Precipitation has similar advantages and disadvantages in southern Alberta. A godsend to the dry land farmer who needs just a little bit of rain to produce quality crops, too much rain, as witnessed in the catastrophic floods in southern Alberta in June 2005, 2010, and 2013, have resulted in washed out crops and drowned cattle. More than the dry Chinook wind, the recent floods have proven to have a devastating impact on rural communities and their way of life.

Another significant problem that ranchers and farmers have been facing is the encroachment of urban sprawl and big industry on rural land. This issue, addressed first in chapter 2, will also be discussed in chapter 5 on the fossil fuel energy industry. As will be discussed in chapter 6 with “The Truth Comes Out,” urban sprawl and development have had significant impact on the ecosystem and destruction of natural habits for bears and cougars in southern Alberta. This has led to both high instances of bears being hit by vehicles along roadways and the increased presence of the wild animals on ranches in the region. This poses a major problem for ranchers, who wish to keep their family and cattle safe from predators (namely, cougars) seeking food. Just as these animals migrate to southern Alberta’s sacred ranch land, so too are the big oil companies, who wish to explore the foothills for potential coal bed methane deposits. “This Is My Prairie” and “Long Gone to Saskatchewan,” both off of his 2009 *Losin’ Lately Gambler*, reveal different sides of the impact that the fossil fuel industry has had on ranching. While “This Is My Prairie” demonstrates a rancher’s protective instincts over his family’s health, land, and livestock, “Long Gone to Saskatchewan” illustrates how the industry has driven the price of land so high that ranchers can no longer afford to remain in Alberta (as discussed in chapter 5). Whether or not the song’s narrative pokes fun at its eastern neighbours, Lund captures a real and frustrating trend in southern Alberta. While Alberta remains the leading beef producer of Canada, and is not likely in any real jeopardy of any major changes in the near future, it is still a disheartening fact that a region once known for its near-perfect land and weather conditions for cattle ranching, is witnessing the slow decline of the industry as a result of its even more profitable energy industry.

### ***“Cows Around” (2012)***

In addition to these external challenges presented upon ranching, the cows themselves are often pesky critters to manage on a daily basis. Lund, being the sarcastic, witty, songsmith he is, wrote a humorous ode to cows and, in his words, “how much of a pain in the ass they are” (Lund 2012). Lund reveals in the ninth instalment of his webisode series *What That Song Means Now* that “Cows Around” began with just a fragment of a musical and lyrical idea in the phrase “everything is better with some cows around.” The phrase swirled around

his head for a couple of years; he admits that he knew that the song would be a sarcastic reflection on how much of a pain the animals are, but that the rest of the song did not come to him until around 2011, when he was writing songs for his 2012 album *Cabin Fever*. While the chorus joyously exclaims that “everything is better with cows around,” most of the verses pose a series of hilariously rhetorical questions about the problems that arise in a rancher’s life, with the answer to each being one word: “cows,” as revealed in the verse’s refrain, “May you always have cows around.” His questions revolve around the amount of money spent on caring for cattle and the early mornings (verse 1), the tensions that cows cause between a husband and wife (verse 3), the animal’s mischievous nature and tendencies for leaving their enclosed space, how this profession wears on a person’s face, and a cattle’s propensity for charging at people (verse 4). In the final verse, Lund’s questions point to the financial instability and unpredictability of ranching life, and to the fact that generations continue to ranch despite the chance of losing everything and have nothing to leave to their children (verse 6). In between these questions, he also includes verses about embracing the frustrations that come with raising cattle: the lack of free time and the complications that they bring to making plans (verse 2). He also lists some of the things ranchers in southern Alberta may have to do to make enough money to feed and raise cattle, including allowing oil and gas exploration or turning the land into an exotic game range (verse 5). In the bridge, one of the Hurtin’ Albertans asks Lund what kind of cows he is talking about, and this leads him to list off a number of cattle bred in the region. When performing the song, the singer-songwriter quickly found out that fans are sensitive about their cattle, and that “it turns out if you do a cow roll call and leave out one breed, you’re going to hear about it” (Dansby 2012). In March 2013, Lund performed two small concerts in the Glenbow Museum as part of his *No Roads Here* exhibit. He included “Cows Around” in his set. Before he sang the bridge, Lund (2013d) paused to talk to his audience about what his life is like now that he has written a song about cows:

I’d like to tell you what my life is like. If you write songs about cows and you put a bridge in a song where you list almost every breed of cow, and then you run into the old guy whose breed you didn’t mention. I’m getting shit from people who raise Murray Greys.

The use of this type of “list” in the bridge, allows Lund to establish a level of authenticity by including elements normally known only to insiders. In a live performance, such as this one at the Glenbow Museum, lists have an even greater function: they provide Lund the opportunity to update his list or customize it not just to local tastes, but also to as a way to even have a little bit of fun with his audience by poking fun at ranchers who get a little bit sensitive about their cattle. This was certainly not an insult to his audience, in fact, the audience members burst into laughter, as though a joke between old friend, or in a way that suggests that those in his audience may have had similar interactions. The form is flexible, with two verses between each chorus, and does not have a fixed pattern for the order of question and statement verses. This flexibility allows Lund to switch around verses or add new ones to liven up a performance. In fact, he had *so many* verses about the joys of raising cattle that he has two different versions of the song: the original album version and the acoustic album version.

As in “Little Foothills Heaven,” Lund draws on a western swing style for his ode to cows. What started as a simple idea to write a song about the joys of raising cows morphed into a very complex song musically—relative to what Lund *usually* does in his songs (Lund 2012l). Unlike “Little Foothills Heaven,” the song does not include the traditional group of instruments, using only acoustic and electric guitar, double bass, and drums (leaving out fiddle, banjo, and lap steel). The basic foundation of the arrangement is the same, however, and builds from the drums’ 4/4 shuffled “train” beat. Over this beat, the arrangement layers a jazz-style bass line, the acoustic guitar strumming on the beat, and the riffing electric guitar riffing. The song has a jazz-swing chord structure for the chorus in E major (Ex. 3.3) and modulates down to the dominant key area in the verses via a transitioning motive (Lund 2012l). “Cows Around” opens with the electric and acoustic guitars picking a head motive based on the chorus melody over the shuffle train beat and the walking bass line, and then moves right into the first statement of the chorus (Ex. 3.4). The delicate picking of the high-registered melody in the head motive and the slight swing in the chorus creates a light almost “cutesy” or sweet feel. Here the band creates a kind of musical irony, establishing such a light or delicate sound to portray the innocence of an animal with a weight range of 2,000 to 3,000 pounds. This contradictory image perfectly suits the humour and sarcasm of the lyrics and perhaps even the preconceived notion that raising cattle is an

easy job. The musical setting is then contrasted by the list of ways in which cattle are a, in Lund's words, "pain in the ass."

Example 3.3 "Cows Around," chorus harmonic structure

with a Western swing feel (Swing  $\text{♩} = \text{♩}^{\text{3}}\text{♩}$ )

Eve-ry-thing is be-tter with some cows a-round Li-ving in

town some-times brings me down let me be-stow this wes-tern bles-sing share what

I have found May you al-ways have c-ows a-round

### Example 3.4 “Cows Around,” head motive

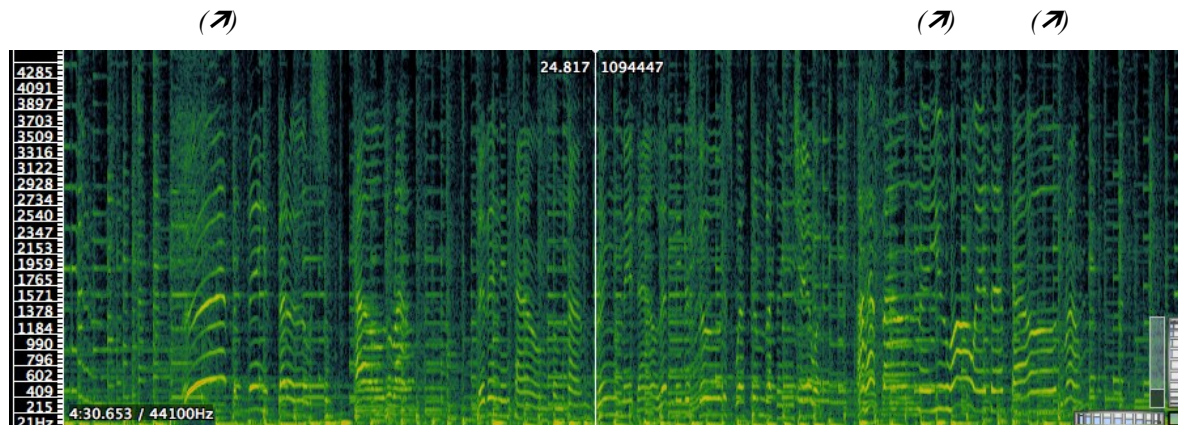
with a Western swing feel (Swing ♩ = ♩<sup>3</sup>)

Much of the song’s sarcastic tone is conveyed through Lund’s vocal performance and a combination of phrasing and vocal qualifiers. His voice has an almost joyous ring to it in the chorus, as a result of the exaggerated rise of “everything” and the swelling emphasis on the “always” of the final line of lyrics. The spectrogram in Ex. 3.5 provides a visual representation of the size and direction of the vocal arc on those two words in the chorus.<sup>9</sup> The verses, however, elaborate the sarcasm behind the lyrical narrative, shifting between spoken and sung words. In the first verse, Lund breaks up the flow of the first phrase to emphasize the sarcastic tone from the outset, inserting a slight pause between “what else you gonna spend that extra” and “money on”—implying that there really is no extra money to spend (Ex. 3.6). He does the same thing in the next phrase, breaking up “what else is gonna get you up” and “hours before dawn.” In the second and third verse, he puts emphasis on certain words through a vocal strain that has a slight crack, especially on “time on your *hands*,” “*complication*, in your plans,” “*man and his wife*,” and “*enhancements* to your life.” The vocal strain enhances the emotional strain of the lyrical narrative, and reinforces the humour behind the sarcastic lyrical narrative. Throughout each verse Lund’s vocal strain seems increasingly worn out, capturing his exhaustion from working with the beasts.

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<sup>9</sup> When examining the vocal performance through the spectrogram, each instance of the chorus is easily identifiable because Lund maintains this exaggerated rising arch throughout the song.

Example 3.5 “Cows Around,” spectrogram of chorus 1

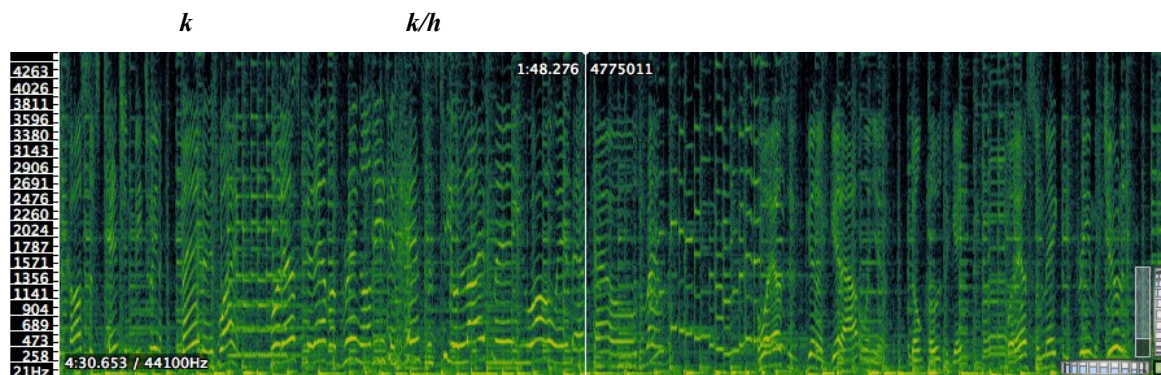


Lyrics: *Everything...*

*always..cows around*

Note: (↗) indicates an exaggerated rise in pitch

Example 3.6 “Cows Around,” spectrogram of verse 3



Lyrics: *man...*

*enhancements...*

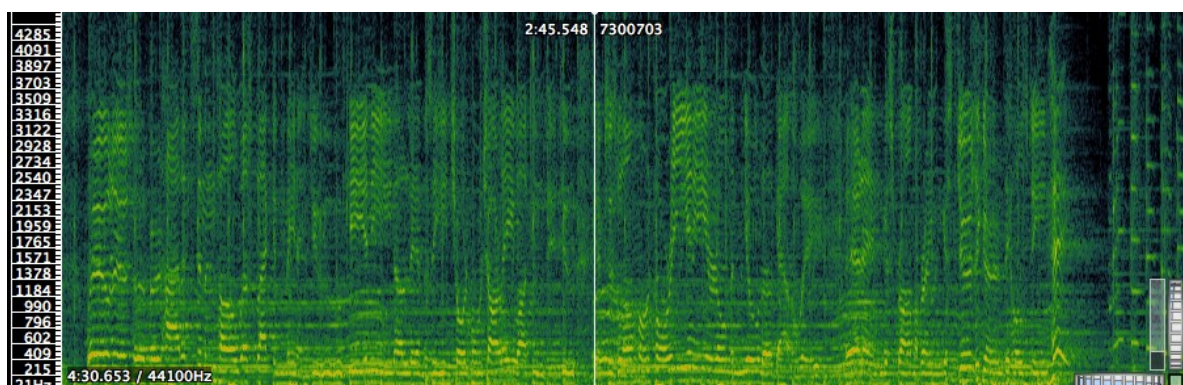
Note: The “*k*” indicates the voice crack from vocal strain,  
 “*k/h*” indicates the same voice crack, followed by breathy voice.

In the bridge, the band drew fittingly on the popular 1948 song “(Ghost) Riders in the Sky,” written by Stan Jones, to accompany his cattle roll call. A country-western song about a cowboy who has visions of the ghosts of condemned cowboys chasing red-eyed, iron hooved, and steel-horned cattle stampeding through the sky, the “(Ghost) Riders” theme captures perfectly the sentiment of Lund’s song. Just as the ghosts warn the cowboy



about changing his ways if he does not want to end up riding the skies with them one day, “Cows Around” uses sarcasm to warn the listeners of the troubles they will have if they continue to ranch the animals. The “(Ghost) Riders” theme contrasts the lightness of the chorus: Lund has more reverb on his voice than in the rest of the song, he sings louder and in a lower register, and the background vocal harmonies shift from the major to minor as the musicians sing open vowel sounds (“oooo”). Lund’s vocal performance in this section is even reminiscent of Johnny Cash’s voice in his cover of “(Ghost) Riders in the Sky.”<sup>10</sup> The slap bass accompaniment also connotes the charging hooves of cattle, not *real* cows, but the visions of frustratingly annoying cattle that plague Lund’s life. The spectrogram in Example 3.7 provides a visual representation of the entire bridge section, showing where Lund’s voice is more hoarse and prominent in the mix as he rattles off the names of cows. The dense and hazy look of the spectrogram illustrates the thick texture of the section, a result of the backup harmony vocals, the reverb, and the louder slap bass. The combination of these elements (theme, vocal performance, background vocals, reverb, and slap bass) further invoke the hallucination implied in the “(Ghost) Riders” narrative and theme. In “Cows Around,” they also suggest the delirious ramblings of a man driven insane by his cows, crazily spouting off the varieties of cows that have tormented him.

Example 3.7 “Cows Around,” spectrogram of bridge



Lyr., *Well there's... Chianina... Charolais... Corriente... and Angus... Jersey... hey!*

<sup>10</sup> See Johnny Cash’s performan of “(Ghost) Riders in the Sky” here, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lxn48wSiCzg>>.

Almost all of the songs on *Cabin Fever* were recorded live in Riverdale Recorders studio in Edmonton, Alberta. Lund recalls that it was mostly just the four band members playing in studio, that “it’s got more of an organic, rough-around-the-edges feel to it” (Sperounes 2012b). Songs on this album, more than the others, seem to evoke a sense of space within the recording, capturing the feel of a small club setting. “Cows Around” has a short reverb on the voice in the verses and chorus, used to enhance the small space and the distance between the instruments inside that space, and is used more heavily in the bridge to create the effect of madness (Doyle 2005, 42). Lund’s voice emerges at the front and center of the recorded mix, closer to our ear and louder than all of the other instruments. The instruments, then, sound as though they are staged around the singer, like a backup band on a small stage. The upright bass can be heard to the right of Lund, with the electric guitar to the left, and the percussion feels as though it recedes behind the group, or at least behind the lead singer. Recording the instruments in this manner creates the feel of watching the band at a live performance, capturing the raw and organic sound that Lund sought for this album. Unlike the songs discussed in chapter 2, which had narratives that took place in the outdoors and used echo and reverb to help capture this space, “Cows Around” uses reverb instead to allude to the performance space of a western dance hall. This sound is further emphasized in the acoustic version, which was recorded live with all instruments in one room. When discussing the recording process, Lund recalled,

There wasn’t even any separation between the instruments. Usually, you put each instrument in a different room, so if you f\*\*\* [sic] something up you can fix it without screwing up everybody else’s track. But for the acoustic version, we didn’t even do that. We were all just sitting in a circle with microphones (Sperounes 2012b).

While there is still a sense of the placement of musicians, people talking and laughing can be heard in the background of the acoustic version. This version of the song (and indeed all songs on the acoustic version of *Cabin Fever*) has a live-jam feel, as though Lund has invited his fans into the studio or into a house party where he and the Hurtin’ Albertans are playing their latest songs for friends. There is a level of playful spontaneity felt throughout the acoustic album, most notably on this song.

Lund maintains the light sarcastic humour throughout the entire song. He pokes fun at the rancher life, but does so in a way that reveals his knowledge of the work and a deep respect for those (including his family) who have dedicated their lives to the unpredictability of ranching. His song illuminates the challenges that ranchers face on a daily basis, many of which provide some good laughter at the end of a long day (cows getting out of their enclosure, being charged at by a bull cow, or birthing a calf at -40°C), and others that create stress and heartache for individuals and families just trying to make a living. The financial difficulties that arise for many ranchers are often the result of external issues, including (1) having to purchase extra feed in the winter months during a snowy Chinook-less season, (2) having to fix damaged fences, and (3) having a neighbour's mangy bull breed with prized cattle. Perhaps most disheartening for ranchers is renting out tracts of land just to have a little extra income during a rough patch. Some activities, including digging for oil and gas, may provide financial gain upfront, but have the potential for creating long-term issues not just for the cattle, but also the health and well being of family members. These cons can far outweigh the pros and lead to a rancher having to sell his/her property and start anew elsewhere (as in "Long Gone to Saskatchewan," see chapter 5). Lund ends the song with his own cattle call, a deep double "moo," imitating the cow's "moo" that had been added to the final chorus (which also appeared in "Little Foothills Heaven"). He may have had participation from an actual cow in the song, but, in the end, he gets the last laugh: his own moo emerges like a poke in the ribs after a joke at the cow's expense.

### **3.4 Veterinary Medicine**

An important figure in ranching life is the rural veterinarian, who often works twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week to provide medical attention to his animal patients. Lund's father was not just a rancher and rodeo rider, but also a veterinarian who graduated from the Guelph University's Ontario Veterinary College (OVC). Until 1969, OVC was the only institution in Canada that offered a degree in veterinary medicine, and Lund's father,

D. C. Lund, was part of the freshman class of 1955.<sup>11</sup> D. C. Lund started practicing veterinary medicine in Taber in the 1960s with Dr. Stu Little, and later purchased the Taber Animal Clinic with Dr. Don Hamilton (Southland Funeral Chapel, n.d.). Lund was introduced to veterinary medicine at a young age, he even found himself participating in certain exercises alongside his father:

The country veterinarian is a mystical and mysterious figure in rural life. As a child I read James Herriot's novels with enthusiasm, and I grew up around animal doctoring thanks to my dad, Dr. D. C. Lund, who had a large animal practice in Taber, Alberta. I was pressed into service as an assistant at a very young age, and took part on many gory and questionable exercises (Lund 2013c).

These experiences influenced Lund to write two songs about veterinary medicine for *Losin' Lately Gambler*, "Horse Doctor, Come Quick" and "Talkin' Veterinarian Blues"—possibly the only two country songs about the practice.

### ***"Talkin' Veterinarian Blues" (2009)***

The album opens with "Horse Doctor, Come Quick," a song about scoring drugs from a veterinarian. In his NPR interview with Melissa Block (2009), Lund discussed the relationship between drug users and veterinarians:

There's the long tradition of people using vets as sort of a back door to get a hold of narcotics. Because it's the same stuff, right? Morphine is morphine or, you know, speed is speed. So I mean, a lot of the steroid guys get their steroids from vets.

Perhaps an odd theme for a country music song, or any song for that matter, "Horse Doctor, Come Quick" points to a dark, undiscussed relationship and practice in rural communities. Throughout the verses, the song lists off the various narcotics that veterinarians have on hand in their "little black bag" that could be of interest to drug users, including tranquilizer, "crank" (speed), penicillin, "bute" (phenylbutazone, an anti-inflammatory), and

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<sup>11</sup> The College of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Saskatchewan and the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine at Université de Montréal opened in 1969 (the latter being the only French program offered in North America). The Atlantic Veterinary College at the University of Prince Edward Island opened in 1986 and the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Calgary opened its doors in 2008. A photo of D. C. Lund's 1955 freshman class was featured in the section on veterinary medicine at the Glenbow Exhibit (Lund 2013c).

buprenorphine (a more potent and longer lasting analgesic than morphine). More importantly, the song also points to class distinctions within rural communities. The song character, the drug user calling out for the veterinary surgeon, refers to himself in the bridge as being “just a layman,” that he “ain’t never been schooled,” “can’t diagnose nothin’” because he “ain’t got no clue.” The questionable grammar points to an uneducated culture, while the use of “ain’t” stereotypically suggests a rural setting. He contrasts his own image against that of the veterinarian, who spent five years “down east, learning everything about the bird and the beast.” There is a sense of resentment in his tone as he sings “I’m just a layman, I’m not like you,” as though these two men were destined for their roles, and the education that the veterinarian received had little to do with hard work and determination, but rather, a result of being a fortunate, perhaps wealthy, member of the higher class. Even the fact that the veterinarian went “down east” to study seems to be a point of contention for him, as he has likely never had the opportunity to leave his small town. The narrative points to a great class divide between those who were unable (or did not want) to leave home to continue their education, and those who had the opportunity (and strong academic record) to have these life experiences.

“Talkin’ Veterinarian Blues” explores the actual animal doctoring side of veterinary medicine. As Lund (2009b) indicated in his liner notes, the lyrics are “a little gory for the urban market,” but are made up of true stories that happened to his father and Dr. Don Hamilton in their practice (see also Block 2009). Lund’s father would come home from work and relay stories about his day to his family—little did he know that two to three decades later these stories would end up in a song. The song is composed in four verses, with no refrain or chorus. Instead, Lund strings together these stories, retelling them from his father’s perspective. As with most of his music, the song character emerges in his vocal delivery. Again, like “The Truth Got Stuck,” “Talkin’ Veterinarian Blues” is spoken-word, which gains musicality through Lund’s humorous delivery. Each verse has some amusing story element that he enhances in his unique way. The first verse of “Talkin’ Veterinarian Blues” begins with the most important lesson that D. C. Lund taught his son, that if he was going to be a vet, to make sure that he gets paid, “cash money,” as opposed to jam, eggs, and other homemade goodies that farmers and ranchers have historically paid their

veterinarian for services rendered.<sup>12</sup> He relayed to his song that all of the money is in the city, indicating with a hint of bitterness that “city folks pay a high dollar to make sure Fido ain’t hot under the collar.” Lund imparts an almost sung quality to his spoken-word performance at the end of the first verse, as he sarcastically emphasizes all of the glorious things about urban veterinary medicine, referencing the “boutique animal hospitals” found in many urban centers. In the second verse he shares a story about the time that a bird that belonged to a blind woman died over a weekend while in his practice’s care, and rather than upsetting her, his assistant bought her a new bird. This new bird, however, could sing, and the old woman proclaimed that they were good doctors for teaching him this new trick. Here, Lund imitates the old blind woman thanking the doctors for teaching her bird to sing, straining slightly to reach the “melodic” rise on the line “you taught him to sing.” The third verse reveals D. C. Lund’s compassion for calves that spend their summer frolicking in the field, only to be branded, tagged, delivered vaccinations, dehorned, and castrated in the fall. He sarcastically ends this verse with “welcome to the world little buddy.” Lund’s dry delivery in this section provides a moment of laughter as he speaks about the joys of fall season cattle castration. In this phrase, the deliberate pauses between each small section (“snip snip snip” and “welcome to the world little buddy” and “it’s no picnic”) enhance the sarcastic humour and the unfortunate list of procedures the calves have to endure each fall. The final story speaks of the trials of treating cattle choking on sugar beets, indicating, “if it gets too bad you gotta cut the throat and salvage the carcass.” Unfortunately for D. C. Lund, the sugar beet would not dislodge, so he cut the cattle’s jugular, causing it to jump and cough out the beet, but it was too late and he bled to death in front of the two men. The song concludes with one line, “don’t get me started on...alfalfa bloats.” Here too, as with his updated “list” in his live performance of “Cows Around” (Lund 2013d), the inclusion of this little sarcastic comment at the end of the song is yet another moment when Lund includes information only known to insiders both regionally and professionally. In this case, it also emerges as a sweet moment between a son and his late father: Lund likely heard D. C. Lund speak about alfalfa bloat regularly while growing up, and this final witty statement allowed the singer-songwriter to address his father’s hard work, even the irritating features, with fondness.

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<sup>12</sup> This was not only common for veterinarians, but for all types of doctors in rural settings; Dolly Parton has famously relayed that Dr. Robert F. Thomas delivered her for a bag of cornmeal (see Cardwell 2011, 45).

The musical setting for “Talkin’ Veterinarian Blues” is built on a repeating chord progression, creating a circular moving pattern similar to “The Truck Got Stuck.” Composed in A major, the main repeating harmonic progression through the verse is I-IV-V-I, to which Lund adds a IV-ii<sup>7</sup>-V tag at the ends of phrases in each verse (Ex. 3.8). Woven into this chord progress is a recurring motive that ushers one chord to the next; the motive moves from the tonic A up to F# and back to the A, enhancing the circularity of the musical accompaniment. The bass and drums add to the repetitive circularity of the setting through a walking bass line and “train” beat (respectively). With “The Truck Got Stuck” and “Chinook Wind” such circularity implied stasis or immobility; here, the accompaniment seems to suggest monotony of both the son’s boredom with hearing his father’s repetitive stories about veterinary medicine, or the routineness with aspects of the veterinarian’s day.

Example 3.8 “Talkin’ Veterinarian Blues,” head motive with harmonic progression

The musical notation shows a head motive in 4/4 time, A major. The melody consists of quarter notes: A4, B4, C#5, D5, E5, D5, C#5, B4, A4. The harmonic progression is: I (A2, C#3, E4), IV (F#4, A4, C#5), V (G#4, B4, D5), I (A2, C#3, E4), IV (F#4, A4, C#5), V (G#4, B4, D5), I (A2, C#3, E4), IV (F#4, A4, C#5), ii7 (B3, D4, E4, F#4), V (G#4, B4, D5). The ii7 chord is a half note, while the others are quarter notes.

Lund’s father passed away on 9 April 2013, and he left this song as a tribute to the man who raised him and to the important work that he did to support ranchers in Taber. Veterinary medicine in rural Alberta may seem as though it is not as “glamorous” as in urban centres (as mentioned in the song), and it may seem to be a lot of routine and gory work, but the job is vital to rural communities and the ranchers that depend on veterinarians to keep their animals alive and healthy. Fall is perhaps the busiest time of year for many rural veterinarians, who help with the set of identification and vaccination procedures. This is an important job, as it contributes to the health and longevity of the cattle herd and, by

extension, the rancher's income. While Lund does not go in great depth on the topic of "alfalfa bloat," the mere mention of it at the song's close and suggests that is amongst the most frustrating aspects of D. C. Lund's job. Technically called "pasture bloat," the issue is often locally referred to as "alfalfa" bloat because that particular forage has been associated as a leading cause of this potentially deadly bloat. Recently, cattle grazing in alfalfa pastures have been limited due to the potential for bloat, and many ranchers and farmers have implemented a number of techniques to reduce the risk, including co-cropping "bloat safe legumes" with alfalfa, wilting of the plant, and even rotational grazing systems to maintain uniform grain intake (Majak, McAllister, McCartney, Stanford, Cheng 2008, 14; Popp McAllister, Majak and Berg 2014). Unfortunately, one of the four most common causes of sudden death or death without the appearance of illness has been linked to this feedlot illness (Majak et al. 2008, 19). Alfalfa bloat must have been an issue that D. C. Lund dealt with on a regular basis, because he is known locally in Taber as having created his own remedy the sickness. Proud of his father's accomplishments, Lund featured a bottle Dr. Lund's Bloat Remedy (his father's own concoction for ridding cattle of the common bloat) in his Glenbow exhibit.<sup>13</sup>

### 3.5 Summary

Lund's songs demonstrate that ranching is not always an easy way of life. Indeed, as evinced in Denver's "Thank God I'm a Country Boy," farming and ranching can be, and have been overromanticized. From unpredictable weather and rising land prices to the stubborn nature of cows, Lund has explored some of the challenges ranchers and farmers in southern Alberta face each year. Each song demonstrates his intimate knowledge of the ranching tradition, the joys and stresses, and the sacrifices made to continue in the profession. In a 2012 interview with Brad Wheeler (2012) for the *Globe and Mail*, Lund related his views on the dedication required to succeed in modern ranching: "You have to work at it. In the early days, being a cowboy made sense. The whole lifestyle was based on open, cheap land. These days, you have to go out of your way. You have to really want it." In some cases, that means negotiating loans with the bank, in others, it means renting out or providing access to land for exploratory purposes. This is not ideal, and is certainly not what ranchers envisioned when passing their land down to their children, but it is often a necessity for survival in a constantly fluctuating market and in an unpredictable

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<sup>13</sup> In the exhibit, Lund (2013c) revealed that drummer Brady Valgardson lived on a ranch two miles west of the Lund family in Taber and that D. C. Lund was their vet. He shared his bloat remedy with the Valgardson family.



environment. In interview with Lana Michelin of *The Red Deer Advocate*, Lund revealed that his great-grandfather's homestead (the "Little Foothills Heaven") still exists; different relatives have their own corners of the land, including an uncle who still runs cattle. But, as he says, "it's getting harder and harder to make a go of cattle ranching these days. The homestead is viewed mostly as a 'spiritual home' and family gathering place" (Michelin 2014).

Lund does not shy away from these challenges, however. He instead tackles them head on, using his music to communicate the realities of ranching in southern Alberta. While it is not all bad, as made clear in his celebration of his family's ranch land near Cardston, he uses humour and word-play to illuminate the many sacrifices that ranchers make for their livestock and the medical care required to keep cattle alive. In this chapter, the western swing style emerged as a new "sound" for the tales of ranching in southern Alberta. While Lund abandons some aspects of the western swing tradition (notably the lead fiddle part), he maintains the basic structural rhythmic foundation in both "Little Foothills Heaven" and "Cows Around." While elements of the western swing style can be found in "Always Keep an Edge on Your Knife" (from *Hair in My Eyes like a Highland Steer*), Lund draws on this style in two of the songs discussed here to evoke a general sense of rurality, relying on his lyrics to localize the music to southern Alberta and, interestingly, to the ranching tradition. The western swing style is used in a way that ties western Canadian ranching to its southern roots in Texas, and honours the traditions that remain prevalent to the profession in southern Alberta. While the Texan and Oklahoman roots remain evident, the modified western swing arrangements, which are predominantly lyrically and vocally driven under Lund's direction, establish a sound of a *new* West and frontier identity. The musical setting for both songs establishes an upbeat, joyous feel for songs celebrating the ranch landscape of Lund's youth and the pleasure of working with cows. And while the sarcastic tone throughout "Cows Around" might suggest animosity toward cattle, Lund's ability to find humour in their amusing behaviour actually conveys his affection for the animal and ranching lifestyle. In the end, these songs reveal nostalgia rooted in Lund's personal experience of having left the family ranch. They also demonstrate the importance of the region and ranching tradition in Lund's memory and, by extension, his identity.

As will be discussed in chapter 4, ranching is not the only rural cultural tradition that the singer-songwriter experienced growing up in southern Alberta; rodeo riding has also had an integral role in the Lund and Ivins family histories, with award-winning riders on both sides of his family (his father and mother included). Unlike the cow, which emerges in Lund's narratives as an annoying (yet lovable) creature, horses often assume the role of the romantic "other." These songs do not simply address the challenges of breaking or riding a horse; rather, Lund uses narratives about human and horse to interrogate complex relationships between individuals, and even attachment to place. With the long history of the Calgary Stampede, these songs also play an important role in honouring the rodeo tradition in southern Alberta.



## Chapter 4. The Rodeo

Corb Lund grew up around the rodeo. His grandfathers, parents, and uncles were all very active in the rodeo community in southern Alberta, not only as competitors, but as judges, coaches, and, of course, as spectators of the sport as well. His father was also an important voice in the discussion of humane treatment of livestock in rodeo competition. The Lund and Ivins families are both very well respected within the southern Alberta's rodeo community, and several relatives have been honoured by local rodeos and the Canadian Professional Rodeo Association. Needless to say, with so many talented cowboys and cowgirls surrounding him, the singer-songwriter's had ample inspiration for his rodeo songs. Two of the songs analyzed here, "We Used to Ride 'Em" and "Buckin' Horse Rider" offer reflections about his father's and uncle Lynn Jensen's careers as bronc riders, while also tying in important cultural motifs that highlight the important relationship between the cowboy and his horse. Both of these songs address issues surrounding aging and retirement, offering nostalgic reflections for the good old days. Lund was himself a rodeo competitor in his youth, participating in the steer riding and steer wrestling events at local rodeos and even the Calgary Stampede. However, after a steer stomped on his head, Lund left the sport. It was also around this time that Lund became captivated by the music of Black Sabbath, an experience that he regularly notes as a turning point in his youth (Lund 2009b). In "Steer Rider's Blues" Lund shares *his* rodeo history, reminiscing about his early teen years as a young steer rider. Although Lund may not compete in the rodeo today, he maintains a significant presence as an invited performer at numerous local rodeos, notably the Calgary Stampede.

This chapter examines Lund's rodeo songs and considers how he uses rodeo cowboy motifs to tie his family heritage to southern Alberta. While previous chapters have

explored his family's deep connection to the land and ranching industry, this chapter will focus on the integral role that they play in local rodeo culture and traditions. As such, I will consider the rodeo theme in relation to the dissertation's general perspective of place. That said, I will also refer to Michael Allen's (2005) work on the "Cowboy Code" to interrogate the ways in which Lund draws on and adapts cowboy motifs to tell his stories and address emotions surrounding complex issues including aging, retirement, and nostalgia. In two of the songs analyzed in this chapter, Lund's narrative revolves around the activities of an unnamed protagonist, and he draws on external references to tie the stories to his family members. In so doing, his narratives are often constructed in a manner that allows the individual to stand as a symbol for the entire family's connection to the rodeo. The musical setting offers yet another layer of meaning in each of these songs; through musical analysis, I will show how Lund draws on older musical styles and rhythms that mimic the sound of a galloping horse or bull to impart identity to the featured animals. It will also consider how the use of non-traditional harmonies and power chords aid in communicating the emotional response to the sport, capturing sentiments such as loss, longing, determination, and even eagerness. All of these song narratives are deeply tied to place. This chapter will therefore discuss the ways in which Lund's music anchors his family's story in local traditions, mythologizing their place within southern Alberta's community and rodeo culture.

#### **4.1 Rodeo Culture and Country Music**

Like the image of the singing cowboy, the rodeo cowboy holds a prominent place within country music culture. Even though the rodeo has not been a dominant theme in country music (Allen 1998, 132), a large body of songs has been written and recorded over the last 125 years that have not only defined elements of the profession and lifestyle, but also provided a lens into the cultural and behavioural codes of the rodeo cowboy. Rodeo activities were a component of the working cowboy tradition, and the roping and bucking events prominent in contemporary rodeos were once informal competitions amongst cowboys looking to pass time while herding cattle on the range (discussed below) (Foran 2008, 1-20). These informal competitions inspired the rodeo song subtheme of the cowboy song, and just as the ranching cowboy wrote about his life on the open range, so too did

they write songs about “bronc busters,” the type of cowboy skilled and talented enough to ride and subdue wild horses (and later, bulls) (Allen 1998, 134). One of the first poems/songs in this tradition is “Bucking Bronco” (author unknown), which celebrates the bronc buster for both his skill at taming horses, as well as for his prowess with women. Many of these early songs (“Bucking Bronco” included) were often bawdy in nature, and activities like riding and bucking, or objects like a gun and saddle, were invoked in a manner suggestive of sexual activity (Westermeier 1976, 93).<sup>1</sup>

As rodeo song historian Michael Allen has noted, the roots of the rodeo cowboy and rodeo songs lie in the very same poetry and cultural codes as the North American cowboy (i.e. the singing cowboy tradition). Thus, in addition to describing the practical side to the activity and sport, many rodeo songs display an understanding of the orally transmitted “Cowboy Code” that defines cowboy culture in general. As Allen (2005, 277) notes, nineteenth century cowboys adhered to (and passed down) an orally transmitted set of values and traditions, a “Cowboy Code,” which resembled the Turnerian “frontier” thesis, which argued that democracy in the USA was a product of the westward settlement—away from the hierarchy, aristocracies, religious establishments and intrusive governments of Europe toward a life of freedom and individuality. Cowboys were bound by the code, according to Allen (2005, 277); they demonstrated not just a love of nature and animals (horses in particular), strength, courage, humour, musicality, adaptability, and nomadism, but they also exhibited loyalty to their boss, and were hospitable toward other cowboys. The Code, like the “frontier” thesis, however, included qualities such as violence and anti-intellectualism (a by-product of their general distrust toward authority and government). This Code transferred from ranching to rodeo culture (Lawrence 1984, 129), and has routinely been invoked in song narratives where traditional rodeo cowboy motifs are used as a metaphor for deeper and complex questions about the individual in society, and the meaning of life.

It is worth noting that, as with the ranching songs discussed in chapter 3, many of the country musicians writing and performing rodeo songs had once been bronc riders and

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<sup>1</sup> A verse in “Bucking Bronco” provides an example of this bawdiness: “He will rope you and throw you, and when you’re fast tied / Down on your bare belly, Lord God how hell ride” (Allen 1998, 134).

rodeo competitors themselves. According to Allen, bronc rider Johnny Baker was the first musician to dedicate his career to writing rodeo songs, producing four rodeo albums, including *Songs of the Rodeo* (1964), *Let'er Buck* (1965), *Rodeoin' with Johnny Baker* (1966), and *Rodeo in the Sky* (1974). These albums contain songs about bronc riding, but also, and perhaps most importantly, they include songs about the nomadic lifestyle of rodeo cowboys. Like Baker in the 1950s, Moe Bandy, and Chris LeDoux made the transition from rodeo to country music, both recording numerous rodeo-themed albums.<sup>2</sup> LeDoux, in particular, released a significant body of rodeo cowboy material in his thirty-four-year career in country music. A fairly successful independent country artist with a strong regional following, LeDoux had a “do it yourself” method working for him: he wrote his own songs, started his own recording company (American Cowboy Songs), and sold his albums both out of the back of his pickup truck at rodeos and through his family’s Wyoming-based mail-order business, allowing him to maintain control over his music and image (Huey 2015a). He had found a successful niche for himself writing songs about the life of rodeo lifestyle. In 1988, he became instantly known outside of the rodeo arena, as his name was featured in the debut single of a young Garth Brooks, “Much too Young (To Feel This Damned Old)” (1989). The attention garnered from this single led him to sign with Liberty Records (a subsidiary of Capitol Records), allowing him to reach a wider audience with his rodeo songs (Huey 2015a). Texans Red Steagall and George Strait, and Canadian singer-songwriter Ian Tyson are other former rodeo riders who have written songs about being a rodeo cowboy.

While many of the early songs (ca. 1910s-1930s) celebrate horsemanship, a number of rodeo songs praise the bronc instead of the rider. An early example of this motif is one close to Lund’s heart, “Strawberry Roan,” which he learned to play from his grandfather. Written by rodeo rider Curley Fletcher, the famous poem “Strawberry Roan” (1914) details a bronc fighter’s searching for a wild horse to tame. He finds his match in a Strawberry Roan, an old male horse (a “Caballo”), whom he calls a “regular outlaw.” The bronc fighter puts on his spurs, saddles up the horse, and attempts to ride him. The horse, however, is a force to be reckoned with, and quickly takes control—squealing, bucking, stomping,

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<sup>2</sup> Moe Bandy’s albums include *Moe Bandy the Rodeo Clown* (1975), *Cowboys Ain’t Supposed to Cry* (1977), and *Rodeo Romeo* (1981).

jumping, and doing anything he can to throw this rider from his back. In the final verses the rider claims,

With a phenomenal jump then he goes up on high  
An' I'm settin' on nuthin' way up in the sky,  
An' it's then I turns over an' I comes back tuh earth,  
An' I lights in the tuh cussin' the day of his birth.<sup>3</sup>

Fletcher's poem utilizes the Cowboy Code theme of the bond between the cowboy and the horse, and the bronc fighter's quest to tame the untameable, revealing qualities of courage, strength, and stoicism (fundamental tenets of the code) (Allen 2005, 277). "Strawberry Roan" has become one of the most recorded cowboy songs of this subtheme, perhaps the most popular being Marty Robbins' rendition on *Gunfighter Ballads and Trail Songs* (1959). Robbins' version presents a shorter and cleaner lyric than Fletcher's original, which has 15 verses and provides intricate detail of the encounter between the bronc fighter and horse. Contemporary versions tend to include only 5 verses, and alter much of the slang in favour of more modernized and easily understandable words and phrases. The song has been recorded by a number of former rodeo riders turned musicians, including Red Steagall, Moe Bandy, Chris LeDoux, and Canadian singer-songwriter Wilf Carter.<sup>4</sup> The genesis of "Strawberry Roan," and the number of recorded versions from cowboy poem to beloved rodeo-cowboy song, demonstrates the power of the oral tradition within this nomadic rural culture, where poems and songs were passed along from one region, culture or generation to the next. It also suggests a modern-day affinity with the cowboy tradition and the male quest for displaying his strength and technical ability.

As rodeo events gradually transferred from informal ranching competitions to large-scale multi-day competitions showcasing a now professionalized sport, songs narratives also made the transition. For example, Fletcher's "Bad Brahma Bull" (ca. 1942) and Everett Cheatham's "Blood on the Saddle" (1945) were early adaptations of the theme, taking the action from the open range into the rodeo arena. "Bad Brahma Bull" is notable

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<sup>3</sup> Curley Fletcher's poem can be viewed here, <<http://www.cowboypoetry.com/fletcher.htm#Roan>>.

<sup>4</sup> Other notable recordings include Pete Seeger (from Smithsonian Folkways *American Favorite Ballads 5*, 1962), and hard core artists Michael Martin Murphey (recorded with Chris LeDoux on *Cowboy Songs III – Rhymes and Renegades*, 1993), and David Allan Coe (*Country and Western*, 2005).

for two factors: it describes the physical features of the new setting (the chute and fence), and the livestock featured in this song a Brahma bull, not a bronco. This is significant because the shift in lyrical narrative from horse to bull highlights a change in the professional sport, as bulls were re-introduced to the rodeo around 1922 (LeCompte 1985, 38). These songs and the rodeo themed songs that followed focused not just on describing bronc and bull riding events, but also the nomadic life of the rodeo cowboy following the circuit and the relationships between man and animal, as well as those between man and woman.

Nomadism and wanderlust are strong markers of the Cowboy Code and his desire to avoid being tied down. Perhaps more than any singer-songwriter in the genre, hard core artist Chris LeDoux's career was anchored in the rodeo cowboy tradition and mystique. He began riding horses at a young age and won Wyoming's bareback title twice while in high school. He then attended Casper College on a rodeo scholarship. He left college to join the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association and pursued "the elusive gold buckle [World Championship] in bareback bronc riding," which he won in 1976 (Allen 1998, 139). Five years earlier, in 1971, LeDoux began writing and recording songs (and entire albums) about his cowboy experience. His 1975 song, "Born to Follow Rodeo" (from *Life as a Rodeo Man*) recounts a young man's desire (possibly his own) to follow the rodeo at all costs, describing the nomadic lifestyle as his boyhood dream, "satisfying a hunger" in his soul, and revealing his "deep gnawing" of desperation to win at old Cheyenne (the famous Frontier Days rodeo in Wyoming). As this song and others in his discography reveal, "the rodeo cowboy is driven by powerful forces—spiritual forces—to follow the rodeo life," and this "archetypal rodeo man" rejects modernity in exchange for the rambling world of his cowboy ancestors (Allen 1998, 140-41). LeDoux's cowboy is constantly in search of freedom, as best explored in the narrative of his 1981 "The Cowboy and the Hippie" (from *He Rides Wild Horses*), in which the title characters realize that, despite their visible differences (long-haired hippie and the cowboy with "green stuff" on his boots), they subscribe to the same cultural codes of the free, wandering lifestyle. Before they part (the hippie going east and the cowboy going west), the hippie states, "They say the closest thing to freedom is livin' on the road, / In a country where freedom's almost gone" (Allen 1998, 138-39). Thus, the image of the wandering cowboy (sometimes on horseback) has become



a strong symbol of the mythic quest for freedom and happiness in life, often in contrast to confining political, social, or familial structures.

The relationships between the sexes are often complex in rodeo songs. Because the Cowboy Code emphasizes individualism and wanderlust, relationships are often treated with a semblance of ambivalence, with narratives considering predominantly the life of eternal rambling bachelors. Allen (2005, 277) observes that a general “politeness toward ‘good’ women,” the allure of the freedom of the cowboy lifestyle is often stronger than any amorous feelings toward a lover. One of the classic tales that depicts the relationship between the cowboy and a woman emerges in the lyrical narrative of hard core artist Ian Tyson’s “Someday Soon” (1968). Told from the perspective of the rodeo cowboy’s female lover, “Someday Soon” recounts the strong pull that the rodeo holds on the young man who “loves his damned old rodeos as much as he loves” her. Thus, adhering to his cowboy code, this rodeo man is indeed a stereotypical wandering cowboy, following his passion for horses and the nomadic lifestyle. As the song protagonist continually admits that she will be going with him “someday soon,” it is clear from the narrative that this young lady may be waiting a very long time for him to return to fetch her. Coupled with this ambivalence toward women is the notion that outsiders *can never* truly understand the cowboy lifestyle. As LeDoux’s song “A Cowboy’s Got to Ride” (*Thirty Dollar Cowboy*, 1983) reveals, family and friends want him to return home, his “best girl things it’s time [he] settled down,” and that he is surrounded by people who have “big plans” for him. But the “nine-to-five” lifestyle of the people back home does not appeal to the cowboy who gets to life “foot-loose and fancy-free,” thus turning his back on the monotonous life and obligations of the working man. Women, and families, it seems from these narratives, are obstacles for many wandering cowboys.

Yet LeDoux has also revealed the ways in which room can be made in this roving lifestyle for the right woman. Perhaps inspired by his personal quest to find the middle ground between life on the road and family back home, he has written several songs that highlight the possibility of a strong and supportive woman entering a cowboy’s universe. In one of his first songs to explore this theme, he describes the early days of a marriage where a young wife accompanies her cowboy on the circuit, detailing her pregnancy and the

ultimate goal of settling down on a ranch where rodeo dreams and a growing family can find harmony in “Our First Year” (*Sounds of the Western Country*, 1980). As Allen (1998, 143) notes, LeDoux made a place for both women and marriage in the rodeo cowboy’s life, injecting “a healthy dose of historical reality into the rode-song subgenre, for the happy, swashbuckling, rambling rodeo man is, arguably, largely a figment of the male imagination.”

Horses, and livestock in general, inhabit a significant place within rodeo song narratives. Since the earliest songs in the subtheme of the cowboy songs, horses (and later bulls) were arguably the main focus of lyrical narratives: they were sought after by bronc riders, their ability to buck a cowboy was described in intricate detail, and they were the victors in most competitions (many resulting in the untimely death of the rider). From “Buckin’ Bronco” to “Strawberry Roan” to “Blood on the Saddle” (and many more), these horses are dangerous, fearsome, and command the attention of all characters in the story and of the audience listening to these tales. Yet in other narratives, the horse is the rodeo cowboy’s partner and equal. In LeDoux’s “He Rides Wild Horses” (*He Rides Wild Horses*, 1981), the singer-songwriter reveals a cowboy kinship with the animal in the chorus: “He rides wild horses / The same blood flows through their veins / Yes he rides wild horses / Like the horses he’ll never be tamed.” In his article on Tyson’s *Cowboyography*, Terrance Cox (2002, 281) also observes the prominent role accorded to horses, which he describes as more than “the cowboy’s working vehicle,” but a companion and muse for the singer-songwriter. Whether presented as an opponent or sparring partner, a companion, or the muse, the horse occupies a complex space in rodeo song narratives, often highlighting a complicated relationship between man and animal. These relationships seem to function as a metaphor for deeper life questions. Indeed, songs like “Strawberry Roan” could be interpreted as a cowboy’s quest for the meaning in life as he courageously attempted to tame the wild bronc, while songs that portray the horse as a companion provide insights into the cowboy’s identity and even human bonds. This latter relationship, which will be discussed in greater detail below in the analysis of Lund’s rodeo songs, occurs in narratives in which horses are anthropomorphized, utilized to represent a lover and allow the singer-songwriter to explore a range of interactions, relations, and emotions.

The final theme to be considered here is the concept of mythology. In a sense, as Allen alluded to with regard to the rambling rodeo man as a figment of the male imagination, all rodeo songs work toward extending the myth of the rodeo cowboy and the values and codes by which he lives. These songs tell tales about courageous, strong, and daring men, who live a life of apparent freedom on the rodeo with no one to answer to but their horses. They try to tame the untameable, fall to their untimely death when bucked off a bronc, win major rodeos, and more. Some songs, like those by LeDoux, offer a glimpse into the life of the rodeo rider, with more realistic experiences that highlight the inner turmoil of the cowboy dreamer grappling with the personal tensions of striking a balance between life as a rodeo rider and honourable family man. Others still perpetuate myth, with the goal of cementing the memory of an important figure within cowboy culture. Circulated primarily by word of mouth, songs such as “Fritz Truan, a Great Cowboy,” “Kenny Madland,” and “Pete Knight” celebrate the life and achievement of early rodeo riders. “Pete Knight,” for example, mourns the loss of a great rodeo bronc rider who was trampled in competition (Allen 1998, 135). In honouring these fallen rodeo heroes in poem or song, their story and experiences becomes part of rodeo history and culture; their tales are passed down through generations of rodeo riders, with elements of the story sometimes exaggerated with the passage of time. These individuals become important cultural figures in their passing, marking transformative moments in perhaps competition, community, or collective identity.

The image of the wandering cowboy has been an important cultural symbol within country music. This theme comes, perhaps, more naturally for former rodeo riders like LeDoux and Tyson, who lived this nomadic lifestyle of chasing the elusive buckle. Both hard core artists, these singer-songwriters drew on their personal experiences on the rodeo circuit in complex narratives exploring the various levels of emotional tension riders faced when navigating their careers, relationships, and ultimate retirements from the sport. This image and theme of the wandering cowboy has been evoked by a number of hard core artists (mostly singer-songwriters with no personal ties to the sport). Michael Martin Murphey’s “Cosmic Cowboy” (1973) and “My Heroes Have Always Been Cowboys”, recorded by both Waylon Jennings (*Wanted! The Outlaws*, 1975) and Willie Nelson (*The*

*Electric Horseman*, 1980), are two prominent examples of artists drawing on this image.<sup>5</sup> This theme was especially popular during the countercultural movement of the 1960s and 1970s, when country rock and outlaw country artists appropriated rodeo cowboy motifs and imagery in lyrical narratives and album artwork. Perhaps the most notable examples include The Byrds' album *Sweetheart of the Rodeo* (1968), which featured a rodeo cowgirl and other rodeo artefacts on its cover, and their 1970s song "Chestnut Mare," which drew on the bronc rider motif (Allen 2005, 289). But the rodeo cowboy has not been the exclusive domain of hard core singer-songwriter, soft shell artists, notably Garth Brooks, have occasionally borrowed this theme as well. "Much too Young (To Feel This Damned Old)" (1989) was Brooks' first, but not the only song in his discography to consider the rodeo theme; his third album, *Ropin' in the Wind* (1991) featured "Rodeo," a song about a man's urge to compete in a Tulsa rodeo. While "Much Too Young" grapples with aging and the stresses of being away from his family for long stretches of time, "Rodeo" (written by Larry Bastian) speaks of a young man's desire to compete in a Tulsa rodeo and positioning the protagonist between two loves: the rodeo and his girlfriend. Yet, even through Bastian draws on this classic rodeo motif, the musical setting does not follow the typical rodeo style, which draws heavily on traditional country musics. As Allen (1998, 153) notes, Brooks' recording is "a bluesy rock number devoid of country vocal and instrumental stylings." While Allen argues that he uses an "old motif in a striking new way," one might read Brooks' song as a soft shell interpretation of a rodeo theme, arranged in a way to appeal to the sensibilities of a wider country-pop audience.<sup>6</sup>

Where does the concept of place figure into these rodeo songs? In many songs, the geographic setting is ambiguous. While some narratives do make reference to specific rodeos (Cheyenne, Calgary Stampede, etc.), thus establishing at least a transitory space or "pit-stop" in the journey of a wandering cowboy, others rely on elements of the Cowboy Code or rural settings to create the notion that narratives are unfolding "in the west." There is a certain mobility to such narrative structures, as this establishes a strong sense that the "place" mentioned in lyrical narratives could easily be dropped or swapped out for another

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<sup>5</sup> James Taylor's "Sweet Baby James" (1970) also evokes this theme.

<sup>6</sup> Brooks also recorded "Good Ride Cowboy" (written by Jerrod Niemann, Bryan Kennedy, Richie Brown, and Bob Doye) in 2005 as a tribute to LeDoux (Huey 2015a).

place, and that the lyrical story could unfold in the geographic region of the singer's or audience's choice. The goal, then, is not to define a geographic region, but rather to define a lifestyle, a collective identity, a set of cultural codes, and even to differentiate (or find similarities between) eastern and western ideologies. These songs, then, offer very little to the definition of geographic regions, but instead to regional spaces and patterns of migration between them.

Lund approaches the rodeo theme through a different lens. First and foremost, place is often a crucial component of the singer-songwriter's lyrical narratives; not only do his stories unfold in specific geographic regions, but they also consider the life and achievements of local rodeo heroes. Thus, in his rodeo songs, southern Alberta is strongly evoked as the narrative setting for his stories. Second, while his rodeo riders travel, the wandering lifestyle is not the principle characteristic of his protagonists. As a result, his songs exhibit a strong sense of being rooted to place. This is likely due to the fact that the majority of the rodeo songs in his discography grapple with nostalgia from the perspective of the retired cowboy. A deep sense of loss and youthful regret emerges in songs about the "good old days" as a rodeo cowboy, and the emotional tensions that many struggle with as they age and their bodies are no longer display the agility of their active youth. And finally, unlike those before him who have addressed relationships between man and woman with some ambivalence, Lund's narratives explore deep feelings of rejection between the sexes. The women in his songs are not waiting patiently for their men to return—*they* are the ambivalent characters in his narratives, rejecting the singer-songwriter. In fact, these narratives often anthropomorphize livestock and explore the dynamic between man and horse as a metaphor for relationships between a man and woman. Lund's songs offer, on the one hand, an interesting contrast to the wandering rodeo cowboy and his cultural codes, and, on the other, a glimpse at the life of the retired cowboy, coming to terms with his inability to live the lifestyle ingrained within identity. Because Lund's rodeo songs are deeply anchored in the Alberta as place, it is important to contextualize his music within the rodeo culture, traditions, and practice of the western Canadian province.

## 4.2 History of the Rodeo in Alberta

Rodeo in general, and the Calgary Stampede in particular, play an integral role in southern Alberta's culture and identity. The cowboy sporting event emerged in the late 1880s as popular pastime in southern Alberta. As Claire Eamer and Thirza Jones (1982, 6) have noted, these activities were "simple contests among working men who had few other amusements." They were relevant to local conditions at that time, especially during the early days of open range ranching (Wetherell 2008, 22, 24). These informal competitions were a well-established component of ranching that migrated north as part of the cattle trade that settled in southern Alberta and British Columbia. These were not, as historian Donald G. Wetherell (2008, 24) points out, "rodeos—formal events with well-understood rules and competitive standards—but were informal and essentially disorganized." The roots of these cowboy sports lies in the Mexican *charreada* (itself a legacy of feudal Spain), which included contests such as roping steers and horses, riding wild bulls and broncos, and bull wrestling. As historian Mary Lou LeCompte (1985, 24) has observed, the cowboy (*charro*) skills were on display not only in fiestas and fairs, but also during branding (*herraderos*) and roundups (*rodeos*) on the haciendas. Spectators traveled from miles around to watch these rousing competitions between local haciendas. As the Mexican ranching industry expanded north into San Antonio (1718) and California (1786), so too did their skill in horsemanship and ropesmanship, as well as their many ranch-work contests.<sup>7</sup> Although the Mexican style of ranching and cowboy events were the precursor to the western heritage festivals known as the rodeo, their influence is often ignored in favour of the romanticized myth that they emerged from the informal contests between cowhands in late nineteenth-century USA alone. The fact is that the events popular in modern day rodeo predate even ranching in the USA, dating back beyond the Mexican *charreada* to the fiestas of feudal Spain.<sup>8</sup>

All across North America, these informal events soon spread from ranches to public spectacle, slowly transforming into an organized rodeo by the early 1900s. In southern

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<sup>7</sup> LeCompte (1985, 25) has listed these events as the following: jaripeo, colear, bucking horse riding and roping, horseraces, and bullfights. Jaripeo was a form of bull fighting where a cowboy would ride the animal to its death.

<sup>8</sup> LeCompte (1985, 37) has even pointed out that men tamed bulls through acrobatic acts in ancient Minoan culture.

Alberta, cowboy activities were first integrated into agricultural fairs, as demonstrated with the 1894 Calgary Exhibition, which featured bucking and roping contests, and soon cropped up at fairs, horse races, and even as their own stand-alone events. Eamer and Jones (1982, 7) have dated the first full “stampede” to 1901 or 1902 in Raymond, Alberta. In addition to the proliferation of cowboy events in southern Alberta, the popularity of traveling vaudeville and “Wild West” shows from the USA that featured riding and roping acts grew. These shows, the most famous of which mounted by Buffalo Bill Cody, dramatized the “Old West” and “stimulated popular interest in rodeo,” helping to “legitimize local contests as fashionable and attractive mass entertainment” (Wetherell 2008, 25). Buffalo Bill’s Wild West was founded in 1883, touring the USA and later Great Britain and Europe. His shows served as the model for many vaudeville shows to follow, which included parades and re-enactments of battle scenes (perpetuating the “myth” of the dramatic days of the western frontier and the battles between cowboys, Native American Indians, army and outlaws) that included wild animals and trick performances. The combination of the naturally occurring ranching cowboy events and the extravagance of the traveling shows made the perfect conditions for the first Calgary Stampede in 1912.

#### *4.2.1 The Calgary Stampede*

The historical foundations of the Calgary Stampede lie in the Calgary Exhibition, which dates from 1886. As Max Foran (2008, 3) notes, the Calgary Exhibition, like other agricultural fairs across Canada, was “[a] cornucopia of agricultural, sporting, and other festive activities [...] designed to advertise district wealth, promote settlement, bring business to the host town, and provide an infrequent opportunity for social interaction and entertainment.” An annual event, the Calgary Exhibition was managed by Ernie Richardson, and held a lease on city-owned Victoria Park in downtown Calgary. By 1908, it had become a huge and important event in a rapidly growing agricultural hub in western Canada.<sup>9</sup> That year, American-born cowboy and showman Guy Weadick was part of the

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<sup>9</sup> The 1908 Exhibition was a significant spectacle; the organizers had been advanced \$50,000 from the federal government, a city grant of \$35,000 and donation of \$25,000 to stage a “Dominion Exhibition” as part

one-day Miller Brothers' 101 Ranch Wild West Show at the Exhibition; he immediately envisioned Calgary as the perfect city to host a large-scale rodeo that allowed cowboys to demonstrate *real* skills instead of “the fantasy and tricks” of the travelling shows (Foran 2008, 5). Weadick had a significant battle in front of him as he spoke with city councilmen, livestock agents, and local ranchers about his desire to stage a multi-day “stampede” in Calgary. While many claimed the rodeo was “obsolete” or a “thing of the past,” others saw it as an opportunity to pay tribute to the era of open range ranching.<sup>10</sup> As historians such as Max Foran (2008), Donald G. Wetherell (2008), and Tamara Seiler and Robert Seiler (2008) have noted, the Stampede emerged in the early 1900s as a result of nostalgia for the ways of the west as the brief era of open range ranching died out in southern Alberta. Weadick found his support in the Big Four, Pat Burns, George Lane, A.E. Cross, and Archibald J. McLean, a group of wealthy, prominent cattlemen in Calgary. Foran (2008, 5) in particular, observes that while Weadick saw the Stampede as an “annual event anchored by a world-class rodeo, the Big Four saw it as a one-time party, a farewell gesture to a dying way of life.”<sup>11</sup>

The 1912 Stampede did not *immediately* turn into the annual event that Weadick envisioned, due in some part to the outbreak of WWI and the financial issues that accompany post-war depression and other environmental catastrophes. Weadick did, however, stage a Victory Stampede in 1919 to celebrate the end of the war, followed, in 1923, by the new vision of the Calgary Stampede, which ushered in the start of an annual western frontier celebration. What made the 1923 Stampede different was its merging with Ernie Richardson's Calgary Exhibition. The 1923 Calgary Exhibition and Stampede successfully fused the city's agricultural fair with an exciting rodeo that included not just roping and bucking competitions, but also the new (and dangerous) chuckwagon races.

The rodeo events at the Calgary Stampede grew out of both the Wild West traveling show and the authentic cowboy tradition. Those from the Wild West show include steer

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of its national program to spotlight local government. Organizers were thus granted an unimaginable budget to stage an impressive event (Foran 2008, 4).

<sup>10</sup> Here Foran (2008, 5) cites headlines from *Morning Albertan* (Calgary, 30 July 1910).

<sup>11</sup> The Big Four were all involved in Alberta's cattle industry (and have since been inducted into the Canadian Agricultural hall of Fame): Pat Burns owned a meat-packing business, A.E. Cross owned a brewery, and George Lane and Archibald J. McLean were ranchers.



wrestling (also known as bulldogging), which was invented by Bill Pickett, and buffalo riding (or bull riding). Neither of these events would have been part of a cowboy's daily work, in which the former includes a horse-riding cowboy chasing a steer, dropping from the horse to the steer in order to wrestle it to the ground by twisting its horns, and the latter involves a rider attempting to stay mounted on a bucking buffalo (or bull). Despite their original sources as purely entertainment, they have remained an important part of the rodeo and its six main events. The tradition of saddlebronc riding and bareback riding involve a rider attempting to remain mounted on a bucking horse (both with and without a saddle). Tie-down roping features a horse-mounted rider trying to capture a calf by throwing a lariat around his neck, dismounting the horse, and restraining it by the legs as quickly as possible. These three events emerged from actual roundup activities on the ranch. The final event that occurred at the 1912 Stampede was ladies barrel racing, in which a rider leads her horse as quickly as possible around a figure-8 or clover-leaf obstacle course of barrels. In 1923 chuckwagon races of the Rangeland Derby, arguably the most dangerous for both livestock and riders, were added to the Stampede. The invention of Weadick himself, the chuckwagon races were inspired by Stagecoach Races (where farmers raced four horse hitches) and "lore of the American land rush, when the United States opened up thousands of acres in land lotteries" (Van Herk 2008, 241). Nicknamed the "half-mile of hell," the race that features a 4-man crew assembling the tent and stove in the back of a wagon before leaping onto their own horses, and following a wagon pulled by four horses as it completes a figure 8 in the infield and onto the race track. Four teams compete in each heat of the race, creating a dangerous and exciting atmosphere as 4 wagons, 20 men, and 32 horses run full tilt. Also introduced in the 1920s, but no longer part of the Stampede, are the wild cow milking and wild horse race competitions.<sup>12</sup> Since the 1923 Stampede, other activities have been added to the rodeo, including novice bareback riding, novice steer wrestling, junior steer wrestling, and wild pony racing. The now 10-day event begins with a parade, has a Transalta Grandstand Show, and remains combined with the Exhibition's animals and agricultural fair.

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<sup>12</sup> Both of these events were retired from the Calgary Stampede events in 2005 (Mikkelsen 2008, 207-08). An article in the *Edmonton Sun* revealed that Lindsey Galloway, spokesman of the Stampede, said that they had decided to remove the two events from competition in order to "streamline the popular rodeo" (Sun Media 2006).

As Donald G. Wetherell (2008, 33) has noted, rodeo events, including the Calgary Stampede, were “self-referential.” Until 1929, each rodeo was an independent event and had its own governing rules. As a result, no centralized records existed, and comparative statistics or titles were rendered meaningless, as one could not truly compare results from one region’s rodeo to the next. As the rodeo events gained popularity, and star cowboys emerged in local culture, the need for the formalization and standardization of the competition emerged. In 1929 the Rodeo Association of America formed, followed by the Professional Rodeo Cowboy Association (PRCA) in 1936, making it “possible to regulate events and establish great uniformity across different venues” (Wetherell 2008, 33). The Canadian Professional Rodeo Association (CRPA) formed in 1944 (then known as the Cowboy’s Insurance Association) and started working to professionalize the sport in Canada. The PRCA (in the USA) and the CPRA (in Canada) eventually worked together to standardize rules as well as and create consistency from one venue to the next and establish a hierarchy amongst the venues to formalize the rodeo “circuit”; it also served to legitimize the sport and its past.<sup>13</sup> In so doing, the professional associations sought to create strong linkages between the modern rodeo sport and its rural agricultural roots (even if those very roots were tenuous at best).

In the mid-1960s the CPRA wanted to integrate into the PRCA, in large part because steer wrestling was an event in the USA, while not in Canada. In uniting with the PRCA, CPRA members could have their points count in both countries. The two associations parted ways in 2005 over a dispute surrounding Canadian prize money counting toward the world finals. Even though the CPRA re-integrated into the PCRA in 2006, the Calgary Stampede, which had been working on a new format for their event, ended up parting ways with the two associations. As of 2006, the Stampede, with its renowned international reputation, became a stand-alone event, removing itself from the North American pro rodeo circuit. Participation in the Stampede is now by invitation only: each July twenty of the world’s highest-ranking rodeo cowboys are invited to compete not just for the prize money, but also for the honour of taking part in one of the world’s most prestigious rodeo competitions (Mikkelsen 2008, 223). Functioning as a tournament rather

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<sup>13</sup> As Ralph Clark has detailed, the PRCA has sanctioned CPRA rodeos for decades, with the exception of those in 2005-2006, when the two institutions temporarily ended their agreement (Clark 2015a/b).

than a stop on the circuit, the Calgary Stampede is taking rodeo into the next generation and forging new ground for a sport built on ranching and agricultural roots. In short, it is building a more exciting, quicker-paced competition of only the cream of the rodeo crop, seeking to ensure that the mythology and rodeo legacy endures.

#### *4.2.2 Rodeo as an “Invented Tradition”*

Much of the literature on the Calgary Stampede (and rodeo in general) has discussed the tradition as a fabrication or, to borrow from Wetherell (2008), an “invented tradition.” Adopting the term from historian Eric Hobsbawm (1999, 61-86), “invented tradition” captures the important social and cultural construct of an activity being accepted as having a long history within a local culture, but in reality being quite recent. He states that invented traditions tend to represent “something essential about a nation’s character, values, and identity” that “arose from a widespread effort to justify the nation state, royal dynasties, and national boundaries by linking them, often tenuously and sometimes even falsely with the past” (Wetherell 2008, 22). The sport puts on stage an activity tied to a short-lived and unsuccessful style of open range ranching in southern Albertan culture. Open range ranching, unlike its counterpart in the western states of the USA, did not succeed in southern Alberta. As observed in chapter 3, open range ranching suffered greatly as an industry due to a number of uncontrollable factors, namely, bitterly cold winters (especially in 1905-6) and periods of drought. It also failed in large part because of the federal Canadian government’s desire to see homesteaders and crop farmers settle the land. As a result, early ranchers often found barbed wire fences of homesteaders being built through the open pastures they had once used to graze their cattle. By 1908, open ranching was on a rapid decline in favour of mixed farming (crops, cattle, and dairy). Despite these contradictions, the western Canadian cowboy continues to prevail as an important cultural symbol. Ethnomusicologist Gillian Turnbull (2009, 60) has argued that the Stampede and cowboy create a specific identity and set of values and ideologies for Calgarians, fostering “a notion of ‘The West’ that serves to separate Western Canada from Eastern Canada.” The Stampede, and the image of the cowboy conquering the western frontier, works as an

important cultural symbol that helps mark out not just Calgary's identity, but the province's as well.

#### *4.2.3 Lund and Ivins Family and the Rodeo*

As the Canadian Professional Rodeo Hall of Fame (CPRHF) has noted, the Lund family is "one of the best-known rodeo families in Southern Alberta" (CPRHF 2011e). Brothers Art and Clark Lund (the singer-songwriter's grandfather) have been inducted to the CPRHF, D. C. Lund (his father) was named a Legend of the Rodeo in 2010, and numerous others have participated in the sport. The maternal Ivins have likewise made their mark on rodeo in southern Alberta: Lund's uncle Tom Ivins has been named a Legend of the Rodeo (Lund 2013c). Both sides of the singer-songwriter's family have thus contributed not just to local southern Albertan rodeo culture, but also to the national scene, making enough of a mark to be honoured by Canada's Professional Rodeo Hall of Fame.

Rodeo, like ranching, dates back four generations in the Lund and Ivins family heritage. This tradition likely dates back to when Lund's family lived in Utah, where his great-grandfathers would have been participants in the open range ranch style of the western USA, and all of the informal cowboy roping and bucking competitions that took place during roundups. Thus, rodeo influence came "from the fact that both the Lunds and Ivinses have been ranching, punching cows and generally making like cowpeople since the 19th century" (Canwest News Service 2006). The talent and skill of the Lund and Ivins families flourished in southern Alberta, where many of his family members, his parents included, competed in local rodeos and, most notably, in the Calgary Stampede. As Lund related in interview with Mimi Stafford (2006),

My grandpa, Clark Lund won the all around championship at the Stampede in 1938. He was also a rodeo judge there for many years after he retired from competition. His five brothers, my great uncles [including CPRHF inductee Art Lund], all competed at the Stampede back then also. My other grandpa, [Eddie] Ivins, competed at the Stampede. My mom, Patty (Ivins) Lund, won the ladies barrel racing in 1959, which was the first time it was offered as a major event. She is now a 'Pioneer of the Calgary Stampede'. She won the barren racing in '60 also. My dad

competed there for many years when he was a pro steer wrestler. I won some day money there in steer riding when I was a kid in the early '80s.

From one generation to the next, the Lund and Ivins families have continually made their mark on the sport on local, national, and even on international levels.

While the Lund family has often been acknowledged for their role in the rodeo regionally, the singer-songwriter's parents have had a significant impact on the country's rodeo culture as ambassadors of the sport in other countries. In a video blog that Lund (2010d) posted in July 2010 about "Strawberry Roan" and his father's accomplishments, the singer-songwriter revealed that around 1974, D. C. Lund and his wife went to Zambia, Africa to stage a rodeo.<sup>14</sup> Lund recalls that they were having celebration for the 10-year anniversary of Zambia's independence, "so they called the Canadian government saying they wanted a Wild West show." When D. C. Lund heard about this request, he and Patty Lund were on a plane to Zambia six days later along with other local cowboys (Tommy and Rosemarie Bews and Gordon Kesler).<sup>15</sup> As Lund (2010d) recounts,

They were there for a month, training the locals, and putting the stock together, and the arena and stuff. And then they spent three weeks preparing and then did a weeks worth of shows. I guess the local black African mounted police were ordered to become bronc riders, whether they liked it or not. We have this really great footage—super 8 footage—of African guys learning to ride broncs and wrestle steers and stuff. It's pretty cool.

Lund's father seems to have made a significant mark on the celebrations, beyond his involvement in actually preparing, training, and staging their rodeo. On one of the first days of the Wild West shows, D. C. Lund's hat blew off of his head, and he rode over to get it and just scooped it up from the ground without leaving the saddle of his horse. The crowd enjoyed it so much that he did it every day following just for entertainment value. In addition to their trip to Zambia, D. C. and Patty Lund also competed in rodeo in Australia

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<sup>14</sup> The video blog seems to have been inspired by D. C. Lund's then recent induction into the Canadian Historical Rodeo Hall of Fame (CPRHF 2011f). In this blog, Lund speaks very proudly of his father's (and mother's) accomplishments and artistic talents.

<sup>15</sup> Tommy Bews was a prominent rodeo figure in southern Alberta. Inducted into the CPRHF in 2000, Bews won the Canadian all-around championships five times, and received numerous other awards in his twenty-three year professional career (CPRHF 2011a). Gordon Kesler, of possible relation to Reg Kesler, was a rodeo rider, oil company scout and politician, carried a seat for western Canada Concept in 1982 (a western Canadian separatist party founded in 1980 that sought separation of the prairies, B.C., Yukon, and Northwest Territories from the rest of Canada [Finkel 1989, 199]).

in the late 1960s. Lund's video blog revealed the cultural differences between North American and Australian rodeo at the time: Aussies do not traditionally rope in their cowboy culture, and so they did not have calf roping as a rodeo event at that time. D. C. Lund, who was a bronc rider and steer wrestler (not a calf roper), ended up inadvertently teaching Australians how to rope calf because they would gather around him while he was practicing and competing in the sport.

Lund himself was a steer rider in his teen years, and may very well have followed in his family's footsteps before an injury—and the lure of Black Sabbath—influenced his decision to leave the sport. As Lund revealed in interview,

I did rodeo until I was 15 or 16. I quit in Calgary in 1981. The day before, while practising at the family ranch near Lethbridge, a steer I was riding bucked me off and stomped on my head. I didn't go to the national finals, because I didn't go to enough rodeos to rack up points. I never did enough steer wrestling to do well at it. But some of the guys I competed with became professional rodeo riders. The money was just as bad in music when I started but it's much safer (Dawson 2006).

Having made the decision to leave rodeo behind, Lund turned away from the cowboy culture in which he had been immersed since birth toward rock and roll music. After roughly a decade as bassist for a speed metal band of rock and roll, including his successful career as a member of The Smalls, Lund returned to his roots and, instead of living the life of a rodeo star, he wrote a number of songs about horses and rodeo life, documenting this fascinating elements of southern Albertan culture.

In addition to his personal experience growing up in the ranch and rodeo community of southern Alberta and the stories passed down through his family, Lund has an avid interest in western novels. As a child he read Will James' *Smoky the Cowhorse* (1927), which followed the life of Smoky from his youth as a wild horse to his capture and training by Clint, his eventual decline, and all of the exciting pursuits in between. He has an affinity for Annie Proulx's *Close Range: Wyoming Stories* and is a proud owner of the complete collection of Louis L'Amour's novels, which includes the author's famous frontier stories—many of which have been adapted into film (Dudley 2012, 69). These novels painted vivid pictures of the grit and grimness of frontier life, and shared exciting tales about cowboy activities. The stories in these novels captured an old world of the western

frontier, one with which Lund would not have been familiar, but would have likely been romanticized in his family's stories.

Lund has invoked the rodeo cowboy image throughout his career. The original album cover of his debut album as a country musician featured a watercolour painting that his father did of his family's Crockett spurs (worn by grandfather Clark Lund, D. C. Lund, Corb Lund, and family friend Reg Kesler). The painting, *We Used to Ride 'Em* inspired one of the very first rodeo songs that Lund recorded (discussed below) by the same name. The liner notes for his third studio album, *Five Dollar Bill* (2002), feature photos from his family's archive of his parents and himself participating in rodeo events. The cover features a photo of Lund competing at Writing-on-Stone Rodeo in 1981 (presented as the image on a five-dollar bill), and the inside panels featured a photo of his father bronc riding, his mother barrel racing, with a photo of Lund dismounting a horse in a tie-calf roping competition on the back cover (Ill. 4.1). The album covers and publicity artwork for both *Losin' Lately Gambler* (2009) and *Cabin Fever* (2012) feature images of him wearing a cowboy hat (Ill. 4.2), as do several of his music videos.<sup>16</sup> Lund also has his very own western graphic novel. Edmonton-based illustrator and comic book artist Bob Prodor turned some of his songs from *Five Dollar Bill* and *Hair in my Eyes like a Highland Steer* into short comic stories called *Corb Lund's Western Tales* (2006). The cover features an illustration of Lund riding a bucking horse (Ill. 4.3) (Dr. Brain 2007).

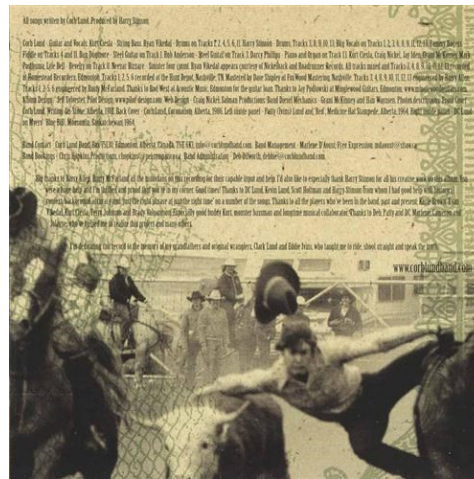
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<sup>16</sup> Lund wears a black cowboy hat in "The Truck Got Stuck," "A Game in Town Like This," and "September," and a white cowboy hat in "The Truth Comes Out," "Hard on Equipment (A Tool for the Job)," "Roughest Neck Around," "Gonna Shine Up My Boots," "Family Reunion," "This Is My Prairie" and "Getting' down on the Mountain."

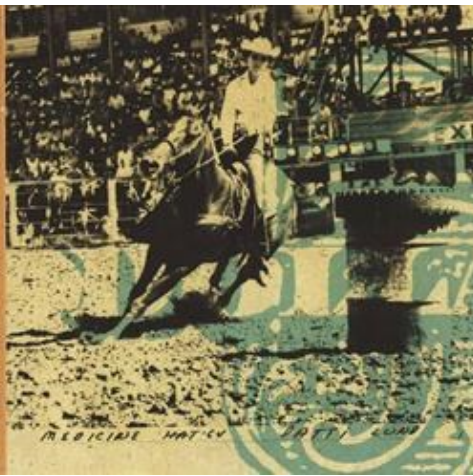
Illustration 4.1 *Five Dollar Bill* (album artwork)



Jacket Front: Corb Lund steer riding



Jacket Back: Corb Lund steer wrestling



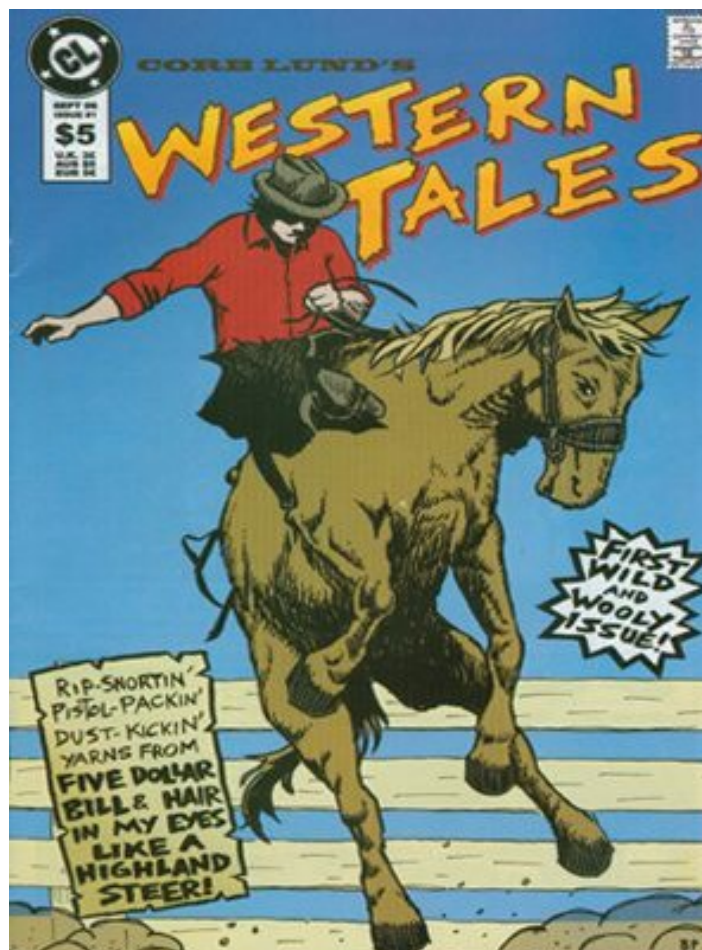
Inside: D. C. Lund bronc riding (left) and Patty Lund barrel racing (right)



Illustration 4.2 *Losin' Lately Gambler* and *Cabin Fever* (album covers)



Illustration 4.3 *Corb Lund's Western Tales* by Bob Prodor (cover artwork)



Lund also included rodeo in his Glenbow Museum exhibit, and it was perhaps the only exhibit that was made predominantly of Lund and Ivins family mementos and stories. As indicated on the Rodeo exhibit's plaque:

Like Ranch culture, rodeo followed the cattle herds north from the American West, and likely originated as informal competition between idle (or drunk) cowboys displaying practical ranch skills. My family is replete with rodeo cowboys and cowgirls going back four generations. I myself competed as a youth, but I smartened up early and decided to sing about it instead (Lund 2013c).

The exhibit featured an array of artefacts from the Lund family archive including photos of the 1932 Calgary Stampede Rodeo Competitors showing Deloss (Lund's great grandfather), Clarke (grandfather), and Art and Andy Lund (great-uncles); one from 1964 of his father D. C. Lund riding "Blue Bill" in Moosomin, Saskatchewan; a photo of his mother Patty Lund barrel racing in 1965; one of his uncle Tom Ivins steer wrestling at the Calgary Stampede in 1980; and the now famous photos from the cover of his 2002 *Five Dollar Bill* album of Corb Lund competing at Writing-on-Stone Rodeo in 1981. The exhibit also featured a 1958 poster of his mother, with the headline "Vote Pattie [*sic*] Ivins for Calgary Stampede Queen," the 1920s family spurs worn by Clarke, D. C. and Corb Lund, as well as Clarke Lund's prize buckle for Canadian Championship All Around Cowboy at the Calgary Stampede from 1939, and Clarke and D. C. Lund's saddles. Through this exhibit, the audience learned that his father was a top bronc rider and steer wrestler, and his mother was a two-time barrel racing champ in 1959 and 1960. Through interviews, Lund has also revealed that his great-grandfather Clarke Lund was the Calgary Stampede's wild cow-milking champ in 1936 and named their all-around cowboy in 1939 (Dudley 2012, 68). In 2010 his father was honoured at both the annual Taber Rodeo, and as a Legend of Rodeo at the Canadian Professional Rodeo Hall of Fame. The dedication at the Canadian Pro Rodeo Hall of Fame (Lund 2013d) noted D. C. Lund's successful rodeo career, and also highlighted his prominence in the rodeo community and praised his dedication to raising awareness about the treatment of rodeo stock. The exhibit did not just show off family memorabilia, it also demonstrated the singer-songwriter's strong sense of pride of his family heritage and their role in the history of the sport and the Calgary Stampede. That pride is even more evident in his music and album artwork, as he pays homage to the rodeo tradition and cowboy culture.

Yet Lund often pays tribute to his family's rodeo heritage through a mournful lens, revealing a sense of youthful regret or nostalgia for the "good old days" and a lost way of life. The end of the rodeo (whether a specific rodeo, the rodeo season, or retirement) conjures significant emotional turmoil in the narratives of many of these songs. This nostalgia is made all the more interesting by the very fact that this was a life that Lund never really lived, as his own rodeo days were cut short when an injury resulted in his departure from the sport in his teens. While he certainly grew up surrounded by rodeo sportsmen and women and had the great fortune to observe the current of emotions each family member felt throughout their career and subsequent retirements, the pain and loss in his lyrics is cast in a more personal light than that of a mere bystander. His performances of these nostalgic narratives demonstrate his intimate knowledge of the rodeo, and the personal attachments to sport and horse.

### 4.3 Lund's Rodeo Songs

Lund's introduction to the rodeo themed song was by way of "Strawberry Roan," which his grandfather taught to him as a boy. While he has not recorded the song for his albums, it has been regularly featured at concerts throughout his career. The version that Lund sings is that passed along from his grandfather; it is substantially longer than Marty Robbins' version and closer to the original than most recordings of the song. At a house concert in Austin, TX (September 9, 2007), Lund performed "Strawberry Roan" following "The Truth Comes Out" and introduced the song with his (Lund 2009a) story about learning it:

Some of the first music I ever heard was from my grandpas who were both cattle ranchers. They knew all these old cowboy songs that were a hundred, hundred and fifty years old. They were all sort of oral tradition songs that predate recorded [...] musical history. This is the very first song I learned, it's about a bronc rider. My grandpa taught it to me, and he didn't know how to sing or anything, but this is from a time when there really wasn't much of a music business and it was sort of, the purpose of music was different, it was just sort of to entertain yourself, and also to pass on stories [...] This is my bedrock song.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Lund's live performance of "Strawberry Roan" at the Austin, Texas house concert can be viewed here (starting at 3:20), <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lult7TG\\_aPo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lult7TG_aPo)>.

Lund demonstrates here, and in all interviews in which he touches on this song, his strong understanding of the oral cowboy tradition. In his Video Blog from July 2010 (Lund 2010d), in which he sings this song, he discusses how songs were transformed as they were passed along not only between generations, but also from one region to the next. He points out that his version (learned from his grandfather) is different from most recorded versions because of how these songs were transmitted. He notes (Lund 2010d), “guys would just learn ‘em from each other and pass them around. They would change as they, you know, moved around geographically. Some of the locations would change in the song and some of the technical terminology would change based on who was singing them.” While Robbins (and others) likely selected particular verses from the original text to record to create shorter (three-minute) songs to comply with radio format (Allain 2014), it is clear from his interviews and performances of the song that Lund feels a very deep connection to the cowboy culture that inspired the original song in 1914. The key point throughout this discussion is not just that this was the *first* song Lund learned to sing and play, but that he acknowledges this song—and arguably the cowboy tradition—as the foundation (his “bedrock”) of his musical education. This is a crucial point when discussing the roots of Lund’s music and artistic identity.

This relationship resonates through Lund’s discography. Rodeo emerges as perhaps the most prominent theme in all of his place-oriented songs, with songs about rodeo riders appearing on his very first solo album (“We Used to Ride ‘Em” and “Manyberries,” *Modern Pain*, 2003). Just like the cowboy song tradition in which cowboys would write songs/poems about their experiences or expand up on tales and myths, Lund often draws his rodeo tales from the family archive. His rodeo songs feature local heroes, his grandfather, his father, his uncle, and even himself as characters involved in tales of bronc riding and living the life of a rodeo cowboy. While the narratives are not necessarily specific to southern Albertan culture (as rodeo cowboys are an important part of many rural regional cultures), many of his lyrics point specifically to local rodeos and communities, including his tale about a local aboriginal cowboy from “Manyberries” (Alberta) and songs mentioning local rodeos, including the Calgary Stampede, as part of the rodeo circuit (“We

Used to Ride ‘Em,” “Buckin’ Horse Rider,” and “Horse I Rode In On”).<sup>18</sup> Even those that do not mention place by name, however, seem to suggest a southern Albertan landscape by virtue of the regional identity of the man who wrote (and sings) the songs. For example, in his painfully nostalgic song about leaving the rodeo behind, “Rodeo’s Over,” Lund sings with fellow country artist Ian Tyson, seemingly establishing a firmly regional identity for this ode. Tyson, who was born in Victoria, BC, and previously lived in Toronto and New York when he was part of the famous Ian and Sylvia duo, now resides in Longview, Alberta, where he ranches and writes songs steeped in local cultures and traditions. In many ways, Tyson opened doors for local Albertan singer-songwriters who wanted to write about their origins and roots, putting this province “on the map” lyrically, so to speak. Thus, while “Rodeo’s Over” could appeal to the sentiments of rodeo cowboys across the continent, one assumes when listening to the intensely personal lyrics that the voices singing the song are somehow reflecting on their own rodeo pasts, both of which are firmly rooted in southern Albertan culture.

#### 4.3.1 *Rodeo as Metaphor*

As discussed earlier, singer-songwriters often used rodeo activities as a metaphor for relationships between the sexes in their song narratives. While in very early songs, like “Buckin’ Bronco,” bronc riding was suggestive not just of the recreational activity, but also of sexual activity, later songs tended to lean in a romantic nature, where horses appeared as a female muse to the male rodeo athlete. As Terrance Cox (2002, 281) observes in his article on Tyson’s *Cowboyography*, the horse often remains “other” in such narratives, observing that Tyson’s songs explore complex relationships between human and horse, that ultimately provide “insights into *human bonds*” (*emphasis added*). Thus, these seemingly straightforward descriptions of a rodeo cowboy’s day, training, or other riding activities are often metaphors for deeper questions concerning relationships—often between the protagonist and his/her lover. Like Tyson, Lund has written a number of songs that invoke rodeo as a metaphor for human relationships. These songs range from his inability to really

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<sup>18</sup> Of course, this list also includes “Blood, Sweat and Water” from chapter 2, which honoured the men and women who worked together in 2013 to stage the Stampede following the devastating flood.

give in to love (“She Won’t Come to Me,” *Five Dollar Bill*), his heartbreak in realizing that his love did not show up to watch him perform at the Ponoka Stampede (“The Horse I Rode in On,” *Horse Soldier! Horse Soldier!*), and his courage to step back into the dating scene after a breakup (“(You Ain’t a Cowboy) If You Ain’t Been Bucked Off,” *Cabin Fever*). While the narratives of both “She Won’t Come to Me” and “(You Ain’t a Cowboy) If You Ain’t Been Bucked Off” evoke a sense of despair and hopelessness in Lund’s interactions with horses (stand-ins for female counterparts), the horse in “The Horse I Rode in On” functions as the vehicle on which Lund makes his way through the crowd to the Ponoka Stampede stage, only to realize his love interest’s absence in the bleachers.

Rejection is a significant factor in each of these relationships, but it is the spurning of the singer-songwriter’s affections by a horse that puts Lund’s music strongly in line with more traditional rodeo cowboy songs. In “She Won’t Come to Me” (*Five Dollar Bill*), Lund describes a mare’s reaction to his approach (“She rears her head,” “Her nostrils flared with fear,” “Her eyes are wide,” and “She’s pinning back her ears”) and then sings in the chorus that “she” (the mare) “won’t come to me.” Of course, this relationship is all too common for cowboys attempting to rope a horse that does not want to be saddled and ridden (or generally reined in), and Lund’s narrative clearly describes typical traits of fearful horses. Yet, the close of the chorus suggests an alternate reading, as he sings: “she won’t come to anyone who’s frightened to be free.” The “mare” here, in fact, represents a female who keeps her distance from the protagonist, as she realizes that the prospect of letting go and falling in love frightens him. Thus, the rejection of the lyrical narrative is almost self-inflicted, as he realizes in the chorus that he will continue to be passed over so long as he remains closed to the prospect of a relationship.

### ***“(You Ain’t a Cowboy) If You Ain’t Been Bucked Off” (2012)***

The human relationship is more explicit in “(You Ain’t a Cowboy) If You Ain’t Been Bucked Off” (*Cabin Fever*, 2012). Lund draws on the popular cultural metaphor of getting back on the horse after you’ve been bucked off, but he (2012m) explains that, while a

metaphor for many life events, it comes from a very real ranching situation—one that he himself experienced:

Getting back on the horse after you get bucked off has become a wider cultural saying, but it's a very real cowboy thing. I remember when I was a kid we had this fat old mare, the kids, when we were pretending to chase cows with dad. I was probably 4 or something. And she was a pig, Susie. We loved her, but she was a pig of a horse. Anyway, I think she shook me off somehow, she didn't buck or anything. But I was just a kid. I fell off and it's pretty traumatic when this tall and fall all that way and land on your head... But my dad immediately put me back on the horse, like immediately. I was still bawling, and he put me back on the horse so that the fear doesn't set in. You know, getting right back on the horse after you've been bucked off is a metaphor for lots of things in life. But it actually is based in a real situation.

Lund expertly draws on this metaphor to describe the courage needed to start a new relationship “when you're afraid of getting hurt” (Lund 2012m). In the first and second verses, he recalls the moment he met his (now former) lover—presumably Deb Dillworth (whom he thanks in the album's liner notes), and the trepidation he felt about letting go, and the ultimate demise of the relationship. He concludes each verse with the refrain “you ain't a cowboy if you ain't been bucked off,” demonstrating that courage to give the relationship a try (and get back on the horse). In the bridge, Lund really emphasizes this double image of the cowboy and his horse and the cowboy and his lover, both of which will leave you busted, and broken with “scars you can't see.” This song comes from very real experiences for Lund, who was going through the breakup of a long-term relationship while he was writing *Cabin Fever* (Sperounes 2012a).

Although Lund revealed in his twelfth episode of “What that Song Means Now” (Lund 2012m) that he had the melody and general idea of the song for a number of years, the demise of his personal relationship seems to have acted as a catalyst to get this song finished. While he rarely speaks openly about his private life (beyond acknowledging Dillworth in his liner notes), the New West Records press release for *Cabin Fever* offers the following regarding the writing process for the album:

For this outing, Lund hunkered down in the remote cabin he built with his girlfriend and former bronc rider/favorite uncle Lynn Jensen, an hour outside Edmonton. After the hand-crafted spruce and poplar building was finished, Lund's thirteen-

year relationship crumbled and his uncle passed away. Woodshedding—literally—came next (Sperounes 2012a).

A rare glimpse into his personal life, “(You Ain’t a Cowboy) If You Ain’t Been Bucked Off” is perhaps the most painful reflection on relationships in Lund’s discography. And it seems fitting that bronc riding, a painful (literally) relationship from his youth, functions as a metaphor for that heartache. Both of these relationships mark significant changes in Lund’s path: a teenage Lund quit bronc riding after injury to pursue rock and roll music, and the breakdown of his relationship led the singer-songwriter to explore deeper, darker themes for his seventh studio album.

Lund worked with his friend Mark Skinner to pull this song together for the 2012 recording. Skinner, he reveals, helped him establish the “western” feel of the song (Lund 2012m). This is the first song that Lund and the Hurtin’ Albertans have recorded in a slow 6/8 waltz (Lund 2012g), which the singer-songwriter describes as having a more “textured” feel than 3/4. By this, he seems to suggest that the subdivisions of the compound time signature allow for more rhythmic complexity than a straight 3/4 waltz. The slow subdivision of the time signature lends well to lyrical theme, which narrates his slow waltz with “getting back on the horse” after his painful breakup. It also seems to create a visual image of a cowboy ambling through fields, all alone, on his horse. The musical setting has a relaxed feel, established through the acoustic guitar strumming on each beat; the upright bass playing a tonic E on the down beat of each bar, followed by A and B on the fifth and sixth subdivided beats; and a drum kit. The baritone guitar is woven into the fabric of the song to mark changes in mood, notably to usher in the bridge, where Lund highlights the *importance* of being bucked off/suffering through breakups to get to that “one last ride” (or last relationship) (Lund 2012g/m). This moment of realization is also highlighted harmonically; until this point in the song, the verses had used only traditional “cowboy chords” (I, IV and V), but with this moment in the narrative, the harmony shifts to a iv-I-iv-I progression. Moving to a iv chord does not simply demonstrate how Lund reaches outside of the traditional cowboy chords, rather, changing just one chord tone (C# to C<sup>b</sup>) here alters the mood of the song (Lund 2012m). The bridge is followed by an instrumental break that features vocal harmonies singing on open vowel sounds (“ooo”) as they mournfully slide up and down minor thirds (A/C-B/D-A/C-G#/B). Shifting back into the relaxed cowboy



amble of the verses, Lund seems to regret how quickly time and his relationship slipped through his hands. But he also demonstrates a kind of sombre courage in his resign to “give one last nod” and get back on that horse.

This song demonstrates not just how easily Lund can draw on his personal horse-riding experiences (and a popular cultural reference) and use them as to highlight complex human relationships, but also how intune he is with the rodeo song tradition. By adding drums, upright bass, baritone guitar, and non-conventional harmonies to the rodeo cowboy’s lament, Lund offers a new way of presenting a traditional song form. While neither of these songs marks out place, they help to establish Lund as a member of the rodeo song tradition. They demonstrate his facility with writing in these themes and his knowledge of this thematic tradition. They also provide one more example of how integral his family history and rodeo heritage is to his songwriting, as this provides just one more example of the singer-songwriter pulling from his past experiences in the sport (even though it has been almost three decades since he has competed). In both “She Won’t Come to Me” and “(You Ain’t a Cowboy) If You Ain’t Been Bucked Off” Lund explores the ways in which the horse and rodeo motif can be used to unpack human relationships. Typically, in such narratives, one expects the rodeo cowboy to be the one walking away or stringing along his lover, but in both of these songs Lund finds himself rejected by his female partner(s): ignored by the mare in the former and bucked off in the latter. Indeed, the sense of rejection is almost palpable in “(You Ain’t a Cowboy) If You Ain’t Been Bucked Off,” as the narrative seems to set up a cycle of unending rejection, with a jaded Lund cautiously getting back on that horse each time he gets bucked. The song also reveals a strong sense of nostalgia for a specific past love, one that this cowboy cannot seem to move past, despite the fact that he knows that it is time. Nostalgia and the passage of time are, in fact, important motifs in rodeo cowboy music, ones that recur throughout his other rodeo songs.

### 4.3.2 *Rodeo and Nostalgia*

Perhaps the greatest sadness for the rodeo cowboy is retirement from the sport, whether a forced or voluntary parting of ways. Men and women retire from rodeo for a variety of reasons: some may be forced to retire due to injury or family and financial obligations, while others may choose to walk away from the sport because they want to pursue a new career, education, or start families. The reasons are many and varied, but one thing that emerges in most lyrical narratives is a deep sense of regret and nostalgia for the lost life and freedom of a rodeo Rambler. Lund left the sport when he was still a teenager, at that important age where one decides if they will pursue rodeo as a life long career or walk away. His injury and passion for music influenced him to leave the sport, and eventually move to Edmonton to study jazz music performance; this ultimately led to his decade-long stint as bassist for The Smalls and his current career as a country singer-songwriter. Despite the fact that Lund quit the rodeo before he truly even got started, his lyrical narratives express a strong sense of regret. While he certainly observed such sentiments as he watched his father, family members, and friends grapple with their emotions about the profession and lifestyle change, the intense longing for horses and nomadism that exudes from his song narratives suggest that he too has an intense connection with the animal and sport. The stories told in many of these nostalgic narratives emerge from his family archive, from the tale of the retired family spurs (“We Used to Ride ‘Em”), to a description of the characteristics of a rodeo bronc rider (“Buckin’ Horse Rider”), and by way of a sombre reflection about the end of the rodeo (“Rodeo’s Over”). These lyrical narratives reveal lived experiences of very real situations (even though many fictionalize the events), offering a body of work that honours the rodeo cowboy tradition as well as provides a glimpse into a profession mythologized by song, literature, and film. In so doing, Lund both documents stories and perpetuates that myth. The latter is certainly the case in his song “Manyberries,” which recounts what he calls a “mostly true” story about a local cowboy (Lund 2003). All of these songs point to the prevalence of rodeo in southern Albertan culture, and to the importance of the sport in his family heritage.

***“We Used to Ride ‘Em” (1995, 1999)***

One of the first songs in which Lund explored a rodeo theme is “We Used to Ride ‘Em,” which originally appeared on his first solo album, *Modern Pain* (reissued in 2003), recorded while he was still a member of The Smalls. He then included an updated version (with new vocals and guitar) on *Unforgiving Mistress* (1999). The song narrative is slightly misleading, as it creates the impression of two former riders talking about quitting the rodeo. The two “characters” in the song, however, are a pair of Crockett spurs mourning their retirement from the sport after Lund’s father decided to leave rodeo (Lund 2011). As Lund (2003) stated in the liner notes to the *Modern Pain* reissue,

[“We Used to Ride ‘Em” is] about my dad’s decision to retire from professional steer wrestling, as told from the perspective of a pair of spurs that were rodeoed in by my grandfather Clark Lund, Canadian legend Reg Kesler, my father DC Lund and myself. The idea for the song came from a sketch of the same name that my Dad did of the spurs that appears on the original “Modern Pain” cover. The spurs now sit on a shelf gathering dust, waiting...

In addition to appearing on the original *Modern Pain* cover, Lund displayed these spurs in the rodeo exhibit at the Glenbow Museum. The following analysis will be based off of the updated version from *Unforgiving Mistress*, as it is the recording used in the accompanying music video (Lund 2014c).

Lund establishes the ambiguity of the song protagonist’s identity from the very start of the song, where the first verse reflects mournfully, even nostalgically, on the sounds that the protagonist(s) miss at the Exhibition grounds. And indeed, this ambiguity remains through the song, as he does not reveal the identity of the song character in the lyrical narrative, and instead anthropomorphizes the spurs, imparting human-like characteristics and emotions to them. This ambiguity does not detract from the song narrative; rather, it provides a space for reflecting on the stories of riders, horses, and even spurs once they retire from rodeo. The second verse starts to expand this narrative as the spurs recall the day they were told that the rodeo rider was leaving the sport: “There was a tear in his eye the day that I remember very well / He said his luck was gone and his draw was bad and his ridin’ had gone to hell.” Through the third and fourth verses, these spurs continue to reflect longingly for the sounds and action of the rodeo, warning other spurs that one day *they*

“won’t hear those sounds no more.” In the chorus, these two spurs proclaim their pride in the fact that they used to ride horses “to a standstill,” and that they had the privilege of wearing “the silver buckle high point award.” These spurs had ridden on the heels of Stampede legends (Clark Lund, Reg Kesler, D. C. Lund) and were forced into retirement, destined for a life on the shelf, with nothing but their memories of rodeos past. In many ways, the emotional attachment that these spurs feel toward the sport and the horses they used to ride encapsulate the sentiments of any rodeo rider who was forced to retire from the sport (perhaps due to injury, finances, or other obligations) before truly ready to do so. This type of nostalgic reflection on the “good old days” is a common trope in country music narratives, one that typically emerges during times of increased personal or economic tensions. Consider, for example, Dolly Parton’s famous “In the Good Old Days (When Times Were Bad) (1968),” Merle Haggard’s “Are the Good Times Really Over (I Wish A Buck Was Still Silver) (1982),” Alabama’s “Mountain Music” (1982), The Judds’ “Grandpa (Tell Me ‘Bout the Good Old Days) (1986),” or even Miranda Lambert’s “The House that Built Me” (2009), all of which express a strong sense of nostalgia for the past, and especially, simpler times.

The musical setting of “We Used to Ride ‘Em” pulls from older musical styles to impart character and identity to the anthropomorphized Crockett spurs recalling their rodeo history. The song begins first with a simple strumming pattern on the acoustic guitar in which Lund plucks the tonic and dominant (D down to A) while following each chord tone with strumming the D major chord.<sup>19</sup> Ciesla enters on the upright bass after two bars with a simple bass line plucking D and F#, and adds in a little walking motive at the end of every second bar. The upright bass has a very relaxed jazz feel. Combined with Lund’s vocal line, which sits in the lower end of his register, there is an overriding sense that the musicians are invoking an almost jazz-lounge feel for the verses. Compared to the other songs analyzed here, Lund’s voice has a much more soft, rounded sound, a result of the manner in which he sings and a close proximity to the microphone. In addition to the possible technological techniques used, Lund captures this vibe in the way he emphasizes certain words, including his slight vibrato on “exhibition grounds,” the melodic dip on “moans” and upward bend in “sounds,” and the vocal crack on “before.” He also incorporates other

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<sup>19</sup> Lund uses a similar pattern in “(Gonna) Shine up My Boots” from *Five Dollar Bill* (2002).

vocal gestures that emphasize this feel, such as “mmm” before each refrain (“we don’t ride ‘em anymore”). All of these elements combined (acoustic guitar, upright bass, and vocal performance) create a strong visual image of Lund (or the spurs) singing this bluesy reflection in a dark, smoky lounge. The chorus conjures even stronger images, as this bluesy style shifts into a 1950s rockabilly style reminiscent of Johnny Cash and the Tennessee Two’s “boom-chicka-boom” rhythmic sound.<sup>20</sup> The sound, synonymous with Luther Perkins’s picking style on his fender telecaster, invokes imagery of the galloping horses that these spurs no longer ride. The setting thus establishes a link between a musical style from the past and the spurs recollection of *their* past, a sound and an activity no longer used. In so doing, Lund and his band heighten the sentiment of the lyrical narrative, reflecting nostalgically on one of the most important bands in country music history. This idea of looking backward to these “good old days” both in terms of lyrical and musical narratives coalesces in the song’s music video, which uses family footage of the Lund family members participating in rodeo events—to a time when these spurs were in use.

Working with Trevor Smith, then a film student at SAIT Polytechnic (Calgary), Lund performed “We Used to Ride ‘Em” (1999) alone and in front of a mirror in a basement apartment. These images were alternated with the Lund family footage. The entire video was filmed, even the archival footage. Smith (2014) recalled the process,

[It was] shot as a film student on 16mm short ends. I lit and shot the thing myself on 16mm in a basement suite Corby rented. Corby provided 8mm rodeo material from his family archives that I transferred by videotaping off of a cement wall projection, and my future wife Jennifer edited it, on tape, sequentially, on an old deck system after hours at school. Talk about committing to a cut!<sup>21</sup>

Videotaping the projected archival footage off of a cement wall enhances the aged appearance of the rodeo material, emphasizing its place in time as events occurring in the past. These videotaped images of Lund’s family members participating in rodeo events in the past alternate with long shots of Lund and a presumably unused horse corral in the present. This juxtaposition of present-day and archival footage creates a strong impression

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<sup>20</sup> Examples of this ‘boom-chicka-boom’ sound include Johnny Cash’s hits “Get Rhythm,” “Cry, Cry, Cry,” and “Walk the Line” (to name a few).

<sup>21</sup> “Corby” is Lund’s birth name (Corby Clark Marinus Lund), and seems to be used mainly amongst family and friends (as well as in the liner notes in his early albums).

of an individual sitting alone and reflecting on his family's history in the rodeo, reminiscing about the past moments that the Crockett spurs strongly yearn for in the narrative.

Montage style editing plays an important role in music videos where narratives establish a sense of "time" (a past and present). In an article that I co-authored with Lori Burns (2010, 11-12) on the Dixie Chicks' music video for "Top of the World," we demonstrated how montage editing helped establish not just relationship between different temporal periods (past, present, future), but also "reality" (or real-time narrative moments) and memory. In "Top of the World" this was achieved through a variety of techniques, including, most importantly, editing techniques such as overlapping or superimposing images to create a "flash" effect between present-day and past images.<sup>22</sup> "We Used to Ride 'Em" makes use of similar editing techniques. First, a strong sense of time is established through the juxtaposition of "present-day" Lund playing his guitar in a basement apartment or sequences of images of horses (and later the singer-songwriter) in the corral with the flashback sequences of the old film footage. These flashback images are immediately identified as the "past" due to their grainy or fuzzy appearance (aged film strip), bad lighting represented through dark or white washout moments in the film reel, and the sometimes shaky image as a result of poor filming, older technology, or filming the projected screen. The temporal periods between these images are established through the action within the image sequences, reinforced by the editing techniques. In all of the present-day sequences, Lund is presented in situations where he is seemingly thinking about these past memories: (1) seated in a chair performing the song while looking in the mirror, and (2) sitting on top of a fence and staring out longingly over a horse corral. These deep reflective poses, coupled with the aged look of the vintage film reel, create a strong impression of either the singer-songwriter recalling past memories (or we could assume that he is watching the film footage with the viewers). The idea that these flashbacks should be understood as memories is strongly suggested through editing, which in this video appears to be achieved through a rougher editing. Where as in "Top of the World" the transition seemed smoother as a result of overlapping images, in "We Used to Ride 'Em" the effect is sudden, in which a sort of "flash" effect is created through the quick alternation

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<sup>22</sup> Other techniques include setting the scene (period wardrobe, furniture, décor) and body language (long pauses in action where present-day characters would be visibly reflecting on memories).

between different image sequences (montage editing). The director's wife, Jennifer, achieved this flash effect through three different techniques: (1) she used the film sequences with dark or white lighting to wash out the image at the beginning or ending of a sequence of images to create a bright flash (Fig. 4.1); (2) she adjoined the two separate image sequences with no transitioning element in a way that results in a hard cut and a flash effect as the image rapidly changes (Fig. 4.2); and (3) she inserted a shot of the white projector screen between sequences that seemingly softens the transition (Fig. 4.3). When combined with Lund's live performance in the basement apartment (or later in the horse corral), these montage style editing techniques between past and present images create the strong effect of flashback memories in Lund's mind, or the tug of emotions for the love of a lost sport.

Figure 4.1 "We Used to Ride 'Em"

*Note: Use of white washout light to create memory flash.*



[00: 48]

Figure 4.2 "We Used to Ride 'Em"

*Note: juxtaposing different image sequences with no transition.*



[00:37]

Figure 4.3 “We Used to Ride ‘Em”

*Note: inserting filmed blank screen between image sequences.*



The filmstrip begins to roll as Lund strums the first two bars of the song, followed by a director’s clapperboard with the song title, date of filming, and the name of the director and cameramen. After this introduction, the camera rolls on Lund’s hand strumming his acoustic guitar at a variety of angles and moves up to his face just as he is about to start singing the first verse. The first verse alternates between images set in the present, moving between shots of Lund performing the song in the basement apartment and horses grazing in a pasture, as the lyrical narrative reveals that rodeo (the Calgary Stampede, in particular) continues despite “their” (the spurs’) retirement. The first flashback appears at the start of the second verse (00:37), where the spurs reflect on that moment when D. C. Lund announced his retirement and the video presents two images of (presumably) a young D. C. Lund placing his saddle on a saddle horse. After introducing the character that forced the spurs into retirement, the visual narratives moves back to Lund performing in the basement apartment, then to flashbacks of a family member attempting to rope a calf. The second verse eventually closes with old footage of horses in the corral on the line “we don’t ride ‘em anymore,” before flashing to the first, and only, flashback to the Crockett spurs sitting on the heels of one of the Lund family members while sitting on a fence (Fig. 4.4). This marks not just the introduction to the song protagonist, but also the transition into the chorus and the incredible montage of archival footage presenting sequences of images from rodeos past – presumably events in which the spurs participated.



Figure 4.4 “We Used to Ride ‘Em,” Crockett spurs (song protagonist)



[01:01]

The longest flashback sequences occur during the choruses, where the spurs reveal stronger pangs of nostalgia and the musical setting evokes the old ‘boom-chicka-boom’ sound. Formally, in this chorus, changes occur at structural points: the start of the phrase and cadence points, with faster changes occurring in the transitioning bars between the two phrases. Interestingly, in the first chorus, the horses tend to be in an upward leaping position at the start of each phrase, and the section concludes with a visual cadence of the downward bucking gesture. Figure 4.5 provides a map of relationship between lyrics, music and images, starting with the last frame of the shot of the Crockett spurs, which provide the visual transition to the chorus. Long shots of Lund in the basement apartment frame the chorus, with the space in between filled with archival film footage. The majority of the footage presents clips of bronc riding, the event in which D. C. Lund participated. While it is difficult to ascertain whether or not the man on the bucking horse in each shot is indeed Lund’s father, we do know that the images are indeed the singer-songwriter’s family members. The bucking horse complements both the lyrical narrative (nostalgically reflecting on how hard these spurs used to ride the horses) and the ‘boom-chicka-boom’ sound. The first bronc rider fills the screen at the mid-point of the first chorus phrase (01:05), where the continual and slowed down bucking motion of the horse just about fits in the groove of the downbeat of each bar. The motion is slightly slower, but the visual representation of the horse’s body contorting with each buck seems to mimic the downward motion of the upright bass playing its broken fourths. This movement is captured again with the two longer image sequences in the second phrase, especially the second shot

(01:16-01:19), which visually echoes, the line “ride ‘em all the time” through a slightly slower, drawn out series of bucks.

In the two-bar transition between chorus phrases, the editor inserted three shorter clips of bronc and bull riding, shown in Fig. 4.6. The bull riding edits occur approximately on beats 1 and 2 of the second bar. The combination of the quicker bull riding sequences and the faster paced edited shots contrast the longer and slower movements of the bronc riding sequences, emphasizing the speed and danger of these events. The bronc riding has been slowed to capture the grace of a successful ride, but the transitioning bars present the real-time speed. It also serves to highlight the significance of some memories over others: the successful (potentially award-winning) ride is presented in slower and longer shots, while those of less stellar rides (including being dragged by a bull) might fragment in the mind of someone nostalgic for these events, the rush of the sport, and the accolades.

Figure 4.5 “We Used to Ride ‘Em,” chorus 1

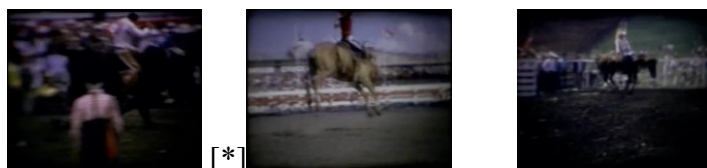


Acoustic Guitar

Double Bass

Hey, we don't ride \_\_\_ 'em like we used to ride 'em to a stand-still Wear the sil - ver bu -

IV \_\_\_\_\_ IV \_\_\_\_\_ I \_\_\_\_\_ I \_\_\_\_\_ IV \_\_\_\_\_



Acoustic Guitar

Double Bass

- cket high point a - ward \_\_\_ Hey, we don't ride \_\_\_ 'em like we used to ride 'em

IV \_\_\_\_\_ I \_\_\_\_\_ I \_\_\_\_\_ IV \_\_\_\_\_ IV \_\_\_\_\_ II \_\_\_\_\_



Acoustic Guitar

Double Bass

all the time and now (mmm mmm) we don't ride 'em a - ny - more .

II \_\_\_\_\_ V7 \_\_\_\_\_ I \_\_\_\_\_

Figure 4.6 “We Used to Ride ‘Em,” detail of transition in chorus 1



The image displays a musical score for the chorus of the song "We Used to Ride 'Em." The score is written in treble and bass clefs with a key signature of two sharps (D major). The lyrics are: "cket high point a - ward". Above the score are three small video stills: the first shows a person in a dark setting, the second shows a person riding a white horse, and the third shows a person on the ground. Below the bass line, Roman numerals IV, I, and I are indicated under the first, second, and third measures respectively.

The second chorus, which follows the third verse’s suggestion to absorb the sounds of the rodeo, warning that these sounds will one day fade from a rodeo cowboy’s life, presents even more images in its first phrase and concludes with a long shot of Lund (Fig. 4.7). While image changes do occur on the starts of phrases and cadence points, in this chorus the rapid sequences of image changes occur in the second half of the first phrase, with only one image accompanying the transitioning measures. In this way, the video seems to present as many flashback images as possible before Lund sings the phrase of the chorus about no longer riding horses in the rodeo. This functions as a transition point in the narrative, with the final long shot of the chorus being of one of his family members leaping off of their horse to tackle a bull to the ground, and then getting up and walking away from the animal. Just as D. C. Lund walked away from bronc riding, this family member walks away from the event, a visual representation of the act of retirement and segue back to the present, where Lund sits with his guitar (but not singing) atop the fence of a horse corral, as he gazes out over the horses throughout the final verse and refrain. The video ends with a sequence of shots that bring each strand of the narrative to a close: a Lund family member

wrestling a calf to the ground, the singer-songwriter putting down his guitar beside his chair and walking away from the mirror, and a horse turning around and walking out of the camera's view. As these final images move from past to present, the video establishes a strong sense of nostalgia not just for the rodeo, but also for the horses.

The horse motif is integral to this song narrative, representing a past life filled with youthful action and excitement. "We Used to Ride 'Em" highlights perhaps the most important elements of the Cowboy Code: the human bond with animals (as told through the spurs). The narrative emphasizes a relationship of respect and admiration for the animal, and the deep sense of loss in retirement. The rodeo and indeed the horses occupy a meaningful and significant place within a cowboy's daily life as companions in the field and opponents in the arena. The end of such a close partnership from one's life bears the emotional impact of a divorce, yet marks the start of a new adventure. The future for these spurs remains unknown as they sit on a shelf waiting for their next mission, their next ride, their next young Lund to adorn.

Figure 4.7 “We Used to Ride ‘Em,” chorus 2

^ indicates continuation of previous edit

The musical score is presented in three systems, each with a vocal line, an acoustic guitar line, and a double bass line. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#) and the time signature is 2/4.

**System 1:** The vocal line begins with the lyrics "Hey, we don't ride 'em like we used to ride 'em to a stand-still Wear the sil-ver bu-". The guitar and bass lines provide accompaniment. Video stills above the first two measures show a crowd at a rodeo and a rider on a horse.

**System 2:** The vocal line continues with "- cket high point a-ward" and "Hey, we don't ride 'em like we used to ride 'em". The guitar and bass lines continue. Video stills above the first two measures show a crowd at a rodeo and a close-up of a person playing guitar.

**System 3:** The vocal line concludes with "all the time and now (mmm mmm) we don't ride 'em a-ny-more". The guitar and bass lines conclude. Video stills above the first two measures show a rider on a horse and a rider on a horse with a hat, marked with a caret (^) above the second still.

Chord diagrams are provided below the bass line for each system:

- System 1: IV, IV, I, I, IV
- System 2: IV, I, I, IV, IV, II
- System 3: II, V7, I

***“Buckin’ Horse Rider” (2002)***

The sense of nostalgic loss is felt perhaps most deeply in both the lyrics and vocal performance of “Buckin’ Horse Rider” from Lund’s third studio album, *Five Dollar Bill*. Here the singer-songwriter looked to his family for inspiration in writing this song. In the liner notes of *Five Dollar Bill*, he wrote that “Buckin’ Horse Rider” was “inspired by [uncle Ray] Lynn [Jensen] and all the other bronc riders I’m related to. And by my mom, Calgary Stampede champion barrel racer. Dedicated to the memory of Reg Kesler, rodeo legend and old friend of the family” (Lund 2002). Both Jensen and Kesler were prominent figures in rodeo on both the regional and national scene in Canada. The Canadian Pro Rodeo Hall of Fame has honoured both Jensen and Kesler: the former as a Legend of the Rodeo (2006) and the latter a 1989 Hall of Fame inductee. Jensen had a long and successful rodeo career in southern Alberta. He won the Canadian Pro Rodeo Association (CPRA) permit award (1968), was named CPRA Cowboy of the Year (1975), and qualified for the bareback event at the Canadian Finals Rodeo six times in his career (CPRHF 2011b). Even though he was forced to retire from competition in 1981 after breaking his leg at a rodeo when it got caught in a chute, he did not leave the sport altogether. He served as CPRA President (1978-1979), judged for both the CPRA and Canadian Finals Rodeo, and coached rodeo at Olds College, all while living on his own horse ranch in Sundre, AB, ultimately turning his passion for the rodeo into a western lifestyle and profession (Hartlen 2006). Kesler, the dedicatee of the song, was a long-time Lund family friend and former wearer of the Crockett spurs featured in “We Used to Ride ‘Em.” He began his career as a competitor in the 1940s and, according to his inductee bio, “was one of the few cowboys who competed in all five major events as well as the Wild Cow Milking, Wild Horse Race, and Outrider in the Chuckwagon Races” (CPRHF 2011c). He was the first saddle trophy winner, winning it in both 1951 and 1953, and crowned the Canadian All-Around Champion at the Calgary Stampede in 1949 and 1950. In addition to his numerous titles and awards, Kesler is perhaps even more highly regarded for his prize-winning horses. One of the foremost stock contractors in southern Alberta, Kesler supplied horses not just to local rodeos, but to events across Canada as well, including the 1967 Montreal Exposition. Many of his horses were chosen as the top bucking stock at the National Finals Rodeo, the

Canadian Finals, and the Montana Circuit Finals, and three have been inducted into the Canadian Pro Rodeo Hall of Fame (PRHF 2015).

Drawing on his uncle's past rodeo successes and Kesler's prominence as a stock contractor, Lund narrates a story about a retired "Buckin' Horse Rider." The song outlines Jensen's passion for rodeo and his many professional accolades. Lund's verse paints a picture of a man deeply tied to rodeo and horse culture, one who "does his best thinking" while riding, whose favourite sounds are the ring of his silver springs, "squeak of the resin and leather, and the thump of the hooves."<sup>23</sup> Lund also names the horses that he has ridden, Moonshine, Three Bars, and Hatrack—all horses owned by Reg Kesler. Thus, not only does the singer-songwriter outline the bronc rider's love of horses and the sport, but he also places him within the local southern Albertan rodeo scene in highlighting his relations to Kesler and his famed horses. Three Bars and Moonshine, in particular, were important bareback horses throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, both being Canadian Professional Rodeo Hall of Fame inductees.<sup>24</sup> Just like the spurs in "We Used to Ride 'Em," there is an overriding sense of loss in this lyrical narrative. Recorded in 2002, long after Jensen's 1981 retirement from the sport, an underlying sadness lingers in the song chorus. In the choruses, Lund reveals his uncle's penchant for wild horses, his humble character, and highlights his past successes, winning in Pendleton (Oregon), Calgary (Alberta), and Cheyenne (Wyoming)—important rodeos in North America.<sup>25</sup> Yet, despite these triumphs, there is sadness here, especially with the mention of the "Buckin' Horse Rider" being "dry" for months. While it does not necessarily imply alcoholism by any means, it does suggest a certain difficulty coming to terms with aging and the ability to maintain the same level of youthful energy and activity (as Lund mentions in the first verse, "he's too old to travel, he's lucky he's even alive"). Such is the sadness painted by both "We Used to Ride 'Em" and "Buckin' Horse Rider," and their narratives about slowing down after years of high level and high stress activity.

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<sup>23</sup> The line "He's done his best thinkin' with his hand in the *riggin'* for years" refers to the leather and rawhide handhold (a suitcase style handle) used in bareback riding (i.e., riding without a saddle).

<sup>24</sup> Three Bars was inducted in 1989 alongside his owner, and Moonshine was inducted in 1996 (CPRHF 2011c).

<sup>25</sup> Both the Pendleton Round-Up and Cheyenne Frontier Days are part of the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association circuit (in the USA), while the Calgary Stampede, as mentioned earlier, has been an invitation-only, stand-alone since 2006.



The musical setting, especially the vocal harmonies, enhances the underlying sadness of the song narrative. The harmonic structure of this slow waltz in D major remains firmly in Lund's cowboy chords, I, IV and V, with a simple accompaniment of two acoustic guitars and an upright bass. Ciesla, on the upright bass, alternates plucking the root and fifth chord tones on the downbeat of each bar, with slight modifications such as walking bass lines to transition between chords. The acoustic guitars pluck the same alternating root and fifth chord tones, but then strum the full chord on beats 2 and 3 of each bar, adding an upward strum on one or both of the half beats. While this simple three-beat accompaniment creates the sonic image of a cowboy on his horse, it also adds to the reflective nature of the lyrical narrative and invokes imagery of cowboys sitting around a campfire singing lonesome tales about their cultural icons and rambling lifestyle. This image is further enhanced by the sorrowful harmonies provided by Harry Stinson in the chorus. Notated in Ex. 4.1, these harmonies alternate between perfect fourths and major and minor thirds in a way that brings twinges of sadness to certain points in the melody. For example, the shift from P4 to m3 to M3 on the section at the start of the first two phrases imparts a sense of loneliness to the bronc rider, a sentiment that emerges in the final chorus phrases in the shift from m3 to M3 intervals. By using harmony vocals in the chorus and in the second verse's third and fourth lines, the recorded performance conjures the imagery of the rodeo cowboys sharing their tales. Lund shares his stories about Jensen in the verses, and the cowboys join together in the chorus to sing their lonesome ode to the retired cowboy, honouring his character and past achievements. These voices are nostalgic for their youth, for the life on the road traveling the rodeo circuit, exuding a sense of loss and regret about yet another rodeo cowboy aging and slowing down in the sport.

This song provides yet another example of the deep bond between the cowboy and his horse. Just as he had done in "We Used to Ride 'Em," Lund used this narrative to reveal respect and admiration for the animal, but the bond here seems stronger, more intimate. While yes, the "Buckin' Horse Rider" has a penchant for wild horses, this song emphasizes the sense of "oneness" a cowboy can feel with the animal, as the narrative reveals: "he's done his best thinkin' with his hand in the riggin' for years." This is not just an animal to be ridden; for this bronc rider, the horse provides a contemplative space where he can find moments of clarity that he cannot seem to achieve elsewhere. While the song exudes a

sense of nostalgic loss for his earlier years in the sport, Jensen’s passion for the rodeo and horses remained an integral part of his life until his death in 2009 at the age of 64. His obituary notice acknowledged his loves in his life being “rodeo, family and friends” and included the following lyric: “He’s was a buckin’ horse rider and he liked ‘em a little wilder than most...” (ObitsforLife 2011).

Example 4.1 “Buckin’ Horse Rider,” chorus

with a swing feel

The musical score is arranged in three systems. Each system includes a vocal line (treble clef), an Acoustic Guitar line (treble clef), and a Double Bass line (bass clef). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo/style is indicated as 'with a swing feel'. The lyrics are: 'He's a buck-in' horse ri-der and he likes 'em a li-ttle wil-der than most', 'You can tell just by loo-kin though he'd be the last one to boast', and 'Un-less he's been drink-in' but hell he's been dry now for months'.

He's a buck-in' horse ri-der and he likes 'em a li-ttle wil-der than most

Acoustic Guitar

Double Bass

You can tell just by loo-kin though he'd be the last one to boast

Ac.Gtr.

D.B.

Un-less he's been drink-in' but hell he's been dry now for months

Ac.Gtr.

D.B.

The image shows a musical score for the song "Steer Rider's Blues". It consists of three staves: a vocal line, an acoustic guitar (Ac.Gtr.) line, and a double bass (D.B.) line. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are: "He's a bu-ckin' horse ri - der he won down to Pen-dle-ton once". The vocal line starts with a whole rest for two measures, then begins with a quarter note on G4, followed by a quarter note on A4, a quarter note on B4, and a quarter note on C5. The Ac.Gtr. line features a steady rhythm of eighth-note chords. The D.B. line provides a simple bass line with quarter notes and rests.

### 4.3.3 *Lund's Rodeo Story*

The majority of the rodeo songs in Lund's discography highlight the talents and accomplishments of his family members and of local figures. Despite including photos of himself as a young boy and teenager in the album artwork of *Five Dollar Bill*, the singer-songwriter rarely acknowledges his own history in the sport in his lyrics. His intimate knowledge shines through in all of his lyrical narratives, but his personal experiences were conspicuously absent until his 2009 album *Losin' Lately Gambler*. The album's second track, "Steer Rider's Blues," offers a youthful, upbeat recollection of his boyhood days in the rodeo. In the liner notes, he (Lund 2009b) states "This is what I did for fun until I discovered Black Sabbath. I thought it was normal. Write what you know..." Since, as discussed in the introduction, this album marked Lund's official foray into the US market on his new label (New West Records), it seems fitting that he include a song about the activities of his youth—effectively introducing himself, his history, and his family traditions to a new audience. While the song highlights moments in his young rodeo career, it also nods to local organizations and rodeos, and even makes passing mention to the family Crockett spurs of "We Used to Ride 'Em." For an audience with little knowledge of southern Albertan culture and Lund's family heritage (that other fans would have gained through years of listening to Lund's albums and live concerts), this song, along with the entire *Losin' Lately Gambler* album, provided a solid background description of the singer-songwriter's experiences growing up in the western Canadian province. For dedicated fans, the song just provided more detail about Lund's youth.

### ***“Steer Rider’s Blues” (2009)***

Steer riding, known also as bull riding, is similar to bronc riding in that the rodeo cowboy’s goal is to tame a wild bull by riding the bucking animal until it comes to a full stop (LeCompte 1985, 24). Taming wild bulls has been a part of cowboy culture since the ancient Minoan era, when men used acrobatic skill to attempt to tame the animal (LeCompte 1985, 37). Over the course of the late 1800s and early 1900s, the sport eventually evolved to its current form of taming (rather than killing) the animal. In today’s variant of the sport, a rider is expected to ride his bucking bull with only one hand holding on his rope for grip, and is immediately disqualified from the event for either touching the bull with his free hand or being bucked off. Men tend to ride big Brahma bulls (an “intact” adult male cattle, i.e. not castrated), while junior competitors (aged 11 to 14) ride “wirey bovines” (castrated male cattle) in the steer riding event (Calgary Stampede 2014b/c).<sup>26</sup> As the Calgary Stampede website admits about the event, the adult category of bull riding is “definitely the most dangerous event in the rodeo” in their battle to tame the approximately 2,000-pound male bull (Calgary Stampede 2014b). Many junior competitors aspire to ride (and tame) a bull, as the lyrical narrative of Lund’s song demonstrates.

“Steer Rider’s Blues” is written from the perspective of a junior steer rider competitor, a young (maybe 14-year old) Corb Lund singing the blues about still riding steers, seemingly dreaming of riding the bull. In the verses, he sings about his awards and memorable experiences, providing a lens into his mindset at that age. In the first verse, he demonstrates his pride in the sport and in seeing his name in the “rodeo news,” as well as in his numerous buckles (his winning trophies), but then complains that the sport has not seemed to help with the “girls at school.” Despite the accolades, “the pretty ladies don’t want nothin’ to do with me,” he sings. In the second verse he relays a story about scoring a 73 in one competition, where they were made to ride some “ornery old cows.” In the third verse, Lund continues to share stories of his youth: being bucked off at Mountain View and placing out in Picture Butte—both local southern Alberta rodeos. He also mentions paying his “high school rodeo” dues, the membership fee required of all junior rodeo

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<sup>26</sup> Youth who have entered Canada’s National High School Rodeo Association ride junior bulls (“intact” junior cattle) instead of the castrated steer.

competitors.<sup>27</sup> The entire fourth verse is dedicated to family spurs; he mentions borrowing his dad's spurs, his mom's barrel racing spurs being lost in the barn, and his decision to try on the old Crockett spurs worn by family greats. In the final line of the verse Lund mentions that they "fit a little big," and while he may mean this literally, it also functions as a metaphor here for having big shoes to fill (his grandfather's, father's, and Reg Kesler's). He clearly highlights his novice ranking in comparison to those who have used the spurs before him, but also suggests a determination to achieve similar successes in his decision to tie them on ("with a leather thong") regardless their physically larger size.

This youthful determination spills into the chorus narrative. Like many junior steer riders, young Lund admits that he has the "boy steer rider's blues," but that "it's all gonna be ok" because he is toughing it out for a greater, perhaps elusive, goal: riding a bull. Full of optimism about his future in the sport, he proclaims in the final phrase of the chorus (and indeed the song) that he is "gonna ride me a bull some day." Although it is entirely possible that Lund achieved this goal of riding a bull, it was neither long-term nor on a competitive circuit. As such, this narrative seems firmly rooted in Lund's past: he recounts his boyhood blues over having to ride these "ornery old cows" or (to quote the Calgary Stampede website) "wirey bovines" and reveals his anxiousness to ride a bull. For LeCompte (1985, 37), this youthful desire to ride the bull can be explained by the animal's innate symbolism: "for thousands of years the bull has symbolized the paramount masculine values, great strength and virility." As such, the song captures the nervous excitement and even the impatience of a teenage male on the cusp of "becoming a man" in his sport, as he eagerly awaits his opportunity to leave the chute on the back of a bull.

The youthful exuberance of the young Lund-inspired song protagonist is captured in the musical setting. Not only is the song in an up-tempo two-beat shuffle rhythm (capturing the imagery of quick-moving steer riding), but it is also in a rockabilly style.<sup>28</sup> Lund's setting is reminiscent of the 1950s rockabilly style heard in songs like Elvis Presley's "That's Alright Mama" backed with "Blue Moon of Kentucky" (1954) and

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<sup>27</sup> For more information, see Alberta High School and Junior Rodeo Association website, <<http://albertahsrodeo.com/index.html>>.

<sup>28</sup> A live performance of "Steer Rider's Blues" can be viewed here (starting at 03:15) at <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dPDF7evHeXA>>.

“Mystery Train” (1955), Buddy Holly’s “Blue Days, Black Nights” (1956), or Johnny Cash’s “Big River” (1958).<sup>29</sup> Each of these songs, like Lund’s “Steer Rider’s Blues,” has a two-beat rhythm with a crisp and steady shuffle beat played on the drum rims, and a pizzicato style of plucking root pitches on the upright bass, emphasizing the rhythm more than melody and harmony. Indeed, the introduction and verses remain almost entirely on a G minor pedal point, shifting to a power chord riff in the final two lines of the verse (Ex. 4.2 and 4.3). The absence of full chords throughout the verses establishes a light feel for the song, and its emphasis on rhythm gives it a forward moving drive. Like “Blue Days, Black Nights” (and many other rockabilly tunes based on the blues form), “Steer Rider’s Blues” begins with lead guitarist Siemens playing the head motive on the electric. Siemens attacks his solo (which recurs between after each chorus) with force, using distortion on his guitar to create a harder almost metallic sound in his riff. This solo occurs over Ciesla plucking a G pedal tone, Lund picking a dampened two-note alternating pattern on electric guitar, and Valgardson tapping out the rhythm on the snare and floor tom (Ex. 4.2). The drummer’s steady shuffle rhythm stresses the second beat of the bar, creating a forward moving lilt (accentuated by the swing feel) that feels like a young bucking animal. After the introduction, Siemens transitions into the verses by introducing a wandering motive that acts as a response to Lund’s vocal line (Ex. 4.3). Underneath this motive, the upright bass and drums maintain their steady pulses, further highlighting the momentum of the determined steer rider. The rockabilly style in this arrangement captures the youthful energy of the young steer rider through both its emphasis on rhythm instead of harmony, and the quick lead guitar motives that burst through the arrangement as Lund finishes singing each line of the verse (Ex. 4.3).

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<sup>29</sup> Recordings of these songs can be viewed at the following links: Elvis’s “That’s Alright Mama,” <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yWgprZu4Hk4>>; “Blue Moon of Kentucky,” <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VaB4RXe29-4>>; and “Mystery train,” <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XA5HErVE9oI>>; Buddy Holly’s “Blue Days, Black Nights,” <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M838uJff7L4>>; and Johnny Cash’s “Big River,” <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S34hOJE-DpU>>. While most consider Presley’s recording of “That’s Alright Mama” to be the first “rock and roll” song, this first recording, which omitted the drums, has a more *country* rockabilly vibe than later versions.

Example 4.2 “Steer Rider’s Blues,” introduction

with shuffle feel (Shuffle ♩ = ♩<sup>3</sup>)

Lead guitar

Electric guitar

Upright bass

Drums (rhythm)

Example 4.3 “Steer Rider’s Blues,” verse 1

with shuffle feel (Shuffle ♩ = ♩<sup>3</sup>)

with shuffle feel (Shuffle ♩ = ♩<sup>3</sup>)

I got the boy steer ri-der's blues I got my name in the ro-de-o

Lead guitar

Electric guitar

Upright bass

Drums (rhythm)

news I can't ex-plain it to the girls at school But I think it pre-tty damn

The first system of music features a vocal line in the upper staff and piano accompaniment in the lower staves. The vocal line begins with a quarter rest, followed by eighth notes for the words 'news', 'I can't ex-plain it to the girls at school', and 'But I think it pre-tty damn'. The piano accompaniment consists of a steady eighth-note bass line and a treble line with chords and eighth-note patterns.

cool I won a bunch of bu-ckles by the time I turned four - teen

The second system continues the musical score. The vocal line starts with a quarter rest, then sings 'cool I won a bunch of bu-ckles by the time I turned four - teen'. The piano accompaniment maintains the same rhythmic pattern as the first system, with a consistent bass line and treble accompaniment.

And still the pre-tty la-dies don't want no-thin' to do with me

The third system concludes the musical score. The vocal line begins with a quarter rest, followed by the lyrics 'And still the pre-tty la-dies don't want no-thin' to do with me'. The piano accompaniment continues with the established eighth-note bass line and treble accompaniment.



The musical setting maintains this youthful vigour in the choruses, where major harmonies inflect an optimistic tone to the steer rider's admission to having the "blues." Where in the verses the absence of harmonies allowed Lund to create a minor tinge of the blues through his static vocal line that emphasized G minor tonality, the major harmonies in the chorus offer a contrast to the lyrical misery of the young protagonist. Coupled with the rockabilly style, distortion on lead guitar, and the light and simple shuffle rhythmic setting, the chorus maintains the sense of youthful inner determination and confidence. Thus, while the lyrical narrative suggests frustration and a "wasted youth" (Lund 2010c) trying to chase the elusive dream of riding a bull, the musical setting contradicts this sentiment with a defiant inner strength (perhaps signified in the protected attitude of the distorted guitar) and personal resolve that young Lund had about his ability to one day graduate to a manly bull.

The vocal melody and performance contribute significantly to these conflicting responses to steer riding. Like "The Truck Got Stuck," "Chinook Wind" and even "Talkin' Veterinarian Blues" considered in previous chapters, Lund's melodic line is rather static, remaining predominantly on B $\flat$  in the verses, falling down to the G and B $\flat$  below (or C above) in a way that follows the natural rise and fall of speech. Lund further emphasizes the speech-like delivery in some of the descending lines of the verses, where he shifts into a more speaking tone as though those particular lines were asides to the main story at hand. This shift from sung to spoken text occurs on the following lines:

Verse 1: But I think it's pretty damn cool  
Verse 2: And she gave me a couple of good jumps  
Verse 3: I bucked off at Mountain View  
Verse 4: My mom lost track of hers

The spoken delivery is more prominent in the first two verses, but is certainly noticeable as he descends to the lower register. Lund's use of slang throughout his performance creates a (perhaps stereotypical) rurality to the setting. The singer's altering of "explain" to "splain," using "em" in place of "them," and clipping the "ing" endings to "in" suggests not necessarily a laziness, but rather a certain slow, relaxed paced. While the latter has become increasingly common—especially in casual conversation (amongst friends)—the first two examples here are *performed* acts. Of course, they could certainly be a case of relaxed

speech in casual conversation, but it seems more likely that Lund chose these alterations on purpose, to create a certain kind of character—perhaps even to draw on characteristics of regional linguistics from his hometown (Potkins 2014).<sup>30</sup>

Lund’s voice has a short echo effect on it, creating a pillowy sound around his voice. The echo has been added to the entire vocal performance with a slight reverb audible on the ends of several phrases, but is more prominent in the middle of each phrase. In addition to be characteristic of the rockabilly style, the echo helps to establish an implied setting of the rodeo arena, and the singer-songwriter’s voice being sent through this big space. It could likewise function as a temporal marker of the haunting memories from Lund’s past, what he (2012c) jokingly referred to as his “wasted youth” in a live performance of the song at Love & War in Plano, TX. Lund’s nasal voice itself displays two types of paralinguistic qualifiers that enhance the sentiments of the lyrical narratives (the “blues”) in the form of cry breaks and cracks. The cry breaks occur, fittingly, on the end of the word “blue/s” at the start of each verse, as well as on “Bu/tte” (verse three), and “old/ man’s spur/s” and “bar/n” (verse four). The cracks occur as a result of Lund straining or constricting his vocals in the upper end of his register, especially on the words “school” (verse one), “how” and cows” (verse two). It is through these two paralinguistic qualifiers, coupled with the melodic line inflecting a minor harmonic quality to the verses that he establishes the sense of actually having the “blues” in this song. These qualifiers enhance the emotional frustration of a teenage Lund who is itching to move to the next level in his sport, anxiously waiting for his turn on the bull.<sup>31</sup>

“Steer Rider’s Blues” finally offers Corb Lund’s very own rodeo story. From *Modern Pain to Losin’ Lately Gambler*, he told incredible tales about the members of his family and their role in the community, but his place within the Lund/Ivins family narrative was often left for interviews or stories from the concert stage. “Steer Rider’s Blues” is the first song in which the singer-songwriter turns the camera’s lens on himself, documenting a

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<sup>30</sup> Research on language in the prairies, and southern Alberta in particular, has revealed interesting links between regional accents and religious groups, specifically Mormons and especially amongst those who migrated north from Utah (Rosen 2013).

<sup>31</sup> Although likely unintentional, the cry breaks and cracks could also be heard as a mark of puberty as fourteen year old Lund’s voice changes (perhaps adding to the anxiety of moving into the adult level competition).

pivotal time in his youth—just before he made a major change and left steer riding for rock and roll. Perhaps more importantly, Lund uses this song to mark his *own* place within the family’s rodeo tradition, and the source of his deep understanding of the Cowboy Code and culture. Lund does not reveal nostalgia here, but youthfulness, energy, and pride in his ability to ride a steer, just like his relatives.

#### 4.3.4 *Constructing Local Mythologies*

While many songs in the rodeo repertoire define the cowboy lifestyle, a significant number document the stories of specific individuals or animals, sometimes in an exaggerated text, effectively mythologizing these figures in rodeo history and culture. Rodeo cowboy Pete Knight began his career in Crossfield, AB, around 1918 at the age of 15. He began competing in the Calgary Stampede in 1924, excelling in bronc riding and quickly becoming famous throughout North America. Knight really hit his stride in 1930, as he started racking up the wins: he won the bronc riding competition at the Cheyenne Frontier Days (1930), the Pendleton Round-up (1931), the North American Open Bucking Championship (1933), the Canadian Bucking Championship (1933), the World’s Fair Rodeo in Chicago (1933), and won the Rodeo Association of America’s (RAA) title of “World Champion Bronc Rider” in 1932, 1933, 1935, and 1936. In addition to his world titles, Knight won the coveted “Prince of Wales” trophy awarded at the Calgary Stampede each year to the champion bronc rider. Knight’s name appeared on the award for 1927, 1930, and 1933—an accomplishment that meant the award was his to keep (CPRHF 2011d). It is fair to say that, in bronc riding, Knight was a legend. In addition to his talent on a horse, Knight was an advocate for his sport: he participated in organizing the cowboy strike at the Boston Garden Rodeo in 1936, which protested not just judging, but also prize money. Despite having a new organization, the Rodeo Association of America (est. 1929), working to cement rules for the sport and documenting statistics, judging of competitions remained unfair and prize money often came up short of promises. When 60 cowboy riders walked out on the Boston Rodeo, they brought significant attention to these issues. In response to these RAA troubles, the Cowboy Turtle Association formed (now the PRCA), with Knight as one of its founding members. They immediately established a championship

award system recognizing saddle-bronc riding, bareback riding, Brahma bull riding, steer wrestling, and calf roping as “standard” events (Russell 1970, 105-8).<sup>32</sup> All of this success came crashing down in 1937, when at a rodeo in Hayward, CA, on 23 May 1937, horse named Duster reared high out of the chute, pulling “Pete down, slamming his chest into the saddle horn” (CPRHF 2011c). In front of a stadium full of shocked fans, Knight’s fellow cowboys carried his body out of the arena, where he succumbed to a pierced lung and massive hemorrhaging. His memory, however, has been preserved—not just in the rodeo history literature, but also by his inductions into the National Cowboy Hall of Fame (Oklahoma City), the Pro Rodeo Hall of Fame (Colorado Springs), the Horsemen’s Hall of Fame (Calgary) and the Canadian Professional Rodeo Hall of Fame, the opening of the Pete Knight Arena in Crossfield, and in at least three commemorative rodeo songs.

The first song was written ca. 1933 by Canadian country singer-songwriter Wilf Carter, whose tune “Pete Knight the King of the Cowboys” paid tribute to the rodeo cowboy in his most successful year in the sport. Replete with yodels and acknowledgement of his World’s Fair Rodeo title, Carter described Knight as a true western spirit, finding true happiness only in the fields taming horses, and dubbing him the “King of all cowboys.” Carter’s song revealed not just Canada’s pride in the rodeo cowboy, but also his own as a fellow Albertan.<sup>33</sup> It was Knight’s tragic death, however, that influenced two more songs eulogizing the great rodeo cowboy. Again, Carter honoured his lost friend in “Pete Knight’s Last Ride” (1937). In a slow western waltz, he begins his lament by describing his heartache over the losing “a pal” who was “like a brother” to him, and highlighting the memory of riding side by side with him on the prairies. Carter, like the fans in the audience, “[n]ever dream[ed] a bronco would throw him,” but then explained: “He was riding a bronco called ‘Slow-Down’ ... But when he left the chute / Fate played its hand / That’s when Pete took his last ride.” Carter made a mistake with the name of the horse, but the song captures the shock and sadness over the death of a rodeo legend and friend, ending with a strong statement that he “still remains King of the Cowboys.” The *Traditional*

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<sup>32</sup> According to Ralph Clark, they called themselves the “turtle” association because it described their actions: they may have been slow to organize, but they were finally sticking their necks out (Clark 2015b).

<sup>33</sup> Interestingly, Wilf Carter was born in Nova Scotia (but seems to have adopted Calgary and later Scottsdale, Arizona as his home), while *The Traditional Ballad Index* claims that Pete Knight was born and raised in Philadelphia, PA (Waltz and Engle 2015). Both adopted Alberta as their home for a period of time during their career, ultimately settling in the USA.

*Ballad Index*, hosted by the California State University in Fresno, has catalogued a fragment of a text by an unknown that also commemorates Knight's death. The lyric description provided on their database reads:

Pete Knight was a rider of horses  
The best that I ever did see  
But often a life in the saddle  
Is not what it's cracked up to be

Ten thousand fans saw him carried  
Away from the field and the horse.

This song, like Carter's, commemorated the rodeo cowboy, honouring him as a legend of the rodeo and each contributing to the myth of his death. While the sheer number of his awards alone rank Knight as a superb bronc rider, these songs draw on elements of the Cowboy Code, notably the intimate relationship between man and horse in a way that demonstrates Knight's loyalty to the animal to the very end, emphasizing the tragic picture of a man taking his last ride or being carried away from his horse. And just like "Strawberry Roan," who endures in cowboy culture as a feisty and impossible to tame bronco, "Pete Knight" remains a crucial figure in the history of the rodeo, and his personal story has become part of cowboy myth as the tragic end to one of the sport's greatest competitors and advocates. Yet, not all mythologizing songs recount such devastating stories of being bucked off of a horse to their death, those written by Lund seek to honour cowboys for their skill and passion, painting pictures of local—*living*—heroes.

Lund included two rodeo songs on his debut solo album, "We Used to Ride 'Em," and a story about a local aboriginal "rodeo whisperer" from "Manyberries" (Alberta), who shares his specialized rodeo knowledge with a bull rider about to exit the chute into the arena. The term "rodeo whisperer" is here adapted from "horse whisperer," a style of natural horsemanship that uses communicative techniques to build a relationship with horses (rejecting any form of abusive training methods). Like a "horse whisperer," this aboriginal rodeo expert uses *his* communicative techniques (and expertise) to tell this young man exactly what to do, while also calming his nerves before the gate opened. This

“old-timer” pulled the bull rider’s rope and told him: “Keep your chest out son, keep your elbows bent / Keep a pretty good spring in those knees.” With a quiet calm over the arena, the young bull rider followed the advice given, coming in second place. Scared and nervous to approach this older man to thank him, the song protagonist mustered the courage to say “You gave me good advice,” to which the man from Manyberries responded, “You see son, that’s my heritage.” Years later and all grown up, these individuals cross paths again, and the aged aboriginal rodeo man shares his story with the bull rider:

I used to ride professional ‘till the bottle turned me out  
And now I just take care of the youngsters and I try to tell ‘em what it’s all about  
My forefathers wore the headdress, tooled the flints that they could find,  
Me, I grew up chasing cows and lots of broncs to ride  
So when you see me in my straw hat and my broken Tony Lamas,  
I’m living what I know and that is all that I can promise.

Through this short story, Lund subtly reveals the role that aboriginals played in Alberta’s ranch and rodeo history, something that is often overlooked in the literature. Discussed in chapter 3, several reserves in southern Alberta turned to ranching and agriculture at the turn of the twentieth century, successfully demonstrating their skill in the industry. While there was at that time significant controversy surrounding the involvement and potential exploitation of aboriginals in the public fairs, there has always been a large aboriginal presence at the parades and in the commemorative Indian Village at the Calgary Stampede. Despite arguments about such ceremonial participation, however, there was no apparent objection to aboriginal involvement in rodeo events (Dempsey 2008). As Hugh Dempsey observes, the young aboriginal cowboys often remained outside of these commemorative villages in every aspect: they dressed in western cowboy garb, and competed and lived alongside white cowboys. Thus, they identified as “cowboys” and not as “native” (Dempsey 2008, 61-62). This separation between what Marilyn Burgess (1993, 153-64) calls the “historical past of white colonization” and participation in the rodeo and “prehistoric past” relegates Native meanings to a “pre-history” status—one, presumably, with no relevance to the modern nation. Lund subtly marks this notion out in this passage of the song narrative. The former rodeo competitor’s soliloquy highlights the long history of his people in the land: his ancestors with their traditional ceremonial clothing and activities, and the younger generation of aboriginals living a modern colonialized existence

on the ranch and in the rodeo arena. He will not be found in this clothing, but rather in cowboy attire (a straw hat and Tony Lama boots), passing *his* knowledge and experiences to the next generation of rodeo cowboys, who he likely sees as his kin.

Although the identities of these two men remain concealed, the liner notes in *Modern Pain* reveal that this is a “mostly true story about a local cowboy.” One could speculate that the nervous fourteen-year-old could be Lund himself, recounting an experience with a seasoned aboriginal cowboy from Manyberries. While it would be interesting to know the identity of at least the wise old cowboy, the absence of a name does not diminish the importance of the narrative for preserving the interaction and a piece of local aboriginal history. In fact, “Manyberries” functions in much the same manner as “Strawberry Roan,” which mythologizes the thrilling yet fatal interaction between the fearless rider and the wild bronco that could not be tamed—both of which remain anonymous. The exact narrative of “Strawberry Roan” may never have occurred in reality, but the story has been perpetuated as part of cowboy myth and culture, describing the characteristics that manifest in a macho cowboy and in the perfect opponent in the rodeo arena. Likewise, Lund’s song honours a local figure from the south-west corner of Alberta, in a small town called “Manyberries,” a wise aboriginal man who cares for the young bull riders to tell them what the sport is all about. Like a sage old prophet, the man from “Manyberries” shares his intimate knowledge of the animal and the sport to junior bull riders because, as he says in the chorus, “You see son, that’s my heritage.” Thus, Lund’s song utilizes several elements of the Cowboy Code—the intimate relationship to animals, and the loyalty and hospitality to fellow cowboys—, revealing important qualities of another cowboy type: no longer the strong, macho competitor, this cowboy has retired from competition and has become the conduit for transferring not just bull riding technique, but also the sacred Cowboy Code, to the next generation.

The generational element is crucial in the remaining songs discussed in this chapter, as each celebrates the Lund and Ivins family achievements, talents, and contributions to southern Alberta’s rodeo culture. The singer-songwriter takes great pride in his rodeo heritage, as demonstrated from the fact that the majority of his true rodeo songs share a piece of his family story. Although largely about the Lund family Crockett spurs, “We

Used to Ride ‘Em” honours D. C. Lund and his “silver buckle high point award.” In the narrative, Lund reflects nostalgically on the moment of his father’s retirement from the sport and the fragility of time as rodeo cowboys grapple with aging and their inability to participate in the sport (through the voice of the spurs, of course). For the rodeo community, especially those close to the family, the Crockett spurs and the name of the song bear important cultural value. Worn by three generations of Lunds and family friend Reg Kesler, the Crockett spurs had already been memorialized by D. C. Lund in his watercolour painting, “We Used to Ride Em’.” Thus, the singer-songwriter does not just honour his father the “rodeo bronc rider,” but also his father “the artist.” In so doing, he put into words the story behind his father’s painting, while also recognizing the family heritage within bronc and bull riding (from his grandfather, to his father, to himself), as well as their role within the community and relations with other cowboys. The spurs, then, become a symbol of that long Lund family history in the sport, and of the loyalty and friendship demonstrated within their local rodeo community and, indeed, within the Cowboy Code.

Aging and nostalgia are likewise issues at the centre of the narrative of “Buckin’ Horse Rider.” Although this narrative also honours an unnamed individual, it offers a more obvious tribute to the many accomplishments of a “Buckin’ Horse Rider,” describing his preference for wild horses, his passion for the sport, and highlighting an aspect of his relationship to the local rodeo community. Although inspired (primarily) by Jensen and dedicated to Kesler, the song also highlights the important place that his family fills in southern Albertan rodeo culture. Lund achieves this by both refraining from naming his uncle in the song lyrics, as well as by identifying Jensen alongside “all of the other bronc riders” in his family as the inspiration of the song. Thus, rather than rattling off a long list of his award-winning relatives (and there are many indeed), he made references to important professional achievements and rodeos and the relationship to Kesler. In so doing, he documented an aspect of the Lund/Ivins cowboy heritage in southern Alberta. More importantly, by avoiding a lyrical reference to Jensen (specifically), Lund’s tale is regionalized rather than truly individualized; as such it allows him to tell the story of many “Buckin’ Horse Riders.” While, for Lund, the story may be specific to Jensen, the passion for rodeo, the intimate relationships with horses, and the emotional stress one endures upon retirement from such an intense sport are sentiments to which many former rodeo cowboys



can relate. Through both personal and regional references, the singer-songwriter acknowledged the local rodeo culture of southern Alberta and preserved the memory of one of the community's (and indeed Lund's) heroes. By extension, this nostalgic narrative contributes to local folklore, mythologizing the "Buckin' Horse Rider" as man passionate for wild horses, who has ridden some of Alberta's most prized stock.

Although Lund left rodeo when he was a teenager, it seems as though the cowboy ethos remains within his identity. Not only does each of his rodeo songs demonstrate a deep understanding for the sport and complex emotions felt about retirement, but they also show an incredible pride in his family's place within local rodeo culture. His *own* rodeo song, "Steer Rider's Blues," then, suggests not just his attempt to tell a story about his youth, but also a desire to take his place alongside the talented rodeo cowboys in his family. The song honours a life that Lund did not pursue. He revealed in his video blog about his father that his parents "didn't really get" why he was in a rock band, but remained supportive of him. He believed that his father understood the motivation to create music, as he was an artist himself, but the singer-songwriter is likely suggesting that his parents did not really understand how he did not (or perhaps could not) pursue a life in rodeo, as they had. Despite the fact that Lund remains quite modest about his skill as a steer rider and wrestler, the number of awards that he won reveals that he likely demonstrated the potential to follow in his father's footsteps. This song, then, serves not just as an autobiographical narrative about his youth as a steer rider, but it also marks out the singer-songwriter's position in the Lund family rodeo story, however short lived. In so doing, he acknowledges and cements his personal rodeo story, proudly taking his place alongside his parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents in southern Alberta's rodeo culture.

#### 4.4 Summary

July 2012 marked the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first Calgary Stampede. To honour this milestone, Lund and legendary country-folk music legend Ian Tyson presented five nights of cowboy songs, stories, and memories at Calgary's Matha Cohen Theatre (Bell 2012).<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> In 2013 Lund and Tyson took their show on the road, performing "An Evening of Cowboy Stories and Songs" in Whitehorse, Prince Alberta, Regina, Toronto, and Ottawa (Corb Crew 2013).

The event, called “100 Years of Calgary Cowboys: An Evening of Stories, Songs and Memories with Ian Tyson and Corb Lund,” presented a mix of traditional cowboy songs and the singer-songwriters’ own creations, interspersed with stories about local Albertan history and culture, focusing, of course, on its western heritage. Tyson and Lund brought their own relationship with the rodeo and western culture to the stage in these shows, with Tyson (whom Lund called a “walking Encyclopedia of the West”) detailing the history of the region, and Lund sharing stories about his family’s role in the Stampede (CBC 2012). In the weeks leading up to the first show, Lund (CBC 2012) reflected on his family’s rodeo history:

It’s [the Calgary Stampede] a pretty big part of my family—both my grandfathers competed and my Mom and Dad and me, when I was a kid, and cousins and uncles. I kind of feel like I have to brag a little about my mom because she won the barrel racing in 1959, and that’s the first year they had it, so they recognize her as a pioneer of the Stampede.<sup>35</sup>

While this family history was not unknown to Lund’s audience by 2012, these shows with Tyson provided a unique platform for the singer-songwriter to share more of the Lund/Ivins story, highlight the significant moments in the careers of his relatives, reveal his *own* connections to the Stampede (and rodeo in general), and perform his cowboy songs on stage with a western icon on a significant celebratory occasion in Calgary. Through these shows, Lund cemented his family ties to southern Alberta, revealing how intertwined his family’s history is with that of the region (both dating back to the late 1800), and the culture and traditions that define its identity.

The roots of Lund’s western *musical* heritage can be traced back to his grandfather and “Strawberry Roan,” one of the oldest and most popular rodeo cowboy songs in the repertoire and the first song the young singer-songwriter learned to play and sing. While the majority of the recordings present shorter cleaned-up versions of the ballad’s lyrics, Lund is often heard singing and referencing a text closer to Fletcher’s original. He learned the song in the same manner as hundreds, if not thousands, of cowboys preceding him: as part of the long oral tradition of passing songs from one generation to the next—no score, no recording, just a cowboy teaching his grandson about the tale of a daring bronc rider and the wild “Strawberry Roan.” As this song passed from one Lund generation to the next, the singer-songwriter joined a centuries old cowboy tradition, and “Strawberry Roan” became the source and analogue of his future cowboy songs. Indeed, Lund’s rodeo cowboy songs reveal the influence of the song through animated rhythms (mimicking the movement of horses or bulls), traditional “cowboy chord” harmonies (in most songs), and, most importantly, using a narrative device of the unnamed protagonist to allow one cowboy’s story to represent a community.

Lund’s rodeo cowboy songs seem to present the struggle between a youthful restless energy and the nostalgic longing for the good old days from the perspective of retired cowboys. And while these are eternal themes, relevant in all towns, cities, and countries, in

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<sup>35</sup> This news story even revealed that his grandparents had even considered *marrying* at the Calgary Stampede—but his grandmother refused to wear the traditional western wear that the Stampede officials had requested of them.

his songs there is a sense of regionality, as the narratives unfold in specific rodeo communities and in defined locations: near the Exhibition grounds, on the back of Reg Kesler's horses, at rodeos in Mountain View and Picture Butte, and in Manyberries. Each one of the songs analyzed here tells the tale of local rodeo cowboys, highlighting their accomplishments and revealing their failures, all the while placing them squarely within a fixed geographic region of southern Alberta—branching out only to prominent rodeos in Pendleton and Cheyenne in a way that further solidifies their reputation and stature in the rodeo scene. That all of the song protagonists are relatives of the singer-songwriter solidifies Lund's roots to the region even further and reveals (without any ego) just how important his family is within local culture. While no one would contest Lund's very own place within that lineage, "Steer Rider's Blues" emerges in his discography as a way to solidify his own place within the story, marking out his own place within southern Alberta's rodeo heritage, alongside the Lunds and Ivinses before him.

Chapter 5 returns to the land to consider the role that Lund's music plays in one of the most controversial debates in Alberta and in the country: the fossil fuel energy industry. This is a very personal topic for Lund, whose family fought to protect their land from coal bed methane extraction. His first song to address the energy industry was in an up-tempo celebration of the rough neck, a song written for (and with) his brother, Kevin, who works in the oil sands in northern Alberta. The songs that follow on *Losin' Lately Gambler* and *Cabin Fever* offer a more critical stance on the debate, providing a platform for the oft-ignored rancher. Analyzed chronologically, the songs in chapter 5 demonstrate shifting attitudes toward the energy industry and reveal an artist increasingly concerned with an impending fossil fuel shortage apocalypse.



## Chapter 5. Fossil Fuel Energy Industry

Through his songs about Alberta's history, culture, landscape, and environment, we have observed Corb Lund's deep love and respect for his native province. One area of Albertan history that ties all of these topics together is the fossil fuel energy industry. Since the birth of the province in 1905, fossil fuels, oil in particular, have been an integral component of Alberta's history and identity: they have ushered the province through its boom and bust cycles, provided employment for its citizens, and have brought international attention and money to it. But they have also contributed to the destruction of the northern boreal forest landscape, the contamination of Alberta's land, water, and air, and created increased health issues for wildlife and humans. For Lund, an artist deeply in tune with the land and environment, these issues have increasingly become an area of focus in his music, videos, blogs, and interviews—notably since the 2009 release of *Losin' Lately Gambler*.

Alberta has been the epicentre of Canada's energy industry since the February 1947 discovery of crude oil near Leduc, a moment that shifted the province's industrial and economic centre from agriculture to energy.<sup>1</sup> The western province is Canada's largest producer of fossil fuels, holding 70 percent of the country's natural gas and coal reserves, and an 98 percent, thus an overwhelming majority of its oil sands deposits (Alberta Energy 2015a). Over the last two decades, Alberta has actively pursued development in the bituminous oil sands under the northern boreal forest region and of the coal bed methane (CBM) trapped in the southern foothills and plains. New technologies and high international prices for energy sources have made extraction and processing of these alternative resources more profitable, but have attracted an increasing amount of attention

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<sup>1</sup> Although the first oil strike occurred in 1914 in Turner Valley, Alberta, the literature suggests that it was this crude oil discovery at Leduc that had the more significant and transformative impact on Alberta's economy (Breen 1993; Byfield 2001; Finch 2005; Gow 2005).

because the extraction processes for both the oil sands and CBM have had a significant impact not just on the environment, but on the health of humans and animals as well.<sup>2</sup> Surface mining in the oil sands, for example, has garnered significant attention because its effect is immediately visible on the devastated boreal forest landscape in northern Alberta.<sup>3</sup> Despite the passage of the Conservation and Reclamation Regulation of the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act (1993/2013), which requires that mining companies return mined lands to their previous state, the open pit north of Fort McMurray remains a target for protesters, as well as prominent celebrities such as director James Cameron (Wingrove 2010), folk-rock artist Neil Young (Koring and Cryderman 2013), and actor Leonardo DiCaprio (CBC News 2014c), whose visits have put a spotlight on the oil sands environmental issues.<sup>4</sup> In southern Alberta, coal bed methane extraction has been a hot-button topic amongst local ranching/farming communities; the main drilling method, a process called “fracking,” uses explosions underground to help release methane gas trapped in coal seams (Thornton 2014, 662-63; Rivard et al. 2014, 64). While CBM extraction has not received the same level of public or scholarly attention as the oil sands, the issues are just as significant: not only are wells encroaching on privately owned land in southern Alberta, but fracking has the potential to contaminate aquifers and water wells, which would lead to health issues for humans and livestock (Jenish 2012, 14; Rivard et al. 2014; Meng and Ashby 2014; Sovoacool 2014).

This chapter addresses the role that Lund’s music plays in the growing debate surrounding oil and gas mining in Alberta. Specifically, I am interested in how Lund’s music defines a strong relationship to, and understanding of, place, offering multiple perspectives on the fossil fuel industry and the impact that it has had on the livelihood of

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<sup>2</sup> The recent crash in the price of oil has slowed oil sands developments in the near-term, and spending cuts, layoffs, and deferred of expansion plans already implemented at Shell Canada, Suncor Energy Inc., Canadian Natural Resources Ltd., and Cenovus Energy (to name a few) (Dykstra 2015; Purdon 2015; van Loon and Tuttle 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Former premier, the late Peter Lougheed, stated “surface mining takes a huge bite out of area, like stripping top soil off a farm” (Raymont and Radford 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Leonardo DiCaprio’s trip to the northern Alberta site caused a commotion not just because he was viewed as an “outsider” (i.e., not Canadian), but also because he participated in the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge with the Chiefs of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation and of the Cree First Nation and The Sierra Club President. The First Nation Chiefs nominated the President of the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers (Dave Collyer) and executives of Suncor Canada and Shell, while DiCaprio nominated Prime Minister Stephen Harper (The Canadian Press 2014).

individuals and local ranching/farming communities. His songs have offered complex political perspectives on the energy industry, including a celebration of the men who work in the rigs in “Roughest Neck Around” (2002), his lament over the loss of his family to the encroaching industry in “This Is My Prairie” (2009), and his post-apocalyptic “Gettin’ Down on the Mountain” (2012) about life in the wake of a fossil fuel shortage. The songs will be examined in chronological order, highlighting the evolution of Lund’s position on the industry, and diverse musical approaches as the province becomes increasingly entrenched in the debate. While Lund seems to avoid making an overt political statement in “Roughest Neck Around” and “This is My Prairie,” the videos and “Gettin’ Down on the Mountain” reveal a tendency toward anticipating the (fuel shortage) apocalypse and suggest that the singer-songwriter is increasingly concerned with the energy industry’s impact on his native Alberta. In his work on the central Appalachian mountaintop removal mining (MTR), Travis Stimeling discusses surrounding music and environmental protest, and demonstrates the ways in which popular song both reflects and *affects* contemporary attitudes toward the environment and MTR. He (2012, 12) considers, among other things, the ways in which musical styles are used to invoke understanding of place, history, and regional identity (Stimeling 2012, 4). In addition to this engagement with regional music styles, Stimeling demonstrates how songs on *both* sides of the debate can be read through a nostalgic lens whether that be with regard to the exploitation of a working-class, the sacrifice of environment and society for the greater good of the nation, or for a sacred time when the land had yet to be touched by the industry. Such responses reveal the myriad ways in which a community responds to changes in their natural world, especially in places like Central Appalachia, and indeed Alberta, where residents have competing understandings of local history, and where occupation and lifestyle result in varied relationships to landscape. His study provides a framework for understanding the ways in which Lund’s music challenges his provincial government to consider the growing impact that the fossil fuel industry has on rural communities and the ranching industry.

Despite mounting tension and general concern over the destruction of land and environment, however, Albertans have displayed a tendency to accept the negative effects of the energy industry so that the province can continue to thrive financially, and individuals can have good-paying jobs. This is especially true in light of the recent crash in

the price of oil, which has slowed oil sands developments in the near-term and spending cuts, layoffs, and deferred expansion plans have already been implemented by Shell Canada, Suncor Energy Inc., Canadian Natural Resources Ltd., and Cenovus Energy, to name a few affected companies (Dykstra 2015; Purdon 2015; Van Loon and Tuttle 2015). Even though this is likely a temporary situation, the fall out (layoffs and hiring freezes, for example) certainly have a significant impact on the province's economy and the ways in which residents who depend on the oil sands for income react to the industry, the government, and protestors. Such contradictions contribute to the complexities of Albertan identity. Indeed, many Albertans find themselves in the middle of these tensions with family members and friends working in the fossil fuel energy industry, yet desperate to find another solution to digging up their province and polluting the land, air, and water. Lund finds himself in just this position with a brother working as a toolpush in the oil rigs and a family steeped in the province's ranching and rodeo history. He uses his music to explore different aspects of the debate, providing a vehicle for social commentary and initiating conversation on alternative resources. As such, his songs do not merely tell stories about the interactions between the energy industry, government, and individuals and local communities. Rather, Lund's music establishes a strong sense of regional identity and connection to local issues, capturing the complexities of place, class, and gender that arise from the fossil fuel industry. Indeed, the singer-songwriter embodies the contradictions of Alberta and its identity: he praises the strength and sacrifices that "roughnecks" make on a daily basis, and explores the negative destructive impact of the energy industry on ranching, and predicts a future of social unrest when the oil runs out.

## **5.1 Country Music and the Fossil Fuel Energy Industry**

The fossil fuel energy industry has occupied an important place within popular music in general, and country music specifically. The repertoire is extensive and has addressed the industry from a variety of angles, including working conditions, the hardships and lifestyle of the miner/driller, and mining/rigging disasters and resulting health and environmental issues to name a few. Most strikingly, mining songs are strongly dependent on context and place, and the repertoire has provided ample documentation of the socio-cultural dynamics



of mining camps and towns (Turnbull [forthcoming]).<sup>5</sup> Geographic places like West Virginia, Kentucky, California, Montana, eastern Canadian provinces, and British Columbia (to name a few) have emerged in song narratives as locations with long and important mining and drilling heritages. With the health, environmental, and economic risks involved in these professions, protest songs have been, perhaps, the most dominant narrative-type in the repertoire, as numerous folk and country singer-songwriters have turned to music to address “corrupt, aggressive mine owners” and boost the morale for striking miners (Turnbull [forthcoming, 7]). Indeed, in Canada, the largest body of protest songs are about mining (Fowke 1969, 37, 39, 41-42).

Because mining songs play such an important role in chronicling this often-marginalized sector of society, folklorists and historians have been active in collecting them. Their efforts have effectively preserved the songs that accompanied work in the mines or were used at gatherings (both social engagements or protest rallies). A largely oral tradition, these songs provide a unique “window into a life that was fascinating, but generally unacknowledged by non-miners” (Turnbull [forthcoming]). The Smithsonian Folkways label, for example, has released nine compilations of labour songs, which include a number of mining songs.<sup>6</sup> In Canada, the majority of original mining songs emerged in camps in British Columbia and the Maritime provinces. While collections such as *Canadian Folk Songs: Old and New* (1927), *Folk Songs of Canada* (1954), and *The Penguin Book of Canadian Folk Songs* (1973) do not include songs about mining, Edith Fowke’s article on “Labor and Industrial Protest Songs in Canada” has reproduced lyrics to a number of early mining protest songs, including ballads recounting the two-year strike near Nanaimo, B.C. (e.g. “Bowser’s Seventy-Twa,” 1913) as well as the 1910 strike in

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<sup>5</sup> Gillian Turnbull presented her paper “*CoalDust Grins: The Conscious Creation of Western Canadian Mining Songs*” on a panel entitled Country Music, Place and the North American Fossil Fuel Energy Industry at the 40<sup>th</sup> annual conference of the Society for American Music, a panel in which I participated as well. Turnbull very kindly shared a copy of her manuscript with me after the conference. Her article will appear in *Traditional Musics in Canada: Contemporary Expressions and Cultural Resonances*, edited by Anna Hoefnagels, Sherry Johnson, and Judith Klassen.

<sup>6</sup> Turnbull ([forthcoming, 7-8]) lists the following Folkways collections *Down in a Coal Mine* (Joe Glazer, 1962-64), *Songs of the Southland* (Harry and Jeanie West, 1963), *Tipple, Loom & Rail: Songs of the Industrialization of the South* (Mike Seeger, 1966), *When Kentucky Had No Union Men* (George Davis, 1967), *We Just Come to Work Here, We Don’t Come to Die* (n.d.), *Gallant Lads are We: Songs of the British Industrial Revolution* (Louis Killen, 1980), *They Moved My Job To Georgia or Was It Tennessee?* (Peyton Hopkins, 1981), *Classic Mountain Songs from Smithsonian Folkways* (2002), *Classic Labor Songs from Smithsonian Folkways* (2006).

Nova Scotia (e.g. “Arise Ye Nova Scotia Slaves,” 1910) (Fowke 1969, 37-43).<sup>7</sup> Eastern Canadian mining and labour songs have been preserved in *Songs and Ballads of Nova Scotia* (1933) and *Coal Dust on the Fiddle: Songs and Stories of the Bituminous Industry* (1943). As Turnbull ([forthcoming, 1]) has noted, mining songs in the prairies are fewer by number, which she argues is largely a result of the migratory labour population and the fact that much of Alberta’s population at the turn of the twentieth century was made up of workers from eastern Canada and the USA. As such, many of the tunes sung in mines of Alberta describe life, work, and mining practices of eastern Canada and the USA. A significant contribution to preserving Alberta’s mining culture was the publication of photographer Lawrence Christmas’ collection of coal miner portraits entitled *CoalDust Grins* (1998). This book inspired the composition of what Turnbull has referred to as “consciously created” mining songs, that is, songs written with the goal of documenting contemporary mining practices. These songs, co-written with local artists including Dick Damron (“Shiny Black Coal”), Dave McCann (“Surrounding Green”), and Steve Coffey (“Shovel Operator”), describe the life, work, and culture of a much-neglected industry that has, indeed, contributed to Alberta’s complex identity (Turnbull [forthcoming, 13-19]).

Country music songwriters turned naturally to mining and drilling for inspiration. As Turnbull notes, many of the genre’s first artists grew up in regions where mining (and later oil and shale gas excavation) was a dominant industry, providing rich source material for contemporary songwriters (Turnbull [forthcoming]). Hard core artists like Merle Travis, Loretta Lynn, Jeanie Ritchie and Darrel Scott from Kentucky, Kathy Mattea from West Virginia, and Corb Lund and Tim Hus from Alberta inevitably turned to the topic at some point in their career. While Travis’s “Sixteen Tons” (1946) and “Dark as a Dungeon” (1946) speak of the dangers and drudgery of working in the mines (in general), other songs address specific regional issues, communicating personal stories and experiences that work to document the history of industry and place. Loretta Lynn’s “Coal Miner’s Daughter” (1969), for example, reflects on the hardships of growing up in a mining family in Butcher Hollow, KY, where inadequate wages and families struggled daily to purchase the basic life necessities.<sup>8</sup> Just three hours south of Lynn’s hometown is Harlan County, a region that has

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<sup>7</sup> Fowke edited both *Folk Songs of Canada* (1954) and *The Penguin Book of Canadian Folk Songs* (1973).

<sup>8</sup> In her lyrics, Loretta Lynn refers to her hometown as Butcher “Holler” instead of “Hollow.”

been at the center of two important labour movements. The “Harlan County War” of the 1930s saw miners strike to fight for better organization and wages. Out of the chaos of this decade-long battle that saw individuals on all sides killed emerged three folk singers who had a significant impact on contemporary and later artists seeking to respond to, and protest, mining: Aunt Molly Jackson and her half-brother Jim Garland (“The Death of Harry Simms,” ca. 1932), and Florence Reece, who immortalized the conflict in her song “Which Side Are You On?” (Hevener 2002). Four decades later in 1972, Harlan County found itself embroiled in another labour battle; this time the striking miners inspired both music and film. Barbara Kopple’s 1976 Oscar-winning documentary followed the striking miners as they fought for safer working conditions, fair labour practices, and better wages in *Harlan County, USA*. The soundtrack for the film featured songs by important singer-songwriters from the region, including Travis (“Dark as a Dungeon”), Garland (“Death of Harry Simms”), Reece (“Which Side Are You On?”), and contributions by newcomers Hazel Dickens (“Black Lung,” “Green Rolling Hills”) and Sarah Gunning (“Come All You Coal Miners,” “Hard Working Miner”).<sup>9</sup> The struggles of miners from Harlan County have continued to inspire songs, including Darrel Scott’s “You’ll Never Leave Harlan Alive” (1997) and Dierks Bentley’s “Down in the Mine” (2010)—both of which have offered personal reflections about the history of mining in the region.<sup>10</sup> While Scott traces his bloodline back to Harlan County, where folks who dig for coal “never leave Harlan alive,” Bentley laments the fate of young men from the region whose only career prospects were mining. Co-written with Jon Randall Stewart, soft shell artists Dierks Bentley sorrowfully reflects on the toll that the occupation takes on the human body and describes a mining disaster that claimed the lives of five men. The narrative makes reference to the use of yellow canaries in mining warn miners of potential danger.<sup>11</sup> Changes in oxygen levels due to collapsed tunnels or shafts or gas leaks would kill the small yellow bird before the miners, alerting the men to exit the mine-shaft immediately. The songs on the *Harlan County, USA* soundtrack, as well as those by artist directly and indirectly impacted by the

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<sup>9</sup> Sarah Gunning was Jim Garland’s sister, and Aunt Molly Jackson’s half-sister.

<sup>10</sup> “You’ll Never Leave Harlan Alive” appeared on Darrel Scott’s 1997 debut album *Aloha from Nashville*. While the names of the character Tillie Helton and the Richland River were made up for the song narrative, much of the song is autobiographical. The song has been covered by a number of artists, including Brad Paisley (*Part II*, 2001), Patty Loveless (*Mountain Soul*, 2001), and Kathy Mattea (*Coal*, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> The Police also reference this safety strategy in their song “Canary in the Coalmine” from their 1980 album *Zenyatta Mondatta*.

events of the 1930s and 1970s, honour the miners and families who work and live in the region, and the sacrifices made to dig for what Bentley affectionately refers to as “hillbilly gold.” These songs document the story of Central Appalachia, and work to define the character and identity of a place and community that has suffered greatly for its coal.

With the rise of new excavation methods like strip or surface mining in Central Appalachian Coal Region in the 1960s, environmentalists and activists turned again to song to vent their frustrations. Artists like Kentucky native Jeanie Ritchie, for example, lamented the impact that strip mining has had on the landscape and environment of her homeland in her 1974 song “Black Waters” (discussed further below). The issues raised by activists and songwriters in the 1970s remain relevant today, as a new body of repertoire has emerged both in opposition and support of mountain top removal (MTR) mining in central Appalachia. As Stimeling (2012, 7) has noted, songwriters opposing MRT practices drew “frequently upon imagery and place-based rhetoric that suggests that residents should serve as stewards of the land” to help save the Appalachian Mountains and its ecosystem. Local artists, such as Todd Burge (“What Would Moses Climb,” 2009) and Donna Price and Greg Treadway (“The Mountains of Home,” 2002), emphasize this kind of regional “mountain religion” that draws on biblical metaphor to tell their stories and highlight a spiritual connection to land. The more mainstream artists from this region have contributed to the debate by bringing awareness to the repertoire of songs written by important yet often-overlooked songwriters from Appalachia, including Kentucky native Patty Loveless and West Virginian Brad Paisley, who have both recorded their own versions of Scott’s 1997 song about Harlan County. Kathy Mattea’s albums *Coal* (2008) and *Calling Me Home* (2012) offer an interpretation of important mining protest songs from the 1930s, 1940s, and 1970s (Stimeling 2012, 15). The 2006 mine explosion in Sago, West Virginia, that took the lives of twelve miners inspired Mattea’s album and her increasing involvement with environmental activism in the region. For Mattea, whose grandfathers were miners in West Virginia, recording these songs came from a desire to celebrate a sense of “attachment to place, to a piece of land,” stating:

The mountains where my mom and dad grew up, they knew them like the back of their hand. They were like family. I don’t think we live like that anymore. I wanted

to find songs that really spoke to that as a celebration of this very subtle flavour of Appalachian culture (Bonfiglio 2014).

Not only do Mattea's albums spotlight important songs by local artists, but they also seek to understand a relationship to land and ecosystem that had been inherent to the culture and traditions of the region generations before her. By extension, the narrative praise Central Appalachia's endangered landscape, and memorialize the work of activists who spent much of their career fighting to protect this sacred region.

Over the last two decades attention has turned from coal to the impact that excavating alternative resources such as shale gas, coal bed methane, and the oil sands have had on health, environment, and landscape. While this has, in the case of artists like Mattea, Loveless, and Paisley, encouraged a revival of protest songs by Ritchie, Dickens, and others, it has also inspired the composition of new material that reflects on contemporary issues on local, national, and global levels. Alberta native Jennifer Berezan, for example, wrote "My Memory Forever" (2012) as a tribute to the lost landscape and wildlife of northern Alberta, pointing specifically to the destruction of the boreal forest, the pollution of the Athabasca River, and the decimation of the caribou population. The accompanying music video functions as a short documentary, following a helicopter ride of Berezan and two colleagues as they fly over Wood Buffalo Municipality (Berezan 2012). The camera captures their reactions to seeing the open mines, tailings ponds, and burning flare stacks that dot the skyline, as captions describing the locations being filmed alongside production, pollution, and health statistics flash on the screen. Berezan's video implores fellow Canadians to consider these images and how this industry will impact the country going forward, stating that this devastated landscape is the price that has been paid for access to energy resources. Lund's songs, which will be discussed in detail below, also question the effect that the fossil fuel energy industry has had on Alberta, focusing specifically on issues of pollution, preservation, and land ownership in ranch territory in "This is My Prairie." Beyond these provincial issues, however, the singer-songwriter also reveals his concern for the future in "Gettin' Down on the Mountain," in which he predicts a grim apocalyptic world in the wake of a fossil fuel shortage.

Not all songs offer critical observations about impact of mining and drilling. Many songs celebrate the coal miner as a hero of the working class, making significant sacrifices to bring fossil fuels to the people. Kentucky native Tom T. Hall's "I'm a Coal Mining Man" (2006) "depicts a patriotic, hard-working coal miner who is proud to support his family" and his country's economy by digging for coal (Stimeling 2012, 14). Alberta native Tim Hus, known for writing occupational songs, released *Alberta Crude* (2004) and *Huskies & Husqvarnas* (2006), which featured songs oil drilling in the western Canadian province. Songs like "Alberta Crude," "One More Oil Boom," and "Pipeline" honour the men and women who work in oil land rigs and oil sands in Fort McMurray. In "One More Oil Boom" Hus's protagonist pleads for "one more oil boom" before he dies, stating that he would be happy to fulfill roles as a derrick hand or work in the oil sands. This miner only wants a final chance to say goodbye to the mining camp life and culture that has played a significant role in this man's life. "Pipeline" is a fascinating contribution to the repertoire, as it praises a *female* driller in Fort McMurray. Although she drives the D-9 Caterpillar and wears "steel toed boots and a dirty hard hat" just like the men, Hus differentiates this woman from the rest of the riggers claiming that she is "refined"—an obvious play on the refinery process of removing impurities or undesirable elements from oil. Similarly, Lund's "Roughest Neck Around" (discussed in detail below) also praises the life and work of the men who work in the oil sands in northern Alberta, referring not just to tools and vehicles, but also incorporating phrases and slang terminology used by the men in the rigs.

While Hus and Lund have written songs that applaud the Albertan oil sand miner, songs written by men who worked in the oil sands offer nuanced reflections on their life in Fort McMurray, Alberta. In "Living in Alberta" (*Something Happened*, 2010) Jim Dorie recounts his decision to move to Fort McMurray to work in the oil sands, revealing that he just wanted to make a little money and then move back home. He describes the long bus commute to work and the landscape altered as a result of the flare stack that resembled the sunrise, and acknowledges the good friends made in northern Alberta. Despite his obvious pride in his job, Dorie mourns his Maritime home and pines for the day he and his family can return. The song compares life in the two regions, notably by contrasting the eastern Canadian beaches with the black tar sands. Dorie returned to Nova Scotia upon retirement from Syncrude (Budd 2014). Ken Flaherty, another oil sands retiree (from Suncor), has also

contributed to the repertoire with “Highway 63” and “Oil Sand Miner” (from *Life in K-Flat*, 2008). In “Highway 63,” he describes his long-trek north to Fort McMurray toward a challenging, but good-paying job so that he can pay off his debts. Although his hours are long and the work is hard, he reveals that the hardest part about the job is the white line on that highway, away from his family. “Oil Sand Miner” recounts a typical day in his life, the long hours at work, the harsh weather conditions, and acknowledges the good friends made working in the oil sands. He draws strength from the manual labour of his job and the vehicles used on the site, and proudly declares himself an “Oil Sand Miner.”

Songs about working in the oil sands offer startlingly different perspectives on the occupation. While Hus applauds the oil sand miner in an almost jingoistic manner, his standpoint remains that of an outsider observing the trade and rattling off the names of tools and vehicles and how they are used on the job, songs by Dorie and Flaherty offer personalized reflections on the physical and emotional stresses of the job, referring to Fort McMurray landmarks, the commute, and the landscape as ways to describe the reality of oil sands camp life and culture. Despite having possible connections to the oil sands and riggers that they can refer to for better understanding the profession, country singer-songwriters like Hus and Lund are not in a position to contribute such nuanced narratives about working and living in Fort McMurray. These musical celebrations of oil sand miners hold an important place in the repertoire, however, for honouring a profession that receives a significant amount of negative attention for the significant impact that drilling practices have on the environment. Not only do these songs acknowledge the personal sacrifices made by oil sand miners, but they also highlight the many reasons for which these men and women move to Fort McMurray. When combined with songs by Dorie and Flaherty, “One More Oil Boom,” “Pipeline,” and Lund’s “Roughest Neck Around” seek to put a human face on the profession, reminding listeners and opponents of the oil sands that the men and women who choose to work in Fort McMurray cannot be blamed for the larger environmental debate that surrounds the industry. Indeed, these are just hard-working individuals trying to make an honest living to support their families back home.

The majority of the songs discussed here have been either written or performed by hard core singer-songwriters. A large body of songs about mining and excavation practices

has emerged in the discographies of country artists directly affected by the industry. For example, artists such as Jean Ritchie and Kathy Mattea grew up in mining families, with parents or grandparents (or other family members) working in this dangerous profession. For these singer-songwriters, music has been an outlet not just for reflecting on the impact that the industry has had on the landscape of their origins, but it has also been a way to honour their families and hometowns. Others may not have familial connections to the industry, but have watched friends go off into field, or observed the destruction of their native landscape for the resources contained within its soil. The hard core artists discussed above have contributed a number of songs that addressed issues related to the environment, working-class exploitation, and the dangers of the field. Of course, not all songs have been critical of the industry, as artists working within traditional, folk, and Americana styles such as Tom T. Hall, Tim Hus, Jim Dorie, and Ken Flaherty have celebrated the profession, honouring the sacrifices made by the individuals working in the mines. Songs written by both opponents and proponents of the industry and its practices demonstrate a strong attachment to place, each offering their own assessment of the impacts that this industry has had on their landscape, their lives, and their families. There are fewer contributions to the topic by soft shell artists. Brad Paisley offered a haunting cover of Darrell Scott's "You'll Never Leave Harlan Alive" on his second studio album, *Part II* (2001). While Paisley was arguably a more traditionalist country artist at this early stage in his career, the expressive vocal performance and sparse musical setting revealed that this topic hits particularly close to home for the West Virginia native. In "Down in the Mine," Dierks Bentley, an artist who straddles the line between hard core and soft shell, pays homage to the harsh life and working conditions in Harlan County through a folk and bluegrass-inspired sound. While much of Bentley's discography consists of country-pop party anthems and (more recently) bro-country numbers, this song and indeed entire album, revealed an interest in exploring important social themes and understanding of country's stylistic traditions.<sup>12</sup> Regardless the cultural sphere, it seems, country artists have turned to this theme not just with a high level

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<sup>12</sup> A style of mainstream country music, "bro-country" draws on a variety of styles outside of country, including hip hop, rap, rock, and pop, with stories revolving around pick-up trucks, alcohol consumption (especially beer), and dating attractive women (referred to lyrically as "girls"). Notable examples of bro-country include Florida Georgia Line's "Cruise" (2012), Luke Bryan's "That's My Kind of Night" (2013), Blake Shelton's "Boys 'Round Here" (2013), and Dierks Bentley's "Drunk on a Plane" (2014) (Dukes 2014; Smith 2015).



of seriousness and respect for the industry and affected communities, but through the sounds of traditional country and roots music styles.

Much of the repertoire of mining songs demonstrates a strong sense of regionalism and relationship to place. From mining songs at the turn of the century, to those recounting the strikes in Harlan County, and even the songs about the oil sands, the landscape and ecosystem of specific geographic regions emerge as sacred places that should be fought for and better preserve for future generations. The singer-songwriters engaging in these debates have demonstrated their regionalism by drawing from the musical styles associated with these specific locations (bluegrass, gospel, and country) as a method for invoking and indeed negotiating deeper understandings and relationships to the traditions, cultures, politics, and histories of place.

## **5.2 Alberta's Fossil Fuel Energy Industry**

Fossil fuels (and oil in particular) have been an integral component of the province's history and identity: they have ushered Alberta's economy through boom and bust cycles, have provided employment for its citizens, and have brought international attention and money to the province. The oil sands and the energy industry have come under increasing scrutiny from politicians, environmentalists, and affected First Nations communities in the broader debate surrounding Canada's energy policy and proposed pipeline projects that, if approved, would connect Alberta with the country's east and west coasts, and with Texas in the southern United States.<sup>13</sup> The current Canadian government, under the leadership of Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper, has great interest in seeing the oil sands, and Alberta's energy resources in general, become a key component to the country's future prosperity. Since he began his tenure as Prime Minister in 2006, Stephen Harper has

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<sup>13</sup> The year 2014 has been decisive for these pipeline projects: TransCanada's West-East pipeline that will deliver oil from Alberta to the country's east coast entered the first stage of approval (March 2014), and the Canadian government approved Enbridge's Northern Gateway pipeline joining Bruderheim, AB to Kitimat, B.C (June 2014) (see Steward 2014; Payton 2014). While US President Obama and his government has not yet made their final decision on the Keystone XL pipeline that would send Alberta's synthetic crude to Texas, in February 2015 he vetoed a bill to build the pipeline. He has recently demonstrated an increasingly critical view on the oil sands, noting that the Canadian extraction process is "extraordinarily dirty" and voiced concerns about piping oil through farmland (Morgan 2015).

actively promoted the oil sands as a desirable place for foreign investment, and as a safe and reliable alternative for countries that wish to pursue energy resources outside of the Middle East (Way 2011, 76). Harper's decisions and policy, however, reveal a desire for unfettered access of the oil sands by private oil companies, often at the expense of the environment, local communities, and other industries that make use of land and water (Jenish 2012). In December 2013, for example, the federal government approved expansion of Shell Canada's Jackpine mine, despite reports that it would cause irreversible damage to the environment in the Chipewyan First Nation region. The band's lawsuit claims that the government's decision not only infringed upon the First Nation's constitutional right of consultation, but also argued that the approval process broke three federal statutes: the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, the Species at Risk Act, and the Migratory Birds Convention Act (Tait 2013; Weber 2014; Whittington 2014).

### *5.2.1 The Oil Sands*

Once called "dirty oil" because it was expensive to extract, dirty to refine, and left a huge environmental footprint, the oil sands are now referred to as the "black gold" of the north. Despite the fact that the oil sands have been under production since 1967, it was not until recently that they became a major player in the global market, thanks, in part, to the determination of former Alberta premier, the late Ralph Klein (Humphries 2008). Canada's rise in the energy industry is tied to significant changes in global politics over the last decade. Until the tragic events of 11 September 2001, oil supply and pricing had been relatively stable—until more recently, that is, with the late 2014 crash in the price of oil. When the price of oil spiked in 2003, unconventional oil (rather than conventional crude oil) emerged as a major player in the North American market. Three weeks after the American invasion of Iraq in March 2003, the global energy authorities deemed the oil sands "economically viable," and the reserves jumped from 5 billion to 179 billion barrels, propelling the country's supply from 21<sup>st</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup>, just behind Saudi Arabia (Raymont and Radford 2008). Following the announcement Premier Klein and a delegation of oilmen traveled to Washington to convince Americans to consider the oil sands as an alternative to their dependence on the Middle East. Prior to this delegation, the two operating companies

were Canadian owned, Suncor (established in 1967 as the Great Canadian Oil Sands Company) and Syncrude (established in 1977); the companies were producing 375,000 barrels a days. Following the delegation, companies from the USA, France, China, and Japan set up operations in northern Alberta, and by 2006 were producing 1.1 million barrels a day (Ewart 2013).

One of the largest reserves in the world, northern Alberta's oil sands deposits cover more than 140,000 km<sup>2</sup> of land and account for more than 46 percent of Canada's total oil production (Humphries 2008). The majority of Canada's deposits lie under the boreal forest in northern Alberta (Fig. 5.1), holding an estimated 179 billion barrels of recoverable oil.<sup>14</sup> Despite the significant supply of bituminous sands, the two main methods of oil sands extraction have a damaging impact on the environment. *Surface mining* has the largest environmental and visible impact on landscape: hundreds of square kilometres of boreal forest and muskeg are cleared, and the overburden layer containing silt, clay, and shale is stripped off the land before the digging can begin. Hydraulic or electric top shovels remove the bituminous sands, scooping about one hundred tons at a time, and feed large mining trucks that can carry up to 400 tons of material (Topf 2010). The sands are then transported to a cleaning facility where they are mixed with warm water to separate the bitumen before it can be processed into a synthetic crude oil. Although the visible impact of a devastated boreal forest is disheartening to many, surface mining has actually been limited to an area of 4,800 km<sup>2</sup> near Fort McMurray, and as of 31 March 2009, only 602 km<sup>2</sup> has been disturbed. This figure of surface minable area accounts for roughly 20 percent of the entire Athabasca deposit. The remaining 80 percent of the oil sands deposit requires an *in situ* well-based method of extraction called *Steam Assisted Gravity Drainage* (SAGD), which has a less superficial impact on land (CBC 2015; Timoney and Lee 2009, 66-67). The process involves drilling two parallel horizontal wells into the ground, with one roughly 4-6 metres above the other. The upper well injects steam, while the lower well pushes the oil

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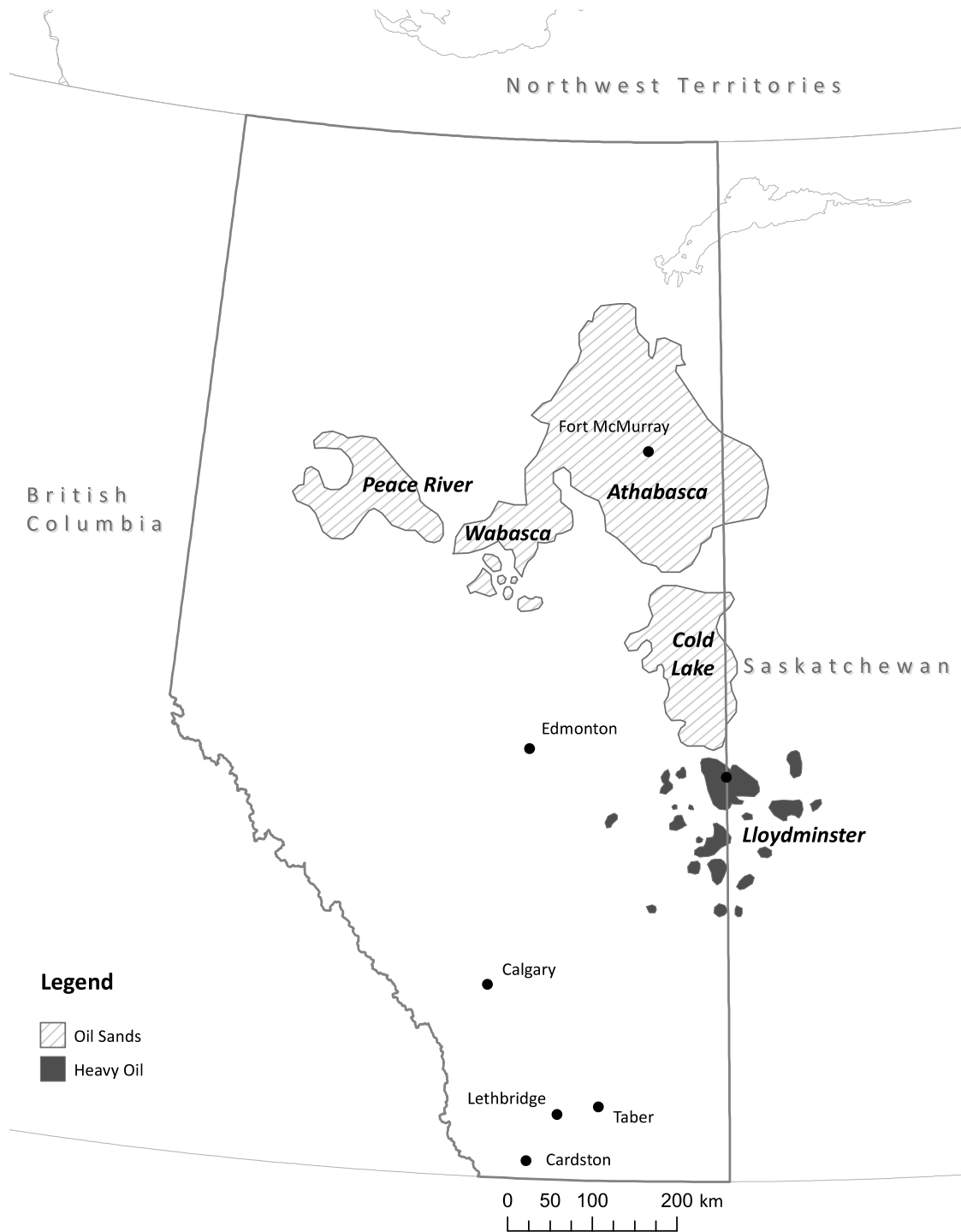
<sup>14</sup> This is approximately 1.84 trillion barrels of bitumen (Raymont and Radford 2008). The first oil sands extraction plant was built near Fort McMurray in 1923, which is now the center of oil sands activity. Throughout the 1930s, oil sands projects increased in number with the Bitumount Plant opening outside of Fort McMurray and an operation opening on the Horse River. In 1967, the Great Canadian Oil Sands Project (now called Suncor Energy) opened and was the largest single private investment in Canadian history, producing 45,000 barrels of synthetic crude a day. The Great Canadian Oil Sands Project/Suncor was followed by Syncrude consortium plant in 1977 (Humphries 2008, 1-5).

sands mixture to a recovery well at the other end. This method is very energy intensive, consumes large quantities of water and natural gas, and has a high risk of oil blowouts.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> According to Diana Glassman et al. (March 2010), surface mining techniques can consume 20 times more water than convention oil drilling. A CBC news fact sheet on the oil sands indicated that it takes 477 litres of water to produce just one barrel of oil (CBC 2015). For information on bitumen blowouts, see Severson-Baker (2013).

Figure 5.1 Oil Sands and Heavy Oil Deposits—Alberta Canada<sup>16</sup>



<sup>16</sup> *Oil Sands and Heavy Oil Deposits—Alberta Canada*. Scale 1 cm = 55 kilometers approx. Base data: ArcCanada 3.1, ESRI Canada. Based on Canadian Centre for Energy Information. Ottawa: Sarah Simpkin, University of Ottawa, June 2014.

The oil sands remain a heatedly debated topic on local, national, and international levels. As much of the literature demonstrates, the oil sands have been a controversial topic because of both environmental and health issues. In addition to land destruction, risk of oil blowouts, and large-scale water use during the extraction process, the oil sands are also under attack for their high greenhouse gas emissions. In 2010, the oil sands were reported to have contributed to roughly 5 percent of Canada's total emissions, but are the country's fastest growing producer of greenhouse gases and are projected to account for 16 percent of the emissions by 2020.<sup>17</sup> The other cause for major concern lies in the safety of massive waste holdings (called tailings ponds). Not only have over 2,000 ducks died from landing in these ponds, but a recent study of the Athabasca River has shown high pollutant levels due to leaking ponds, which have resulted in mutant, tumour ridden aquatic wildlife, as well as increased health issues for residents of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation (Kelly et al. 2010, 161, 78-83; The Canadian Press 2012). More recently, residents of a farming community in Peace River have had to evacuate their homes due to toxic air from the Reno and Three Creeks oil fields. Residents have reported bitumen vapours seeping into their homes, contaminating everything from furniture and wall coverings to photo albums. Some ranchers have also revealed that they had to sell off prize-winning cattle because there was no other way to assure their long-term health and safety. One rancher reported that the air was so gassy that his cattle were unable to remain upright (Toledano 2014).

Despite the mounting criticism, there remains a huge push for continued development of land. In an effort to assuage the fears of those opposed to the oil sands, Alberta's government has instituted initiatives to monitor and reduce the footprint. One initiative put forth by the provincial government is the Reclamation and Remediation project, which requires that the industry return the disturbed land to its equivalent capability, in the form of either planting trees or turning the land into grazing pasture. Time plays a significant role in reclamation: not only can mines be in operation for decades, but it can take several decades to complete reclamation activities. As part of their long-term monitoring program, the government requires that mine operators develop a reclamation plan prior to project approval; once reclamation is complete, the land must be monitored

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<sup>17</sup> The oil sands account for 12 percent of Alberta's total greenhouse gas emissions (CBC 2015).

until a successful ecosystem has been established (which can take up to 15 years post-reclamation).<sup>18</sup> While it does take a significant amount of time to reclaim disturbed land, the government maintains strict regulations in hopes of returning land to its former glory.

### 5.2.2 *Coal Bed Methane*

A less discussed issue internationally (or even nationally), coal bed methane (CBM) has been a hot topic in southern Alberta since the first commercial project was announced in 2002. CBM extraction was first explored in the USA as a mining safety procedure to degas the coal before mining commenced. Throughout the 1960s, mining operations in the USA explored the potential for extracting and processing CBM, eventually tapping into the San Juan Basin on the New Mexico-Colorado border, which is now the most productive CBM basin in North America (Halliburton 2015). Following this success, the plains and foothills region of Alberta were evaluated in the late 1980s and early 1990s to determine whether or not the province's coal seams were a viable source of this unconventional form of methane gas (Beaton 2003). Like the oil sands, high gas prices and increased demand (both domestically and internationally) at the turn of the twenty-first century led to a resurgence of interest in CBM exploration in Alberta. As reported in Alberta Energy's (2015b) Coal Bed Methane FAQ, just over 19,000 well-producing connections have been established in the last ten years. The majority of these wells reside in the Horseshoe Canyon region between Calgary and Edmonton, but projects also exist in the plains and the foothills coal zones (Fig. 5.2). Scientists have estimated that Alberta's coal seams hold 500 trillion cubic feet (Tcf) of natural gas. This is a significant amount of CBM when compared with natural gas mining regions of the USA, such as Marcellus, which an US Geological Survey

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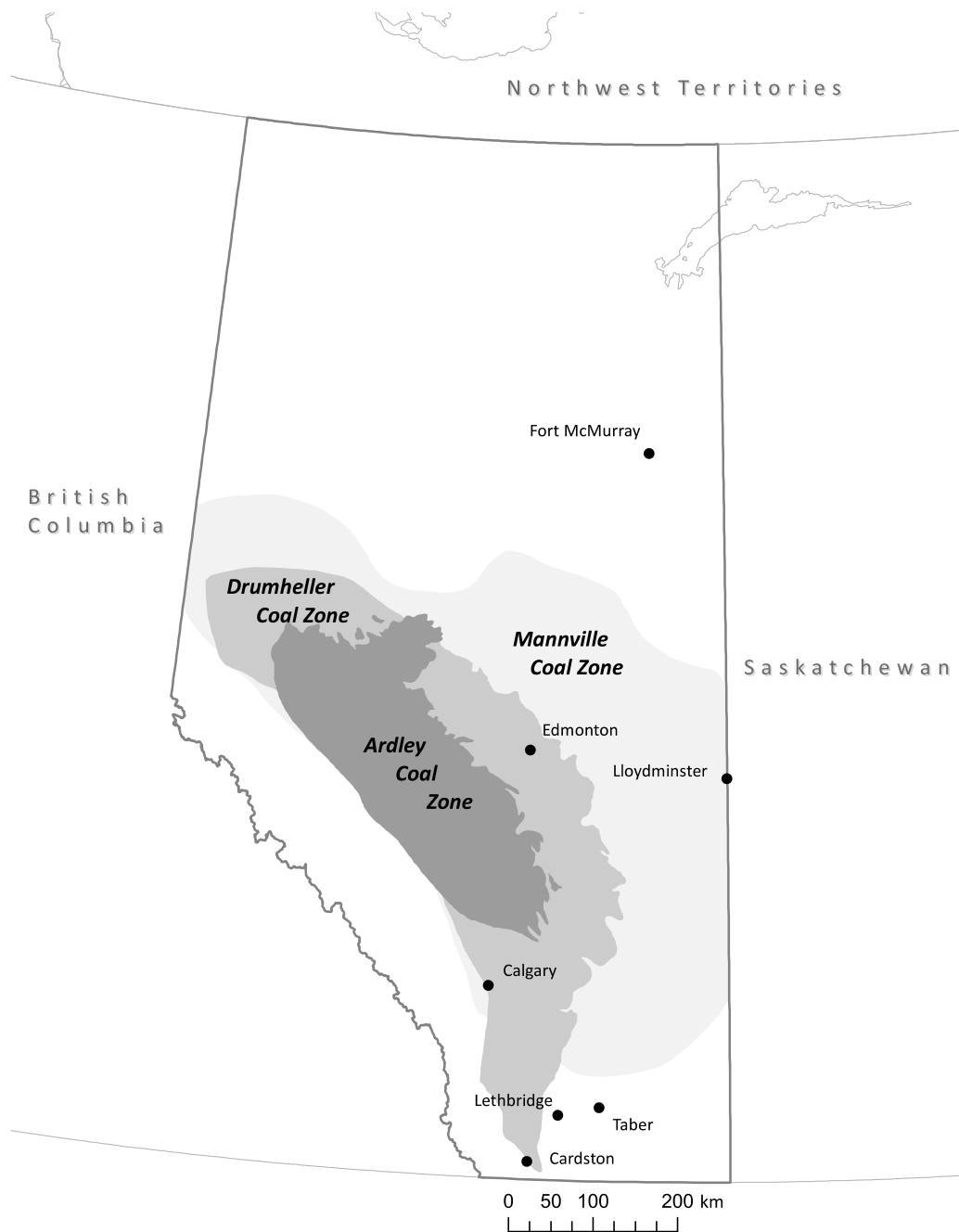
<sup>18</sup> As of December 2012, 77 km<sup>2</sup> of land is under active reclamation, including the planting of 12 million tree seedlings. Suncor's Natural Resources and Environmental Management team has found success with tailings pond reclamation research. Using full-strength tailings pond water, Suncor demonstrated that they could transform disturbed land into a thriving marsh with cattails, rushes, and sedge vegetation. They have indicated that in more "typical" oil sands wetlands reclamation projects, the tailing water would be much better quality (Gulley, Collard and Tedder 2015). Suncor is currently working on reclaiming a tailings pond at Wapisiw Lookout. Progress can be watched online here, a 220-hectare area of land that is a mix of wood forest and wetlands. See Suncor's plan and watch the progress of Wapisiw Lookout here, <<http://www.suncor.com/en/responsible/3708.aspx>>.

estimated holding 84 Tcf of technically recoverable natural gas (Sharp 2014). Alberta has yet to determine how much of the estimated amount can be extracted.

An unconventional form of natural gas contained within coal, CBM is composed primarily of methane, but can contain small amounts of nitrogen, carbon dioxide, and even some heavier hydrocarbons like ethane. The gas forms naturally as a by-product of the geological coalification process that turns plant materials into coal over a billion years (Alberta Energy 2015d). The decomposing organic materials produce methane gas as the coal forms, trapping the gas inside the coal. The coal functions as both the source of the gas and its storage reservoir. This methane can only be released from the coal when water pressure is decreased from the coal seam. The process used by many companies, including EnCana (in the Rosebud River Valley region of Alberta), is called fracking. In a frack, a hole is drilled roughly 100-1500 metres into the ground, through the coal seams. Explosions are detonated underground, and fluids are pumped in to fracture the coal seam (CBC 2010). Pumping water from the well decreases pressure, allowing methane to desorb from the coal and flow up through small perforations in the wall of the casing through the well bore to the surface of the well (Alberta Energy 2015c/d). The main objective in this process is to assure that methane does not get into the water line or that drilling does not interfere with the aquifers in the foothills. The depth of the well plays a role in determining the amount and quality of water produced by CBM development. Pumped water cannot be reinjected into the CBM well, and instead must be either disposed or reused depending on the water's composition. Shallow wells tend to produce non-saline or fresh water, while deeper petroleum wells produce saline water (Alberta Energy 2015d). If the water does not contain saline or sodium, it can be released at the well's surface to irrigate crops or water livestock (Alberta Energy Regulator 2013). In addition to regulating water quality after extraction, operations must also monitor well casing and pipelines. Because wells may pass through groundwater aquifers, CBM operations must assure that fluids from different zones do not mix into these water tables during each phase of extraction. In 2008, CBC news reported that some farmers in Taber, AB, had to deal with contaminated soil on their land as a result of ruptured CBM pipelines (CBC 2008).



Figure 5.2 Coal Bed Methane Deposits—Alberta, Canada<sup>19</sup>



<sup>19</sup> *Coal Bed Methane Deposits—Alberta, Canada*. Scale 1 cm = 55 kilometers approx. Base data: ArcCanada 3.1, ESRI Canada Energy Resources Conservation Board, Alberta Geological Society: CBM Potential of the Alberta Plains - Ardley Coal Zone Boundary (GIS dataset), CBM Potential of the Alberta Plains - Drumheller Coal Zone Boundary (GIS dataset), CBM Potential of the Alberta Plains—Mannville Coal Zone Boundary (GIS dataset), 2009. Ottawa: Sarah Simpkin, University of Ottawa, June 2014.

The larger issue that residents of Rosebud have had to contend with is the contamination of their water wells. The fracturing process may cause methane to find its way into water tables and, as a result, into the water supply and wells for nearby farms. A special investigative story on CBC's *The Passionate Eye* called "Burning Water" (2010) reveals the significant impact that CBM extraction has had in Rosebud. The water in the region has historically had small amounts of naturally occurring methane in the wells, but after CBM gas exploration was pursued for the first time in 2003 Peter and Fiona Lauridsen found that their tap water had turned white, was thick with bubbles, and had smoke coming off of it.<sup>20</sup> Fiona Lauridsen reported that the water fizzed like Alka-Seltzer, and holding a lighter to water running out of a hose cause a fiery explosion. The Lauridsens could no longer drink their tap water, and their skin was left with bright red marks and scabs after showers. These problems do not just pose health issues for their families, but also for their livestock. Ranchers in this region have reported a significant loss in livestock and are unable to support their families (CBC 2010).

Ranchers in Alberta have been increasingly concerned about the impact of both the oil sands and CBM extraction on their land and quality of life. Unfortunately, residents do not truly have the right to refuse a well. According to Alberta's *Surface Rights Act* (2000), landowners have rights to the surface of the land (including sand, gravel, peat, or clay beneath it), basically as deep as they can plow, and the air above it (Alberta 2015). The province, however, owns rights to the minerals contained within the ground. As such, the government can grant right of entry for activities including mineral extraction and drilling under a tract of private or crown-owned land, and companies have the right to exploit those minerals without the consent of the landowners (CBC 2010).<sup>21</sup> Landowners are compensated for what the land would have grown in the form of rent paid by the drilling company, but only the provincial government collects royalties from the extracted minerals. From the loss of control over their land rights and the high potential for water

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<sup>20</sup> A similar example can be viewed in Josh Fox's documentary *Gasland* (2010), which explores the effect of slickwater fracking for natural gas in the United States of America.

<sup>21</sup> According to the *Surface Rights Act*, the government does not own rights to renewable resources, and an Alberta Geological Survey has stated that coal bed methane is included on the list of renewable resources, suggesting that the province cannot own them (CBC 2008).

contamination, many ranchers feel powerless (both emotionally and financially) in what seems like a losing battle against the more profitable energy industry.

### 5.2.3 *Environmental Activism*

Thanks to the research and activism of environmental journalists, scientists at the University of Alberta, and video documentaries, efforts have been made to bring attention to the issues surrounding the oil sands, especially with regard to the well-being of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation group (Kelly et al. 2010). Neil Young, for example, has recently become an active participant in the debate. In a speech promoting alternative fuels such as ethanol and cellulosic ethanol at a National Farmers Union press conference on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, on 9 September 2013, Young called Fort McMurray a “wasteland,” comparing it to the devastated landscape of Hiroshima after the dropping of the nuclear bomb in World War II. Local response to this statement was immediate and angry. Mayor of the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, Melissa Blake, stated that his comments were blatantly false and Fort McMurray’s Rock 97.9 radio station banned his music. Station director Chris Byrne indicated that Young’s music would not return to the airwaves until the singer-songwriter corrected his statement to say that he meant to refer to the *oil sands*, not the *town* of Fort McMurray. Young did not amend his statement, but instead he embarked on an 8-city “Honour the Treaties” tour with David Suzuki, University of Alberta water quality scientist David Schindler, and the chief of the Athabasca First Nation Allan Adam in January 2014. This tour aimed to raise money and awareness for the Chipewyan First Nation’s legal battle against oil sands development (Sterritt 2014).

The impact of the oil and gas industry on ranching and farming has been, by comparison, overlooked, despite the work of local groups and the production of a CBC documentary to actively bring awareness to the issues affecting the agriculture industry. Ranching communities near the Peace River oil sands deposit in the north, and across the CBM region in the south near Taber, have also experienced health issues for family and livestock that have resulted in a loss of income and the inability to ranch in some cases (discussed in detail below). Furthermore, ranchers and farmers in Alberta face serious

challenges concerning land ownership; current provincial law indicates that, while individuals own rights to the surface of their land and the air above it, the province owns mineral rights and can grant access for exploration and extraction (Government of Alberta 1993/2013). As a result, ranchers often feel helpless in the fight to protect their land from development. Lund's music, then, marks an important shift in the discussion surrounding the oil sands and CBM extraction, as he brings much-needed attention to issues surrounding the relationship between the energy industry and agricultural communities. Sensitive to the issues that Alberta's ranchers have been facing with regard to the energy industry, he used his music to tell their story. Drawing on his family's fight to protect their ranchland, the singer-songwriter created an important musical platform for the unheard voices in the growing debate surrounding the long-term viability of oil sands and CBM extraction in Alberta.

### **5.3 Lund's Musical Response**

The topic of fossil fuel energy has become an increasingly personal issue for many Albertans, including Lund. While his music takes a hard look at the industry, he revealed in an interview with former CBC radio host Jian Ghomeshi that he sees both sides of the oil drilling debate, even within his own family. Although Lund comes from a long line of ranchers dating back to the turn of the century in southern Alberta, his brother Kevin Lund and many of his friends work in the oil sands (Q on CBC 2009). Thus, while he can see the significant impact of mining and drilling on Alberta's landscape and environment, he is sensitive to the needs of family and friends working hard in the oil rigs to make a living and support their families. His understanding of the need to find gainful employment resonates in his up-tempo ode to the "roughneck" ("Roughest Neck Around," 2002), which celebrates the hard work and sacrifices made by the men in the rigs. More recently, however, his music has demonstrated frustration with the energy industry, and the conflicting tensions that reside within these songs reveal the complex ways in which Albertans negotiate their place within this particular issue. Lund's songs also give voice to Alberta's agricultural community, who may feel overlooked by a government and society increasingly determined to develop the oil industry.

### ***“Roughest Neck Around” (2002)***

Lund first addressed the Albertan energy industry in “Roughest Neck Around” on *Five Dollar Bill* (2002). He (2002) inscribed his liner notes with the following message about the song:

I figured it’s about time that somebody wrote one about the oil riggers. Them boys work for their money. This is for Eddy, Richie, Porch, Dimitroff, Vik, Pud and everybody else in the ‘patch, and especially for Kev and Scotty who helped me write it.

Lund wrote this song for his brother Kevin, who also helped him with accurate lyrical references of terminology and phrases used in the field to celebrate the life and work of the oil riggers.<sup>22</sup> For example, in each verse he refers to tools or activities related to “black gold” (the oil sands) including Cat trucks, power tongs, evaluating mud weight, throwing chain, tripping pipe. He even refers to the gear worn by riggers—the Green King work gloves and coveralls. Most importantly, the word “roughneck” used in the song title refers to the slang term for a person who works on an oil rig. In Canadian land-based rigs, a roughneck (also known as a floorhand) is the lowest member in a drilling crew who operates machinery on the rig floor.<sup>23</sup> Roughnecks are usually the dirtiest men in the drilling crew and have the most physically demanding jobs. The song narrative presents some of the challenges of being a “roughneck” in the oil rigs: harsh working conditions, long hours, and physical and mental exhaustion.

Lund speaks in this song not just as Kevin Lund’s brother, but also as the narrator of the song. The narrative voice here is void of personal references, and instead speaks about a male roughneck, referred to only as “he.” While the liner notes point to Kevin Lund, they also list the names of Lund’s other friends working in the oil sands, suggesting that the “he” references in the lyrics is not necessarily one individual, but, rather, representative of all of the hard-working men he knows. In addition to describing the physically demanding aspects of the job and harsh working conditions, the song narrative highlights the sacrifices made by the men working in the oil rigs. Perhaps the biggest challenge for many riggers,

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<sup>22</sup> Kevin Lund is now a toolpush in the oil rigs (Lund 2013c).

<sup>23</sup> Detailed information about the duties of a roughneck/floorhand in Canadian rigs can be found at <[http://www.rigzone.com/jobs/postings/338731/RoughneckFloorhands\\_Worldwide\\_Applicants\\_Accepted.asp](http://www.rigzone.com/jobs/postings/338731/RoughneckFloorhands_Worldwide_Applicants_Accepted.asp)>.

however, is separation from their families. As the song relates, this roughneck “drives a hundred-fifty miles [to] make sure his kids are doin’ fine, and he sees ‘em when he can but he’s married to his iron.” Despite the high salaries for working in the rigs, many riggers cannot actually afford to buy houses in Fort McMurray. As reported in the *Edmonton Journal* (2006), the average single-family home costs over \$400,000 in Fort McMurray (a high price when compared to the average of \$282,208 in the province’s capital city of Edmonton).<sup>24</sup> Beyond the constantly rising cost of houses, this story reported that hospitals, schools, grocery stores, and restaurants struggle to find adequate staff and that the roads and sewage treatment system were designed for a significantly smaller community. Instead, riggers have to live far away from their families, coming home for short periods of time off between longer work trips. Thus, despite the celebratory tone, the lyrical narrative also exudes a sense of sadness about the sacrifices these men make on a daily basis so that they can provide a good life for their families. More than that, the singer-songwriter salutes the riggers with a nationalistic pride normally reserved for the men and women who work in the military, acknowledging the role as one that is vital to the country economy and energy resources, dangerous, and, most importantly, honourable. The individuals working in the oil sands are not just Albertans; indeed, men and women have moved to Fort McMurray from across the country to actively seek gainful employment.

Beyond the hard life and working conditions in oil sands operations, however, the song celebrates the work and strength of the riggers. As narrator, Lund opens each refrain with a promotion of the “roughneck,” claiming “You’d better hire him on, ‘cause he’s the roughest neck around” and “he’s better than the rest.” Drawing again on phrases used in the rigs, the song’s refrain applauds the roughneck’s physical strength, as Lund sings his power to pull “dragons from the ground,” a phrase used in the fields to refer to getting to the oil (Canada Science and Technology Museums Corporation 2015). In the third and fifth refrains, he sings that this roughneck also has the “power in his hands and the dragons in his chest”—or, rather, oil—in his heart. It could likewise point to the impact on bodily health by referring to breathing in fumes throughout long shifts on the rig floor. The song is thus a celebration of the life and work of the roughneck in general, and of his brother

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<sup>24</sup> Raymont and Radford’s (2008) documentary *Tar Sands* also discusses the cost of living in Fort McMurray; they show that mobile homes in the region sell for over \$400,000.

specifically. While “Roughest Neck Around” certainly celebrates the roughneck, the song (like the accompanying video) also points to the exploitation of the working class, notably the dangerous working conditions, long shifts, and physical and mental exhaustion. While Lund practically speaks the declamatory song narrative, he concludes the song with a section that contrasts the simple verse-chorus form of the song, and this time *sings* lyrics that include the popular anti-establishment cultural expression: “Power to the people.” The lyrics in this outro can certainly be taken literally, that the roughnecks bring power (energy, gas, etc.) to the people, an interpretation that can be supported in Lund’s recording of this song for the CMT *Memphis Sun* special (Lund 2014b), in which he sings about bringing “Petrol to the people.” However, this lyric might also be read as a statement of protest against the working conditions and the exploitative industry. Perhaps more importantly, it serves as an empowering statement of solidarity and camaraderie amongst the men working in the rigs, who spend many long hours together in a dangerous environment.<sup>25</sup>

Lund matches the celebratory feel of the song with an up-tempo accompaniment that has a driving rhythm. A country-rock number, the song emphasizes clash of acoustic and electric instruments to capture an almost metallic sound to celebrate the riggers. The song opens with an electric guitar riff that has a quasi Beach Boys, or hard rock feel, setting a steady, yet relaxed pace for the song. Lund plays this Beach Boys–like riff on a semi-acoustic guitar, with Siemens playing lower bended notes on his Fender Telecaster. This riff returns after each refrain, following the line about pulling dragons from the ground, seemingly giving the dragons, or the oil, a metallic sounding character as the electric guitar is likewise pulled out of the accompaniment for the repetition of the riff. During the verses, the upright bass and drum kit are prominent in the mix; this sparse or dry arrangement creates a strong base over which Lund sings the lyrics. The melodic line echoes the natural rise and fall of speaking, and Lund’s nasal vocal performance borders, at times, on speak-singing.

The music video for “Roughest Neck Around” elaborates not just the working conditions and the relationships between the riggers, but also the history of drilling for oil

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<sup>25</sup> In 2013 the Canadian documentary television series *Licence to Drill* (on Discovery Channel Canada) featured the third verse and the last two lines of the outro as the theme song for the third season. The show follows crews in Alberta-based energy companies in Fort McMurray (Lund 2013b).

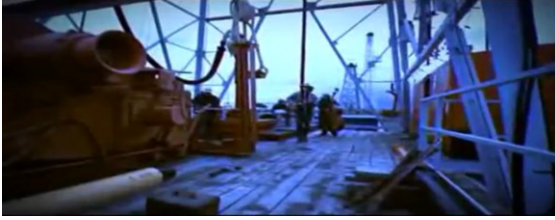
in Alberta. Directed by Joel Stewart (Lund 2010b), the music video was shot on the Leduc #1 oil derrick, the historic site of the 1947 crude oil strike in Devon, Alberta.<sup>26</sup> Lund and the Hurtin' Albertans (who are dressed in blue coveralls and white hard hats) perform the song from the platform of the oil derrick (Fig. 5.3), with the machinery used at the Leduc site clearly visible in the background of the video. Using montage-style editing, the video alternates shots of the band performing on the derrick with black and white 1940s-era footage of oil field workers (Fig. 5.4) and colour images with a slight sepia tone of Kevin Lund performing some of the activities referenced in the lyrics (Fig. 5.5), including throwing chain and rolling pipe (Lund 2013c). The combination of both the Hurtin' Albertans' positioning on the oil derrick and the montage editing solidify Lund's role as song narrator, drawing strong connections between the lyrical narrative and the generations of men working in rigs that are featured in the historical images. As narrator, Lund pays tribute to the industry's history in Alberta through the use of the historic site and archival footage; the video marks not just the discovery of the province's conventional oil reserves, but also the pivotal period in which oil and gas started to replace farming and ranching as the principle industry. While the video highlights the technological advancements made over the last sixty years, the footage used in the video reinforces the overwhelmingly masculine environment described in Lund's lyrics, from the groups of men working together in archival film to Kevin Lund throwing chain and rolling pipe on his own in the modern setting. The video also highlights the long history of working-class exploitation in the fossil fuel energy industry, notably through film sequences of men participating in dangerous activity while working on the Leduc derrick. Drawing on Stimeling's (2012, 19) observations on anti-MTR songs like Shirley Stewart Burns's "Leave Those Mountains Down" (2009) or Captain Catfeesh's "Blair Mountain Battle March" (2010), it deploys nostalgia to read local oil history "as one characterized by the exploitation of workers and the land." The images used in the video underscore the long history of these working conditions. Thus, while the machinery used has evolved, the cultural environment seems to be lagging (at least in this video's representation) in terms of the gender imbalance and working conditions.

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<sup>26</sup> Designated a National Historic Site in 1990, the Leduc #1 Energy Discovery Centre opened in 1997 as a tribute to Canada's oil industry.



Figure 5.3 “Roughest Neck Around,” Lund and the Hurtin’ Albertans on Leduc No.1



Corb Lund and the Hurtin’ Albertans on the oil derrick



Grant Siemens, dressed as a rigger



Kurt Ciesla, dressed as a rigger



Corb Lund, dressed in his cowboy hat

Figure 5.4 “Roughest Neck Around,” historical images from 1930s



Lyrics: *With the welders and the*



*trucks on the black gold rush*

Figure 5.5 “Roughest Neck Around,” modern-day tools



Kevin Lund, the roughneck featured in the video    Kevin Lund, “throwin’ chain”



Kevin Lund, working on a rig

### 5.3.1 *Lund’s Shifting Narratives*

Lund recorded “Roughest Neck Around” in 2002, at a time when provincial and federal government began promoting Alberta’s oil sands to foreign investors. While the oil sands had yet to be included in the country’s conventional energy supply, they were becoming an attractive prospect for members of the working-class from across Canada seeking gainful employment. As interest and exploration of the oil sands increased, so too did the number of jobs and salaries, contributing significantly to Alberta’s economy. While this certainly had a positive outcome for the province, the growth of the industry put increased pressure on local residents struggling to make ends meet. The rising cost of living has had an impact on many Albertans—even the men working in the oil sands. As mentioned earlier, despite the high salaries for working in the rigs, many riggers cannot actually afford to buy houses in Fort McMurray. Instead, they often rent in Fort McMurray and travel home for one week between 14-day shifts. Quite often, as is the case in Lund’s song, it is the male workers in the oil sands who submit to this lifestyle: as already mentioned, they make the ultimate sacrifice for their families, driving long hours to get home every chance they get.

The high cost of living does not only affect the oil riggers wanting to buy homes in Fort McMurray, however. In “Long Gone to Saskatchewan” (2009), Lund assumes the role

of a rancher protagonist who laments the battle of “trying to raise cattle” in Alberta, where oil refineries have contributed to the increase in land prices.<sup>27</sup> He points out in interview with National Public Radio’s Melissa Block (2009), that the narrative about having to move east to Saskatchewan to be able to afford ranch land, is a real phenomenon for Albertans:

See, Alberta has had a real oil and gas boom. It’s driving land prices really crazily high, and so the ranchers can’t afford to raise cattle there anymore. So they’re selling their places in the foothills and buying places that are way bigger in Saskatchewan, that are just as good for cattle—they’re not quite as scenic but—my buddy did it, actually. A bunch of my friends bought places in Saskatchewan now.

While the rancher in this song loves the “cow business,” he and his wife have to take side jobs just to eke out a living, and they still don’t have “enough to buy smokes.” They decide to move east to Saskatchewan, where they can buy an acre of land beside a lake for the cost of *renting* land in their home province. In the end, this Albertan may indeed miss the foothills, but he is laughing because his land is now “five times the size.” The song, as Lund admits right in the lyrics, is a joke for years of poking at his neighbours to the east: “but I’ve been comin’ out bringin’ my t-shirts and singin’ to my good eastern neighbours so long, and you put up with my dumb jokes about your province and so I figured hey, I owed you a song.” It also reveals the financial challenges presented to some ranchers as the cost of land and living continues to rise as a result of inflation and the energy industry. Another solution for ranchers, as Lund reveals in his song “Cows Around” (from *Cabin Fever*, 2012), is renting out tracts of land to oil and gas companies just to have a little extra income. While this may provide financial gain upfront, it has the potential for creating long-term issues for the cattle and the health and well-being of family members. These cons can far outweigh the pros and can lead to a rancher having to sell his/her property and start anew elsewhere. Although Lund is able to celebrate the work and sacrifices of the rigger, and joke about having to move east to Saskatchewan due to the high cost of living in Alberta, he has also used his music to explore the negative impacts of the energy industry on his province. In “This Is My Prairie” and “Gettin’ Down on the Mountain,” he considers the impact of the encroaching industry on ranching (a topic that hits close to home for him) and takes a grim look at the future of humanity in the wake of a fossil fuel shortage.

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<sup>27</sup> Lyrics for “Long Gone to Saskatchewan” can be found here, <<http://www.cowboylyrics.com/lyrics/lund-corb/long-gone-to-saskatchewan-28826.html>>.

### ***“This Is My Prairie” (2009)***

At the 2010 awards ceremony of the Canadian Country Music Association (CCMA), Lund closed the evening’s show with a stirring rendition of “This Is My Prairie” (2009), a song that addresses the impact of Alberta’s ever expanding energy industry on small or family-owned ranching operations. Inspired by his mother’s fight to keep coal bed methane projects from drilling into their family’s ranchland in the foothills of southern Alberta (Q on CBC 2009), Lund’s song relays a young man’s struggle to protect his family’s ranch from development. The CCMA is a national organization supporting and promoting Canadian country music in a manner similar to the Country Music Association (CMA) in the USA. Unlike the CMA’s annual award show, which is always held in Nashville, the CCMA’s takes place in a different Canadian city each year. Held in Lund’s home province and adopted city of Edmonton in 2010, this nationally broadcasted ceremony provided him with a platform to sing about ranchers losing their land and livelihood to oil and gas companies, a topic that weighs heavily on his mind. Journalist Shannon Phillips (2011, 43) proposed that Lund’s performance of this song on a nationally broadcasted award show “put the Alberta government and big Oil squarely in his crosshairs.” Yet the singer-songwriter seemingly did not *intend* to make his audience uncomfortable; rather, he admitted in interview that he saw the CCMA performance as an opportunity to do something “different,” not only for its political subject matter, but also as a formal and stylistic contrast to the contemporary country-pop stylings of more mainstream artists like Gord Bamford and Johnny Reid, who were big award winners that night (Phillips 2011, 43).<sup>28</sup> Moreover, reviews of the show focused not on the song and its potentially controversial message, but instead claimed that Lund’s performance of “pretty much says it all for the CCMA’s” that year, suggesting that “This Is My Prairie” was a bold statement of male domination of (geographic) place and genre, and on the stage as well (Ross 2010). While the absence of media, industry, or government response to the song might suggest to some that Lund’s message was not received, it is in fact more indicative of the complex and

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<sup>28</sup> Gord Bamford won the CCMA award for Album of the Year (*Day Job*, 2010), Male Artist of the Year, and Record Producer of the Year. He was also awarded the Slaight Music Humanitarian Award. Scottish-born Johnny Reid won Single of the Year (“Dance with Me”), Top Selling Canadian Album (*Dance with Me*, 2009), Country Music Program or Special of the Year (*Johnny Reid: Live at the Jubilee*, 2010), Fans’ Choice, and Songwriter of the Year (along with Victoria Banks and Tia Sillers for “Dance with Me,” 2009).

contradictory politics of the province and shifting views on the fossil fuel industry. Contrary to Phillips' assessment, "This Is My Prairie" is not an inflammatory prosecution of the energy industry, but rather a more even-handed assessment of the current political, economic, and environmental tensions in Alberta regarding the impact that the energy industry has had on the province and its once-thriving cattle industry—the song even reveals compassion for the riggers working hard to support their families. The reaction (or lack thereof) is further compounded by genre politics and that fact that, as an alt-country or roots artist, he occupies a space within Canadian country music that operates on the fringes of the mainstream, where his audiences are more accepting of stylistic diversity and provocative political messages.

Dedicated to his mother, Patty Lund, whom he calls the "barrel racing champ and keeper of the family land," "This Is My Prairie" laments the negative impact of the energy industry on Alberta's agriculture industry (Lund 2009b). Lund's song was inspired by his mother's fight to protect their family land in the foothills of southern Alberta from encroaching coal bed methane projects. His conversation with the CBC's Jian Ghomeshi revealed that "This Is My Prairie" also speaks to oil drilling and the energy industry in general (Q on CBC 2009). To do so, Lund used terminology that related to both CBM and oil sands operations, which allowed him to address the impact of the energy industry on the province through the voice of a frustrated rancher, highlighting the political, economic, and environmental tensions surrounding the expanding fossil fuel energy industry on agriculture in Alberta.

"This Is My Prairie" is a strophic ballad (a verse-repeating form) of five stanzas and refrain with an instrumental bridge. Although an unusual song form for contemporary country music, it is indicative of the unconventional traits invoked by alt-country songwriters who blend traditional country themes and with unusual stylistic traits. The song protagonist, a rancher, begins his narrative by strongly marking out his territory, boldly declaring the prairies as his home. A conventional theme in country music, "home" has been evoked throughout the genre's history as a way to articulate a relationship between individuals and their surrounding environment and community. For many artists, "home" signifies safety, belonging, and familial togetherness; as demonstrated in Lund's song, it is

also a place to protect and preserve at all costs (Watson 2014, 51-52). Moreover, the general lamenting tone of “This Is My Prairie” is reminiscent of the general nostalgia for home and prairie landscape of traditional cowboy ballads, such as “Carry Me Back to the Lone Prairie” or “Bury Me Not on the Lone Prairie.” Each of these songs reveals both sentimental attachment to place, and a strong desire to remain eternally connected to the prairie soil on which the cowboy narrators were raised.

“This Is My Prairie” functions on two levels: on the surface, the song documents the rancher’s situation, while the underlying narrative explores the complex political landscape concerning the energy industry. As the rancher protagonist of the song narrative, Lund reveals his fierce defensive instincts of this region in the first verse, threatening the encroaching energy industry that they can tamper with his prairies over his “smoldering bones” (or, to put it another way, over his dead body). After staking his claim to his land, he exposes the negative destructive impact that the industry has had on his family and ranch (verse 2), singing: “The water is poison, the calves are all dead / My children are sick, and the aquifer’s bled.”<sup>29</sup> Despite his frustration, however, the song protagonist reveals understanding toward the riggers who work hard to make a living to feed their families (verse 3). Ultimately, as we learn in the fourth verse, this rancher feels powerless (both emotionally and financially) against the provincial government’s laws, which favor the more profitable energy industry. With nothing but his “grand daddy’s rifle” to protect his land, the rancher closes each verse with the Guthrie-esque refrain “this is my prairie, this is my home.”

The rancher’s helplessness is further solidified through the musical setting. Performed in a slow-waltz rhythm, the accompaniment incorporates instruments that suggest both ties to the earth and a militaristic funeral for the land. The instrumental opening and accompaniment for the first verse features the harmonium, played by Tony Harrell. Not traditionally used in country music, the harmonium is a type of reed organ that uses foot-pumped bellows to generate sound. Its sometimes piercing tone quality is similar

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<sup>29</sup> While the industry in general is hugely water consumptive, the CBM projects that Lund’s mother has been fighting are pursued in south-west Alberta, where there are important aquifer tables. Lund expressed his concerns over CBM wells in the region in his interview with Ghomeshi (Q on CBC 2009).

to that of an accordion, both of which produce uniformly sustained tones.<sup>30</sup> Because of its historical use in small churches, the instrument often carries religious or ceremonial connotations. In “This is My Prairie,” it has a somber quality, functioning in the introduction as a funeral-like prelude and establishing a solemn tone at the outset of the song, and holds long chord tones like a drone in the accompaniment of verse 1 (Ex. 5.1). After the first verse, the harmonium recedes into the background and an acoustic guitar, mandolin, and double bass enter the accompaniment, playing predominantly tonic, subdominant, and dominant chords, or what Lund (2012i) calls his “cowboy chords,” shifting to the minor vi chord that functions as a sorrowful pre-cadential gesture before the refrain on I-V-I. The instrumentation here (traditional country music instruments) and the harmonic language solidify the protagonist’s rural roots and ties to the land. Following the fourth verse, horns emerge in an instrumental bridge (played by Sonic Fedora) that further develops the funereal tone of the song (Ex. 5.2). Not only does the instrumental bridge stand out as a deviation from the standard strophic ballad structure, but also the presence of horns (more non-traditional country instruments) and complex harmonies signal a shift in tone and moment of contemplation. The horns step away from the acoustic guitar’s “cowboy chords” (in the verses) to minor and augmented chords that capture the rancher’s despair over the potential loss of his land. These feelings are enhanced by the snare drum’s steady drum roll, which accompanies the horns in this mournful salute of the instrumental bridge, strongly evoking a militaristic funeral for the land after its defeat in a long and hard-fought battle.

Lund’s vocal performance plays a significant role in conveying the sense of loss and helplessness found in the song lyrics. His voice is predominantly hoarse and nasal throughout the song, with moments of perceived vocal strain, sounding almost like a defeated rancher/farmer from the start of the song. This feeling is amplified by his slight yodel break between “stand” and “here” in the first verse. Yodel breaks (or cry breaks) are a result of a sudden microtonal shift resulting in a slurred tone from a “normal” register to a falsetto. A popular vocal ornamentation in country music, yodel breaks create a “crying” effect and are often employed in sad songs where they are coordinated with important

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<sup>30</sup> At the 2010 CCMA awards show performance, Lund used an accordion instead of a harmonium (Lund 2010a).

lyrical moments or with verbs of crying (Fox 2004, 280). A slight yodel break also occurs in the middle of the word “prairie” each time it is sung by Lund creating an increased sense of sadness each time we hear the refrain. Lund also ends many phrases with a warbly slide on the final word. Such slides (or portamentos) have been connected with depths of feelings and sincerity (Leech-Wilkinson 2006, 249). These warbly slides can likewise be a method of showing sadness or frustration, and, when coupled with the yodel breaks and Lund’s hoarse, nasal voice, they convey the rancher’s feelings about losing his family ranchland.

Example 5.1 “This is My Prairie,” harmonium introduction and verse 1

The musical score for "This is My Prairie" is presented in three systems. Each system consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The piano accompaniment features a steady harmonic accompaniment with chord markings I, IV, V, and vi. The vocal line includes lyrics and is marked with triplets and portamento lines.

**System 1:** The piano accompaniment begins with a series of chords: I, IV, V, and I. The vocal line starts with the lyrics: "This is \_\_\_ my prai-rie \_\_\_ this is \_\_\_ my home. I'll make my stand \_\_\_ here".

**System 2:** The piano accompaniment continues with chords IV, V, and I. The vocal line includes the lyrics: "I'll die a-lone \_\_\_ They can drill they can mine o'er my smol - der-in' bo-ones".

**System 3:** The piano accompaniment concludes with chords I, V, and I. The vocal line repeats the lyrics: "This is \_\_\_ my prai-rie \_\_\_ this is \_\_\_ my \_\_\_ home.".



Example 5.2 “This is My Prairie,” instrumental bridge

The musical score is arranged in two systems. The first system includes Horn 1, Horn 2, and piano accompaniment. The second system includes Horn 1 and Horn 2, and piano accompaniment. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The piano part features a steady accompaniment with chords and moving bass lines. Roman numerals are provided below the piano part to indicate the harmonic structure.

**System 1:**

- Horn 1: Bass clef, 3/4 time. Melody starts on a whole rest, then moves to G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F#3, G3, A3, B3, C4.
- Horn 2: Bass clef, 3/4 time. Melody starts on a whole rest, then moves to G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F#3, G3, A3, B3, C4.
- Piano: Treble and bass clefs, 3/4 time. Chords are indicated by Roman numerals: vi, III7, IV, I, bvii.

**System 2:**

- Horn 1: Bass clef, 3/4 time. Melody continues from the previous system.
- Horn 2: Bass clef, 3/4 time. Melody continues from the previous system.
- Piano: Treble and bass clefs, 3/4 time. Chords are indicated by Roman numerals: vi, bVI, V, V/V, V.

The funereal tone of the song is also represented in the accompanying music video. Directed by Lund and his friend Fish Griwkowsky (Lund 2012e), the video was shot primarily at the singer’s cabin near Barrhead, AB—a town active in the agriculture, oil, and gas industries.<sup>31</sup> The video uses predominantly montage-style editing, elaborating different narrative perspectives through clothing and staging (Watson and Burns 2010, 333-36). Lund assumes the role of both narrator and song protagonist: he brings the audience into his story while also allowing them to watch it unfold. As narrator, he sings the song while

<sup>31</sup> Lund built this cabin with his late uncle Lynn Jensen. A press release for *Cabin Fever* describes this cabin as “a remote hideaway cabin in the woods outside Edmonton,” and a “solitary place for the veteran country musician” (Stewart, n.d.). While Lund does spend a lot of time in his rustic cabin, he also owned a modest home in Edmonton, Alberta at the time of writing *Losin’ Lately Gambler*. He sold his house in 2013 so that he could move back to southern Alberta to be closer to his family (Huffington Post 2013b).

playing acoustic guitar, his face obscured by dirty puddle water or by shadows. As protagonist (dressed in the same clothing as his narrator role), he walks into the song narrative, walks through his ranch land and (in the instrumental bridge) digs up rich soil with a shovel. Viewers do not get a clear image of his face in this video, suggesting that he represents the unknown or, rather, the silent victims of the growth of the energy industry: the ranchers and landowners whose land is exploited for their fossil fuel resources. Montage editing is used to alternate long still shots of Lund as narrator and rancher-protagonist with the Albertan landscape, crops, and grazing cattle and horses. The camera offers us two points of view. First, the lens functions as the rancher's eyes, following his gaze as he surveys his property and livestock, and laments the potential loss of his land. Second, it becomes the eyes of the viewer, capturing the rancher's movement as he walks through his land or digs up the earth.

The video opens with shots representing both industries on the prairie, offering a comparison of the tools of the energy and agriculture industries and their effect on the landscape. The harmonium hymn-like introduction is accompanied visually by a sequence of images that follow the tools of the energy industry at work. The opening sequence of images displays tools used to dig up soil, beginning with a Caterpillar excavator bucket and then a hand-held shovel, followed by shots of the larger machinery at work on the land with the Caterpillar excavator wheels rolling over hard ground and a then modern John Deere tractor (eight wheels and two axles) plowing a field. These images immediately establish tension between the industries, using contrasting color and setting to highlight the presumably different ways in which these vehicles are used. While the video only focuses on part of the Caterpillar excavator (the bucket and then the wheels) and uses images from what looks to be an older model of the machine,<sup>32</sup> the grey-tones of the machine and landscape look dirty and menacing and suggest a long history of destruction through their well-worn parts. The hand-held shovel and tractor, however, represent not just traditional and modern ways of tilling soil and cultivating land for crops, but also reveal friction within the agriculture sector between the small time rancher/farmer and the larger

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<sup>32</sup> More recent models of Cat Excavators are yellow or have black wheels and buckets, <[http://www.cat.com/en\\_US/products/new/equipment/excavators.html](http://www.cat.com/en_US/products/new/equipment/excavators.html)>.

agribusiness.<sup>33</sup> Presented in the natural colors of the landscape—deep brown soil, green blades of grass, and brown trees—with a bright green John Deere, these images immediately suggest a more positive use of machinery. Although the tractor is indeed fueled with petroleum, one could read the tractor as having a positive purpose in this setting: not only does the vehicle continually cultivate soil, but it also plays a role in the production of food and, as a result, suggests growth and renewal (Fig. 5.6).<sup>34</sup> Yet these images suggest a deeper reading: the tractor also represents the agribusiness, which is known not just for having wiped out the economic foundation of moderate or small farmers, but also for the destruction of vegetation and wooded areas to make room for large-scale cultivation.<sup>35</sup> Thus, these opening images reveal a cycle of replacement: the energy industry supplants the agribusiness, which had replaced moderate or small farmers/ranchers (represented by the shovel). The land is presented as both nutrient and resource rich through images of a tractor ploughing a field, a Caterpillar excavator rolling over the land, of successful crops, and of dark black soil resembling the thick tar sands deposits. In this way, the video pays tribute to the riches of the land itself, as having the perfect composition of resources to support and sustain two important, yet conflicting industries. Even though the tractor is the last image of machinery presented in the video before shots of animals grazing in the fields start to enter the visual narrative, the images of

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<sup>33</sup> The plow and crop farming have long been important cultural symbols in Alberta, which is a main contributor to Canada's wheat, canola, barley, and oat production. As Laura A. Detre has discussed, in the late 1800s, the Canadian government viewed the already settled eastern provinces as the home of the workforce, and sought to turn the western prairie provinces into the agricultural belt that would supply food for the country. To encourage settlement, they used magazines and posters to attract immigrants and farmers to the region, and promoted agricultural settlement through a magazine called *Canada West*, often using imagery of crop or mixed farming on magazine covers as a way of demonstrating the type of lifestyle settlers could expect in the west. The cover of a 1927 edition featured a man driving a tractor that pulled a disc plow. Whether or not a plow was visible in the cover art, however, the continual emphasis of crop farming in their promotional campaign demonstrates not just the type of society that the central government wanted to create in the prairies, but also the prevalence of such farm equipment in imagery describing life on the prairies (Detre 2004). While these images were generated with the intention of attracting a certain type of population at a specific time in western Canadian history, they have remained prevalent throughout Alberta's agricultural history. Farm equipment and harvesting have recently been woven into the narratives of songs about Alberta, including High Valley's "On the Combine" (2010) and Blake Reid's "Fuel Fertilizer and Deere" (2013).

<sup>34</sup> Every phase of crop production requires petroleum, from preparing the soil, to planting crops, to fertilizing, to harvesting, and then to all of the steps required to process, refine, package, and distribute the product around the globe. Despite the process's reliance on petroleum, the video emphasizes the benefits of agriculture through both the strong contrasting colors chosen to represent the two industries, and the human contact with the land throughout the video narrative.

<sup>35</sup> When tractors in 1925 and bulldozers in the mid-1940s were introduced to farmers in the province, thousands of acres were cleared to facilitate large-scale crop management (Bird and Bird 1971, 136-37).

the Caterpillar excavator never fully escape the viewer’s mind and leave us with a sense of foreboding for the fate of the land throughout the music video.

Figure 5.6 “This is My Prairie,” instrumental opening and verse 1



Lyrics:

*This is my prairie This is my home*

Lund appears for the first time in the video during the second verse. His image appears upside down in a puddle as he sings about the quality of the water on his land. Drawing on the framework I established with Lori Burns for tracking image changes in relation to a musical score, Fig. 5.7 maps out the subtle yet powerful correspondence between lyrics, music and images in verse 2 of the music video. First, the dirty puddle water in this long frame provides a visual representation to the poisoned water killing his calves and making his family ill. As he then sings of the industry’s desire to put a pipeline through his pop’s grove, the video presents shots of a dog and then horses grazing in a grove, transitions to a shot of Lund’s narrator role of his reflection in a puddle, and then ends with a frame of Lund walking out into the grove as he sings “this is my home.” The edited sequence begins with a shot of Lund’s face obscured by shadow, which is followed by a dog, the horses, and then Lund moving through the ranchland. These images change on tonic and dominant chords in the musical accompaniment, using the structural chords of the supporting harmony to move between these points in the visual narrative (Fig. 5.8). These images show the family land in its natural state, and, when coupled with the second verse lyrics and movement of dominant to tonic in the harmony, there is a sense of finality and realization that the video is surveying (with disbelief) the land that will inevitably be destroyed by the pipeline. This sentiment strengthens throughout the third and fourth verses as the protagonist’s frustration grows.

The video captures the somber tone of the horn salute at the instrumental bridge. While the frustration until this point in the song narrative was clearly evident, the devastation of the situation is palpable in this instrumental section. The formal, narrative and emotional climax of the song, the instrumental bridge has the most image changes than any of the verses. The rate of change in the montage is most intense in this section, with images changing nearly every bar and a half. As the horns emerge, fragmented shots of Lund's hand on a shovel digging up soil alternate with images of livestock and landscape, concluding with his hand tossing yellow wildflowers on the pile of earth that he has dug up. Figure 5 maps out these image changes in correspondence with the musical score, showing how they occur with increasing frequency toward the middle of the section, the pace slowing in the final measures over the dominant tonality. Lund's actions in these frames are reminiscent of a gravedigger in a cemetery, preparing a grave for burial. In this case, the sequences of images suggest the burial of a once-sacred Albertan landscape and perhaps even the agriculture industry. By this point in the lyrical and visual narrative, it becomes apparent that the protagonist feels helpless and almost resigned to the fact that he will lose his land to the energy industry. In the transitioning dominant chord at the end of the instrumental bridge, the video presents the first long clear shot of the singer-songwriter's face: no longer concealed by shadows or puddle water, Lund places his cowboy hat back on his head after placing flowers on the mound of earth, and sings the final verse of the song. After he sings the final refrain of the song, the musical accompaniment slows down, he drops his guitar to his side, and he walks away in defeat.

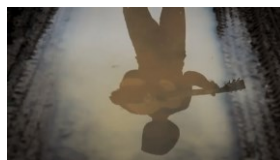
Figure 5.7 “This is My Prairie,” verse 2



The wa-ter \_\_\_ is poi-son \_\_\_ the calves are all dead chil-dren \_\_\_ are



sick \_\_\_ and the a - qui-fer's bled \_\_\_ they want a big pipe-line right through pop's



gro - ve \_\_\_ This is \_\_\_ my prai - rie \_\_\_ This is \_\_\_ my \_\_\_ home.

Figure 5.8 “This is My Prairie,” instrumental bridge

vi III7 IV

I bvii vi



Musical score for the song "This is My Prairie". The score is written in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. It consists of two systems. The first system has two staves: a bass staff and a tenor staff. The second system has three staves: a treble staff, a bass staff, and a bass staff. The bass staff in the second system has chord symbols: bVI, V, V/V, and V. The treble staff has a melodic line with a long note in the first measure and a series of eighth notes in the second measure. The bass staff in the second system has a bass line with a long note in the first measure and a series of eighth notes in the second measure.

Fans responded favorably to “This is My Prairie.” A majority of the comments that appear on Lund’s official music video and performances for *Vue Weekly* (Lund 2009c) and *CBC’s Q* (2009) program thank him for the song and his courage to address the energy industry issues, or comment on the beautiful Albertan landscape, his voice or guitar playing abilities. For a song addressing the impact of the energy industry from the perspective of a rancher, the most significant responses came from those with ties to the energy industry. One listener posted under the official music video that he used to work on the oil patch but returned home and now hates the “evil oil.” He concluded his post by showing his support for Lund’s message stating that he would stand with him if he decided to take on the industry (Lund 2012e). Under the same video, another fan thanked Lund for not blaming the truckers in his lyrics, revealing that he had just moved to Midland, TX, to drive trucks for the oil rigs. Like Lund, who revealed his own ambivalence about the industry and its impact on Alberta, this listener expressed reservations about his new job at the close of his post, stating, “Shit, I have mixed feelings about it” (Lund 2012e).



Although the initial influence of the song was his mother's fight against the CBM project, the song indeed acts as a catalyst for reflecting on the large-scale impact of the entire energy industry, oil sands included. Interestingly, one fan did not seem to view his work in the oil sands in the same light as CBM extraction:

I work in the oil-patch and refuse to do CBM work—it fu\*ks up water wells and ruins aquifers—My family has been ranching in Alberta for 100+ years & I'll be damed [*sic*] before I screw-up their water-wells (Lund 2012e).

This man's comments suggest that responses to the activities of the industry are extremely personal, and that some individuals are able to compartmentalize their frustrations toward different branches of the industry. For this listener, CBM extraction poses a threat to the water supply surrounding his family ranch land, presumably a region that he holds dearly in his heart as the place that holds his childhood memories and family heritage. With no real familial ties to the land in which he works, this listener is able to dissociate his activities in the oil patch and the negative impact of his work on Alberta, from those of the men working on CBM extraction projects. These responses to "This Is My Prairie" illustrate the complex and contradictory ways in which Albertans might respond to the energy industry. The song narrative does not just provide a platform for frustrated ranchers; rather, it also provides individuals with a means to alleviate any lingering feelings of guilt about their role in the energy industry.

With "This Is My Prairie", Lund enters into a long tradition of folk and alternative country artists using their music as a vehicle for responding to political and environmental issues. While it seems to be a nod to fellow Albertan Ian Tyson's "This is My Sky" (*Songs from the Gravel Road*, 2005) about the disturbance of the tranquil blue skies by the noises of the magpies and screeching hawks, the more obvious comparison emerges with Guthrie's "This Land is Your Land": not only are both songs strophic ballads in D major adopting a waltz-like rhythm, but also the verses in each conclude with a rousing refrain defining strong attachments to place (even using similar terminology). Even though the songwriters argue for slightly different proprietary rights over the respective landscapes (Guthrie for public ownership, Lund for personal ownership), both songs encourage deep relationships to place as a physical space: Guthrie explores connections to a large nation, whereas Lund focuses his attention to localized regional issues of the western prairie

province of Alberta. Perhaps more importantly, both songs were written in a manner that allow for multiple readings. Mark Allen Jackson (2002, 249-76) and Mark Pedelty (2012, 52) have demonstrated (separately) how “This Land” evolved from a message of protest to a patriotic anthem through history as the original text was edited to suit different ideological purposes. Guthrie, as Pedelty (2012, 52) observes, “tended to start each song with several relatively apolitical verses, setting the scene and hooking listeners before hitting them with increasingly critical statements.” In contrast, “This Is My Prairie” seemingly straddles the political divide throughout the entire narrative; thus, even audiences have not edited the lyrics to suit particular political readings, the fan responses above reveal that the almost apolitical tone of the song creates space for all Albertans to negotiate their feelings about place and the impact of the energy industry regardless their political or occupational perspective.

“This Is My Prairie” also bears strong resemblance to Kentucky folksinger, environmentalist, and activist Jean Ritchie’s 1974 anti-mining song “Black Waters.” Ritchie’s song became an anthem for the movement, a “rally cry for the growing outrage against the environmental devastation being caused by strip-mining, which [in 1974] was a fairly new method of mining for coal” (House 2009, 30).<sup>36</sup> Ritchie’s song begins in much the same manner as “This is My Prairie,” declaring her heritage and home in Kentucky. In her song, however, the folksinger opens her first three verses by describing the beautiful landscape, nature, and wildlife on the hillside in Kentucky, only to reveal how strip mining has destroyed these tranquil country scenes: “Now there’s scenes of destruction on every hand / And there’s only black waters run down through my land.”<sup>37</sup> Both songs also reference the energy industry’s impact on family health (Ritchie’s pointing to burying a son, while Lund’s references sick children and dead cattle), and the industry’s presence on their family land. Ritchie does not shy away from revealing the negative destructive impact of strip mining on her native Kentucky soil, including the changes in soundscape (dynamite blasts and absence of birds singing) and water contamination. The most striking correlation between the two songs lies in the fourth verses of both narratives. Similar to Lund’s

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<sup>36</sup> Ritchie performed this song for the first time at a Woody Guthrie memorial concert.

<sup>37</sup> Full lyrics of Jean Ritchie’s “Black Waters” can be retrieved from <<http://www.dailykos.com/story/2010/04/14/857098/--black-waters-run-down-through-my-land#>>.

narrative, Ritchie also closes her song by addressing her lack of financial resources to truly own her land, claiming that if she had the money, she would buy Perry County and run the miners off of her land. Despite the similarities between these two songs, they do differ in how they approach the topic. This is most apparent in their refrains, where Ritchie persistently points to “flooding black waters” and “sad scenes of destruction,” always returning to negative imagery to close each verse. Lund, speaking from the point of view of an individual who grew up there and a singer-songwriter caught between his familial ranching tradition and a brother working in the oil sands, takes a more tempered approach to the issues at hand. Instead, he deals with issues of destruction, pollution, and family health and continually returning to issues of landownership in his refrain, and re-staking his claim to his land.

### *5.3.2 Anticipating the Fuel Shortage Apocalypse*

Lund’s narrative in “This Is My Prairie” straddles the political divide to explore the conflicting tensions between individual rights versus the government and industry. While much of the media attention surrounds First Nations groups, landscape, and wildlife, Alberta’s affected ranching community has been largely overlooked and has certainly been ignored by a government increasingly determined to develop the oil industry. Lund’s song works to fill this void. While his lyrics avoid making an overt political statement against the energy industry, his video and interviews have increasingly revealed a sense of foreboding where the energy industry is concerned. Although Lund is the first to admit his own guilt for relying on petroleum, he is sensitive to the negative impact that this industry has had on ranchers, and the foothills landscape on which he was raised. In a blog about the song and video, Lund (2012f) stated:

60 per cent of the time I think we’re beyond the tipping point, and have no chance as a sustainable species. Or maybe there will be a violent setback in our technology and culture where we remake society at a less developed technological level.

The singer-songwriter here draws on the concept “tipping point” to refer not just to global climate changes, but, perhaps more importantly, to hint at deeper concerns for the fate of humanity in a world reliant on petroleum and other fossil fuels. Thus, the change from

exploring resource potential in Alberta to exploiting it at all costs marks a socio-political “tipping point” that causes him great concern. For Lund, the issues have hit close to home: the ranch land on which he grew up, rode horses, chased cows, and learned his first cowboy song, was at risk of being mined for coal bed methane. Knowing and understanding the potential impact that fracking could have on his family’s land, their health, their livestock, and the water tables in the region, seems to have caused Lund to really question the situation and the lengths that oil and gas companies (and the government) will go to in order to increase their energy supply.<sup>38</sup> The apocalyptic overtones in his blog reveal that he is not just concerned with Alberta’s land, but also society in general, and what their future will look like if the government and big corporations have are allowed unfettered access to CBM and the oil sands. This sentiment has since crept into his music, exposing a darker, foreboding feeling for the fate of humanity.

### ***“Gettin’ Down on the Mountain” (2012)***

While the song and video narratives of both “This Is My Prairie” and “Roughest Neck Around” address regional issues, the lead single from Lund’s seventh studio album *Cabin Fever* (2012) reveals his growing interest in global energy issues and their potential impact on society (Lund 2012h/j). Lund was influenced by Chris Smith’s 2009 documentary *Collapse*, which explores the theories of investigative journalist Michael Ruppert and his ideas and obsession with what he believes is the US’s unsustainable energy policy. His views are certainly alarmist in tone: throughout the documentary he predicts that as the world’s oil supply decreases (while demand increases), the American economy will inevitably collapse, leading to social unrest and a society unprepared and unable to support themselves without the luxuries of technology. Lund (2012h) joked in his video blog that *Collapse* got him thinking about canned food and ammunition, an idea that he expanded on in his written blog about the song:

The way I look at it, we all pay lots of money every year for insurance against [events] that are much less likely to happen than an oil or power shortage or a

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<sup>38</sup> These issues will be addressed in more detail in chapter 6.

currency meltdown. And the beauty of buying non-perishable food, ammo, clothing, supplies, etc [*sic*] is that they don't lose value over time. If anything they increase in value, so to me it's just an exchange of one sort of currency for another.

This kind of survivalist thinking is not foreign to Lund. Not only did growing up in rural Alberta often require pioneering instincts and a certain preparedness for blizzards, tornadoes, or other natural occurrences, but his Mormon heritage also followed a command of having one year's supply of food in storage for emergency situations (Lund 2012h). Lund discusses this connection in his blog on "Gettin' Down on the Mountain," reflecting on a being snowed in at the ranch with his grandfather, and eating nothing but the steaks and canned mushrooms stored in the house. From this point, he says, "it's not a big stretch to jump into full-on disaster prep." Intrigued by Ruppert's theories, and drawing from his own survivalist knowledge of preparing for emergency situations, Lund explored the darker side to the fossil fuel energy debate in the chaos of a society learning to function in an oil-less world.

The apocalyptic tones of Smith's documentary are clearly reflected in the narrative of "Gettin' Down on the Mountain." After opening with the doom of "When the oil stops, everything stops, nothin' left in the fountain," the song's narrative discusses an oil-less future where paper money is no longer useful as a result of dramatic increase of inflation caused by the fossil fuel industry. The most valuable form of currency in this world include food, ammo, and other supplies that can be used not just for survival, but also for bartering with neighbors in times of need. In Lund's apocalyptic world, pioneer skills such as breaking horses, predicting weather by reading the sky, tending gardens, gutting fish, digging water wells, and using kerosene lamps are necessary for survival. The song narrative predicts complete social unrest, with desperate parents seeking out food for their starving children, overcrowded social areas, and gridlocked traffic. With an almost Cormac McCarthy-like grimness, Lund concludes the third and fourth verses with: "I think I see a rip in the social fabric: brother can you pass the ammo?" Wishing to avoid the chaos "when

the shit goes down,” the protagonist reveals in the chorus his desire to “get down on” or retreat to the mountain for safety.<sup>39</sup>

The main riff in the song’s accompaniment captures the mood of the song’s grim lyrical narrative through the interplay between a distorted two-note motif of the baritone electric guitar and a fast picking pattern on the acoustic guitar.<sup>40</sup> “Gettin’ Down on the Mountain” opens with Siemens playing an eighth-note pattern on distorted baritone electric guitar on the first beat of each bar, accompanied (in the first four bars) only by Valgardson playing a gentle train-beat on the high-hat.<sup>41</sup> After this introduction, Lund and Ciesla enter on acoustic guitar and upright bass (respectively) with a quick picking pattern on beats 2-4 of the next four bars (Ex. 5.3). This interaction between the distorted and quick-moving acoustic timbres establishes a sinister tone from the outset of the song: the baritone guitar’s distorted tone and low register create a throbbing sound that evoke a sense of impending doom, enhanced by the scratching of the pick-slide in the third bar of each phrase. Although subtle, the scratching pick-slide sounds like a stretched guitar string on the verge of snapping, creating a tension that symbolizes the imminent rip in the fabric of this apocalyptic society. By contrast, the lighter tone of the acoustic guitar’s scurrying finger-picked passage conjures an image of an individual scrambling to escape danger and find cover, an impression further elaborated in the song’s accompanying music video, which has Lund dressed as a lumberjack clambering to get into the mountainside.

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<sup>39</sup> While Lund has not revealed Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* as an influence on this song, video director Fish Grikowsky (2012) has observed a similarity in the singer-songwriter’s grimness of tone. In fact, recent reviews of his holiday single “Just Me and These Ponies (for Christmas This Year)” claim that Lund has a “dusty Cormac McCarthy soul” (Moss 2014).

<sup>40</sup> In his webisode *What That Song Means Now*, Lund (2012j) revealed that the main riff and picking pattern used to be a finger exercise he used.

<sup>41</sup> The baritone electric guitar has a larger body than a standard guitar and has longer scale lengths, which allows the strings to be tuned at a lower pitch while maintaining normal tension.

Example 5.3 “Gettin’ Down on the Mountain,” opening riff (and instr. bridge)

The musical score is written in 4/4 time. The first system consists of two staves: 'Acoustic Lead' and 'Baritone Guitar'. The Acoustic Lead staff has a whole rest in the first four measures, followed by a melodic line starting in the fifth measure. The Baritone Guitar staff has a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes in the first four measures, followed by a similar pattern in the fifth measure. The second system continues the melodic line in the Acoustic Lead and the rhythmic accompaniment in the Baritone Guitar. The Acoustic Lead staff starts with a measure rest (marked with a '6' above the staff) and then continues with the melodic line. The Baritone Guitar staff continues with the rhythmic accompaniment.

The vocal performance adds to the imagery of needing to escape and find cover. The melodic line of the verses is quite static, echoing the natural rise and fall of speech, with short note values and pitch repetition hovering in the first two phrases around F, D, and C (Ex. 5.4). Coupled with a nasal vocal quality, Lund’s delivery has an almost speech-like quality. The attitude of his vocal performance comes across in the first verse as though he is predicting an inevitable situation with the apocalypse—a straightforward, matter-of-fact telling of the future. Through the verses, Lund’s voice captures the worry and panic setting in as the song protagonist questions his pioneering skills and ability to survive the apocalypse. The accompaniment aids in this picture, with its simple oom-pa rhythm in the verses, establishes not just the rhythmic drive, but also the protagonist’s pulse, which becomes stronger and harder in the chorus. The interval span of the melody expands through the verse, so that Lund moves from singing close intervals in a range of a perfect fourth to singing around the intervals of a minor seventh chord in the chorus (almost an octave), and then returns to the close-knit repeated pitches and the tonic of D.

Example 5.4 “Gettin’ Down on the Mountain,” verse 1 and chorus

Verse 1



When the oil stops, eve-ry-thing stops, noth-ing left in the foun - tain

No - bo - dy wants pa - per mo - ney son — so you just well stop coun - tin'. Can you

break the horse? Can you light the fire? What's that I beg you're par - don? You

best start thin - kin' where you food comes from and I hope you tend a good gar - den.

Chorus

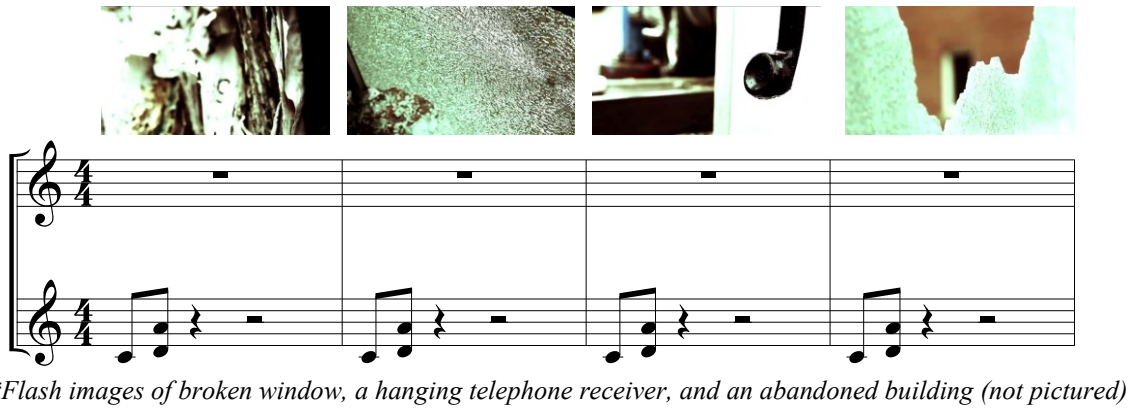
Gett - in' down on the moun - tain, gett - in' down on the moun - tain', don't

wa - nna be a - round when the shit comes down, I'll be gett - in' down on the moun - tain.



The music video for “Gettin’ Down on the Mountain,” also directed by Fish Griwkowsky, opens with flashes of fragmentary images of shattered glass windows and a dangling telephone on the downbeat of the guitar introduction (Lund 2012c). Within these first four bars the video present an abandoned high-rise apartment building (not pictured in Fig. 5.9). Lund, portraying the song protagonist here as well, enters the video at the downbeat of the acoustic guitar finger-picking entrance; first, his foot stomps over an animal skeleton and then he runs through a smokey bog (Fig. 5.10). Even before he sings the protagonist’s lyrics, we are presented with ominous images and a panicked male figure (played by himself) running away from something. Throughout the rest of the video the exhausted male protagonist stops to catch his breath, plods or scrambles across snow-covered fields, and clammers between trees (Fig. 5.10) to get into the low-brush on the mountainside. These actions appear in each chorus and repetition of the opening riff, reinforcing the imagery created in the baritone and acoustic guitar riff of the desperate scramble to get “down in the mountain” to escape the social unrest occurring in the city (represented by the abandoned apartment building and presumably empty commercial buildings). The video also demonstrates the desperate actions that an individual can succumb to in order to provide for his family. In the concluding line of the second verse (“have you ever seen a man whose kids ain’t ate for 17 days and countin’”), the video shows a cat sitting on stairs and then the backside of a man walking into the frame to stare at the cat—presumably sizing up a meal for his starving children.

Figure 5.9 “Gettin’ Down on the Mountain,” instrumental introduction



The image shows the instrumental introduction of the song "Gettin' Down on the Mountain" in 4/4 time. It consists of two staves. The top staff is a grand staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The bottom staff is a single treble clef staff. The music features a simple, repetitive rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and rests. Above the notation are four small, square images: a broken window, a hanging telephone receiver, and an abandoned building (not pictured).

*\*Flash images of broken window, a hanging telephone receiver, and an abandoned building (not pictured)*



The image shows the musical notation for the verse and chorus of "Gettin' Down on the Mountain". It consists of two staves. The top staff is a grand staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The bottom staff is a single treble clef staff. The music features a simple, repetitive rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and rests. Above the notation are four small, square images: a skeleton, a person in a red jacket running through a smoky bog, a person in a red jacket running through a smoky bog, and a person in a red jacket running through a smoky bog.

*\*Lund stepping over a skeleton and running through a smokey bog.*

Figure 5.10 “Gettin’ Down on the Mountain,” Lund in verse 1 and chorus



*Lund stopping to catch his breath (Verse 1)*



*Lund plodding through deep snow (Chorus)*

“Gettin’ Down on the Mountain” is perhaps the darkest song in Lund’s discography. While the singer-songwriter has certainly addressed a range of serious and thought-

provoking issues, but none carry the grim, fatalistic tones as this apocalyptic tale about the chaos and social unrest that would follow an inevitable petroleum shortage. He paints a bleak picture of a world in which canned food and ammo is more valuable than money and a man considers sacrificing his cat to feed his starving children. The mountain is the only place for his protagonist to escape lawlessness and social upheaval of this new world—a world that emerged as a result of fossil fuel shortage and collapse of the economy. Lund draws on his knowledge of the pioneering skills required to survive the apocalypse from his rural and Mormon heritage, both of which emphasize the importance of storing food, clothes and ammo for future emergencies and natural disasters.

### *5.3.3 Looking toward the Future*

Lund included a section on the energy industry in his 2013 exhibition at the Glenbow Museum. Perhaps in an attempt to remain somewhat apolitical or strike a balance between the positive and the negative sides of the industry, he featured the lyrics and video of “Roughest Neck Around” instead of the more critical “This Is My Prairie” or grim “Gettin’ Down on the Mountain,” revealing his personal connections to the industry as he acknowledged his brother Kevin’s role as a tool push. The exhibit celebrated his province’s largest and most profitable industry, highlighting the important role that Alberta has played in advancing technology used to extract fossil fuels. Despite the positive tone to what is ordinarily a controversial topic, the exhibit subtly illustrated some of the darker issues of the industry. Alongside samples of oil and gas pipeline, the exhibit displayed a historical photo of the 1982 sour gas well blowout at Amoco Lodgepole outside Drayton Valley, and a miner’s canary cage from 1910. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, historically, canaries have been used in mining to warn miners of potential danger. The presence of these images reminds the exhibit attendees of the human cost (rather than the environmental cost) of the fossil fuel energy industry and the sacrifices made daily by the men and women who work in the rigs.

Lund also used this exhibit as an opportunity to share some of his thoughts on how he hopes to see the energy industry evolve. Echoing the sentiments of his interview with

Ghameshi and in his 2012 blog, Lund's (2013c) commentary concluded with the following statement:

The world currently runs on fossils, but at some point in our future we will have to move to another energy source—just as we moved from animal power to steam power, and from steam to oil, gas and coal. I would like to see Alberta use its technological ability, drive and innovation to develop new sources of sustainable energy alongside petroleum, and continue to be a world leader in energy production.

As revealed in his interviews, Lund understands the current need for oil and gas, but does not see these two resources as the future of the energy industry. Like many Albertans and environmental activists, he wishes to see a more sustainable resource, one that leaves his native Albertan landscape untouched. More importantly, he believes in the skills and knowledge of Albertans by continually praising the technological advancements and contributions that his province has made in this industry, and encouraging his fellow Albertans to seek out and develop new energy resources that would leave the landscape untouched.

#### **5.4 Summary**

In his interviews and blogs, as in his music, Corb Lund remains even-handed in his assessment of his home province's politics, industry, and environment. He understands that, while the energy industry has wreaked havoc on the landscape and environment in Alberta, it has also provided gainful employment for more than half of the province—including family members and friends. He also sees that the world remains reliant on fossil fuels, and the role that Alberta can play in providing these resources. Despite the apocalyptic overtones that have crept into Lund's music and discourse, "This Is My Prairie" also reveals the contradictory nature of Albertan identity. The western Canadian province, as Aritha van Herk (2002, 395-96) has observed, is married to energy. Oil and gas are its lifeblood. They are its most profitable industry, and employ approximately 275,000 people directly and indirectly (Alberta Energy 2015e). As a result, many Albertans pragmatically accept the negative effect of the energy industry on agriculture and environment so that people can maintain employment and live decent lifestyles. "This Is My Prairie" in particular represents this contradiction, and despite his frustrations, Lund—like so many Albertans—seems resigned to these circumstances and the fate of the land and, as such, remains even-handed in his assessment of his home province's politics, industry, and environment. He uses his position as a fourth-generation rancher with close ties to the industry to offer nuanced critiques that respects the fossil fuel heritage through a celebration of the roughneck, while also criticizing developments in fossil fuel extraction. His songs also project concern about the industry's long-term impact on the destruction of

Alberta's landscape, contamination of soil and water, and increased health issues for affected residents (Stimeling 2012, 15). Thus, while the narrative in "This Is My Prairie" seems to avoid making an overt political statement, Lund's video, published interviews, and "Getting' Down on the Mountain" certainly reveal a tendency toward anticipating the (fuel shortage) apocalypse. These texts suggest that the singer-songwriter is increasingly concerned with the industry's impact on his native Alberta. For Lund, whose family history in the province dates back to the turn of the twentieth century, the prairies are a symbol not just of economic opportunity afforded through ranching (or even fossil fuel extraction), but of the strong connections between past, present and future generations as well. His narrative does not simply lament the *current* state of affairs in Alberta. From his burning "smoulderin' bones" in the first verse to his decaying "moulderin' bones" in the final verse of "This is My Prairie," this over-arching narrative has been, and will continue, to be relevant for generations of ranchers and farmers as Albertan soil continues to be disrupted for its resources.

While this chapter focused on Lund's responses to the expanding fossil fuel energy industry, the next (and final) chapter will examine the urban-rural tensions that exist in Lund's music. The singer-songwriter's discography emphasizes a strong rural identity and landscape for the western Canadian province—despite the fact that Alberta has several large cities and that Lund made Edmonton his home for just over two decades. His Alberta emerges as overwhelmingly rural and juxtaposed against evil corporate urban centres in songs addressing the impact of urban sprawl on his homeland, or against densely populated cities in the more traditional country narrative of elaborating themes of heartache.



## Chapter 6. Rural and Urban Spaces

Each chapter in this dissertation has demonstrated the variety of ways through which an artist can negotiate their relationship with specific geographic places and cultural spaces. As discussed in the preceding chapters, country music artists draw on specific or archetypal places to communicate life experiences and lessons learned. These songs do not simply describe place (or home); rather, they use place as a way to define core elements of their identity and to articulate elements of rusticity, which, as Pamela Fox (2009) notes, allows country artists to maintain connections to their humble origins and a predominantly working-class culture (see also Lewis 2005). The previous chapters revealed numerous ways in which artists explore their relation to place: through narratives about landscape, environment, weather, industry (agriculture, fossil fuel energy, etc.), profession (veterinary medicine), sport (rodeo), and more. These songs demonstrated the variety of ways that artists feel connected to a particular place, specifically (in most cases) the “homeplace,” and how different musical styles and images can reinforce these relationships and build deeper connections to region, community and identity.

This chapter focuses on yet another complex relationship: that is between urban and rural spaces, as they emerge in Corb Lund’s music. The majority of his songs unfold in rural settings: the ranch, the mountains, cozy cabins, etc. Very few songs in his discography unfold in urban settings – which is interesting given that (1) Alberta has the fourth largest population in Canada (Statistics Canada 2014c), (2) is home to Canada’s fifth (Calgary) and sixth (Edmonton) largest cities,<sup>1</sup> and (3) that, for roughly two decades, Lund called Edmonton his home. Despite these statistics, his music still clearly marks out a rural

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<sup>1</sup> In 2011, the following Alberta cities ranked within the top 100 most populated metropolitan areas in Canada: Lethbridge (#34), Red Deer (#43), Medicine Hat (#50), Wood Buffalo (#51), Grand Prairie (#59), and Lloydminster (#87) (Statistics Canada 2014d).

western culture and environment, continually recalling the landscape and setting of his youth. For a ranching family nestled in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, urban sprawl and general encroachment of industry on family land and rural landscape are significant issues in southern Alberta. Lund addresses them in two songs in his discography, “The Truth Comes Out” and “This is My Prairie.” While the former laments the loss of natural habitat for wild animals that have made the Rockies their home, the latter (as discussed in chapter 4) reveals a growing concern with land ownership laws and the increased presence of oil and gas excavation projects in rural landscapes. These songs reveal the impact that the expansion of city limits and the growth of industry have not just on families in rural communities, but also the animals that have lived in the region for centuries. Beyond his protective instincts for his homeland, Lund has also drawn on urban and rural landscapes in his songs narratives as a way of defining his relationship to place. In both “Alberta Says Hello” and “September” he invokes the common country trope of city versus the country in songs that deal with the disintegration of relationships. Country scholar Joli Jensen (1998, 29-30) has observed that rural settings tend to be associated with the safety and security of female figures (mothers and partners) and urban settings are characterized by greed, filth, and deceit. Lund’s settings offer a slight twist on this narrative paradigm: *he* is the one waiting at home, while his female love interests have left him to pursue “big city” dreams in Montreal and New York. While the city is not painted as a demonizing place, it certainly emerges in these song narratives as foreign and positioned against the safety, security, and tranquility of the rural Albertan landscape. Through these narratives, Lund reveals his deep connections to the region, his protective instincts for his family’s land, and a strong sense of identification with the landscape, lifestyle, and culture of the southern foothills of Alberta. After a survey of representations of urban and rural spaces in country music, this chapter will (like the chapters preceding it) describe the relationship between rural and urban Alberta, and then interrogate the ways in which Lund negotiates his connection to these contrasting places and spaces through his music.



## 6.1 Rural and Urban Spaces in Country Music

The juxtaposition of rural and urban settings has been an important theme in country music narratives. Songs addressing the tensions between these two environments create a space through which country artists articulate elements of their identity that would otherwise remain hidden, obscured, or even overshadowed throughout the course of their career (Watson 2014, 52). By positioning city against country in these narratives, country singer-songwriters are able to define their relationship with place, its surrounding environment and community, and unveil elements of their character, values, and beliefs (Watson [2016]). One way of doing this has been by describing what you “are” and/or “are not” in relation to such spaces. The late Little Jimmy Dickens wrote the first song in this narrative theme: in “Country Boy” (1949) he proudly proclaimed to the urban west coast folks who “think they’re so doggone high-falutin’,” that being from the country was something he felt was worth being (Cantwell 2015). His song became almost a template for those who followed. Consider, for example, Loretta Lynn’s classic “You’re Lookin’ at Country” (1971), Jason Aldean’s “She’s Country” (2008), and Easton Corbin’s “A Little More Country than That” (2011), which outline the qualities that make these artists “country,” as opposed to being “city.” Indeed, each of these songs praises the virtues of what it means to *be* “country,” including a passion for the outdoors, respect for “traditional” relationships, celebration of “down home roots,” and even marking identity through wardrobe choice (cowboy hat and boots). We are to assume in each case that, despite very little direct mention of urban spaces, these qualities are in direct contrast to being “city.” Lynn simply claims that you do not see “city” when you look at her, the only option is “country.” Aldean’s song overemphasizes the state of this female protagonist “being country,” to the point that the audience could not imagine the descriptive characteristics as being anything *but* a rural identity. And when Corbin claims that he would not play “games” with his lover because he is more “country” than that kind of behaviour, the audience can only assume that he suggests that men from the “city” participate in such juvenile shenanigans with a woman’s heart. While these songs make little (if any) reference to urban settings, they certainly make a strong statement for “being” country and the rural values and traditions with which they identify. These songs afford artists the opportunity to abandon performative guises in order to honour their rural roots (Fox 2009, 115). They demonstrate that the artists identify with

working-class culture, while insisting on the notion that these origins, however far removed from their current reality, remain an integral component of their identity. In revealing these characteristics about themselves through song narrative, these artists seek to remind their audience that remain just like them. This characteristic is representative of “hard core” culture (Peterson 1997, 137-55). Other artists draw more deliberately on these contrasting images, positioning specific urban and rural settings against one another to establish their place as insiders or outsiders within them.

As I discussed in my article on the Dixie Chicks’ response to Lubbock, TX, one of the ways in which country artists have unveiled their relationship to place is through the juxtaposition of the contrasting settings of city and country. These narratives “express the tensions between sin and salvation, urban and rural life, liberal and conservative values, and resistance and conformity” (Watson 2014, 51). Songs invoking this narrative model tend to draw, at least in part, on the stereotypical representations of rural and urban spaces in order to tell their story. As Joli Jensen (1998, 29-30) has observed:

A rural-urban tension underlies most country songs. Home is always portrayed as rural—green, welcoming, often with mother or girlfriend waiting. Yet home is inaccessible, because the protagonist has gone to the city and been tainted by it. He can long for home and remember it as he sits in his lonely room, or in a some-filled bar, but he can never truly return. Cities are portrayed as unfriendly, dehumanising places, full of temptations, greed and selfishness.

Yet, the rural-urban relationship that the scholar defines is not so easily generalized. Indeed, Williams’ argued in *The City and the Country* (1973, 291-97) that these contrasting places have been constructed through the imagination of individuals and community. As discussed earlier, the countryside represents the past, old ways, and traditions, while the city symbolizes the future, modernization, and progress. These ideas are further complicated, however, by the myriad ways in which individuals perceive and relate to open spaces and urban development. As noted in my article on the Dixie Chicks (Watson 2014, 50), “what may provide a sense of freedom for one individual may cause feelings of isolation for another.” Thus, the way in which an individual describes landscape and their movement through the land is often reflective of deeper feelings toward a particular region. Landscape defined as open and welcoming or isolating and hostile can reveal the nature of an individual’s relationship to place and community. However, relationships to place are

not quite so easy to define; a landscape can represent a geographic or cultural space that is at once welcoming and inhospitable, free and limiting, or peaceful and hostile. The duality of these tensions often results in complex and contradictory responses and relationships to landscape, not just within one song narrative, but also within an album, or throughout an artist's discography. The case study of the Dixie Chicks' response to Lubbock, TX, provides an example of how place, specifically the "homeplace," can represent security and belonging for some, but it may also represent a place from which others struggle, in an attempt to escape the constricting confines of family, community, politics, and even religion. From Natalie Maines to Mac Davis and local musician Andy Eppler, each artist discussed in my article communicated strong feelings of resentment (at least initially) to Lubbock, TX, and a burning desire to leave and build a new life in a more welcoming and liberal environment. Popular examples of Joli Jensen's narrative type include Dolly Parton's album *My Tennessee Mountain Home* (1973), Mac Davis's "Texas in My Rear View Mirror" (1981), and Carrie Underwood's "Ain't in Checotah Anymore" (2005).

I have turned to Dolly Parton in several chapters of this dissertation, and for good reason: she is a strong example of an artist who has continually drawn on her rural Appalachian origins at times of personal and emotional turmoil in her career, notably in her classic 1973 concept album *My Tennessee Mountain Home*. While the majority of the album has Parton exploring her east Tennessee roots, the concluding tracks look to her new home in the city of Nashville. Thus, instead of having just one song elaborate rural-urban tensions, the entire album interrogates this relationship and positions the "downhome" rural values at her core against the "uptown" urban values of her adopted Nashville home.<sup>2</sup> The album, then functions as a battle between Parton's nostalgia for the good old days in her "Tennessee Mountain Home" (album's first track) and her struggle to find her place in "Down on Music Row" (the album's concluding track).<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, this tension lies not just in Parton's lyrical narratives, but also in the musical setting, which draws from both her Appalachian roots and the "countryopolitan" style conventions (i.e. soft shell conventions)

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<sup>2</sup> The terms "downhome" and "uptown" are borrowed from Joli Jensen's (1998, 21-37) work on the Nashville Sound, in which she describes the former in relation to rural, working-class sensibilities, and the latter as a product of high-class urban ideals.

<sup>3</sup> *My Tennessee Mountain Home* opens with a prelude track to the album's narrative called "The Letter," a recitation of the first letter she wrote to her parents back home just a few days after arriving in Nashville.

associated with RCA Victor at that time. Indeed, her Appalachian roots remain at the core of each song on the album through her easy folk style vocal delivery, the thumb-brush strumming technique similar to that of Maybelle Carter, and the gospel-style harmonies.<sup>4</sup> These stylistic elements (drawn from the folk and religious music of rural Appalachia) function as musical codes that mark out region and solidify relationship to the homeplace. The countrypolitan style grew out of the smooth, textured instrumentation of the “Nashville Sound,” which removed strong markers of rusticity like the fiddle, pedal steel, and banjo from arrangements so that songs would appeal to a crossover pop audience (Jensen 1998).<sup>5</sup> Producers on Nashville’s “Music Row” drew on the smoother countrypolitan style as a way to “sophisticate” country music. Instead of eliminating these instruments, Parton used them alongside those markers of the countrypolitan style in her songs on this album. While these regional styles typically represent the clash of rural values with the urban commercialization of country music, their combination in this album actually *emphasizes* rurality. They also allow the singer-songwriter to keep one foot firmly rooted in her past, revealing to her audience that the culture and traditions of east Tennessee have left an indelible mark on both her music and identity (Watson [2016]).

Just as Parton dreamed of leaving her east Tennessee Home for life in Music City, soft shell countrypolitan artist Mac Davis also sought to escape his hometown of Lubbock, TX. After living in Los Angeles for about a decade, Davis wrote “Texas in My Rear View Mirror” (1981) to chronicle his journey from his days as a restless Lubbock teen to a struggling musician in Hollywood. In the bridge, this young man realizes that Hollywood had deceived him, but is too proud to admit his mistakes and instead remains in Los Angeles and gives in to the temptations of alcohol. After each stage in his journey (unfolding through the verses), Davis reveals that he thought happiness was seeing

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<sup>4</sup> This style, attributed to Maybelle Carter, is a thumb-brush pattern in which Parton strums the strings with the back of her nails.

<sup>5</sup> The “Nashville Sound” era emerged in the 1950s and 1960s. Led by Chet Atkins (RCA Records) and Owen Bradley (Decca Records), this movement introduced a “smooth” commercial sound to country music. Atkins and Bradley retained traditional country themes and forms, but abandoned instrumentation that personified its (stereotypical) “hillbilly” roots (banjo, mandolin, fiddle, and pedal steel). They hired session musicians (Nashville’s “A-Team”) to craft more pop-oriented productions—often characterized by lush string arrangements of an orchestra and background vocals provided by a choir. Countrypolitan was perhaps an even *smoother* sound; it maintained these stylistic markers of a pop-oriented Nashville Sound, but also incorporated keyboards, guitars, strings, and background vocals. For more on the Nashville Sound see the work of Joli Jensen (1998), Bill C. Malone (2002), Diane Pecknold (2007), and Richard Peterson (1997).

Lubbock, fading away from sight in his rear view mirror. By the final verse, however, he realizes that, with the help of his religious faith, true happiness could be found *in* Lubbock. Davis's song fits squarely within Joli Jensen's observations about the ways in which country singer-songwriters distinguish between urban and rural values. He describes Hollywood initially as seductive but increasingly unfriendly, and positions the city against Lubbock (home), which is portrayed as limiting and associated with a smothering mother figure and religious upbringing. These contrasting identities are further elaborated in the musical setting, in which a harmonica, acoustic guitar, and pillowy strings characterize Lubbock and a comping Rhodes, bass guitar, and drum kit depict Hollywood. As observed in my article (Watson 2014, 64), the musical setting represents the tension of the traditional home versus urban Hollywood, or, to put it another way, the "security of family versus the seductive lady in red." The further the song character got from his home, the more he realized that Lubbock held an important place in his sense of self, his identity and values.

While Davis struggles to define and find his place within the community in which he was born, another soft shell artist, Carrie Underwood outlines her personal battle to understand the culture of her new home in the city. On her debut solo album, *Some Hearts* (2005), she co-writes "Ain't in Checotah Anymore" with Trey Bruce and Angelo Petraglia, marking the first time in her career that she recorded a song in which she was involved in the writing process. The song begins with a description of her hometown of Checotah, OK: its location where highways 69 and 40 meet, its landmark single stoplight, and its "small town" community culture that revolves around friends, family, football games, Okrafest, and fishing at Eufaula Lake. She juxtaposes this small town image against that of Manhattan, and the lifestyle of excess: oversized hotel rooms, outrageously priced dinners, glamour, red carpets, and paparazzi. She claims that, while the attention can make "a girl feel pretty good," this extravagant world actually makes her feel quite small and nostalgic for the simplicity of her hometown, leaving her to claim, "I ain't in Checotah anymore." Like Davis's song, Underwood also draws on contrasting musical arrangements to characterize these two different spaces. Interestingly, both spaces are represented through a country style setting. The song's opening verse and closing lines (describing the location of Checotah at the convergence of two highways) presents a slow arrangement featuring acoustic guitar, slide guitar pitch bends, and mandolin tremolos to signify a rural space, and

establish sense of nostalgia from the top of the song. As Underwood sings the song's refrain, the instruments shift seamlessly into the up-tempo country number. All of the previous instruments remain in the setting (as in Parton's album), but this amped up setting incorporates electric guitar and drums in a more aggressive setting than the opening verse. The contrasting country styles mark out the two spaces: the "slow" pace and simple lifestyle in the small town of Checotah against the "fast" pace and challenges of life in the city (here, Manhattan).<sup>6</sup> In choosing two country styles to represent the tone of these different cultural spaces, Underwood, like Parton, seemingly maintains her identity: she demonstrates to her audience that whether she is at home in Checotah or navigating the excesses of life in the city, her country values and sensibilities remain at the core of her true identity. That this song is the first song to which she put her pen (and on her debut solo album no less), suggests that Underwood sought to honour her homeplace and affirm her connection to her Oklahoma roots.<sup>7</sup>

As Underwood's career has progressed, and star status has grown, her songs point less to her origins, and more to national spaces and identities. Conforming to Peterson's observations on soft shell artists, Underwood's music speaks of being from rural or small-town "America," non-descript regional spaces that appeal to individuals from many communities across the southern US. In 2007 she released a song about the perfect "All-American Girl" (*Carnival Ride*). The story begins with a young father wishing for a baby boy, only to find out in the delivery room that his wife has had a "beautiful, wonderful, perfect All-American girl" who immediately steals his heart. Underwood admitted before performing this song on the *David Letterman Show* that she wrote this song about herself;

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<sup>6</sup> While the lyrics are referring here to a *hotel* in Manhattan (perhaps representing a professional obligation), it is interesting that Underwood, Bruce, and Petraglia chose Manhattan as the "city" of the lyrics, since Underwood's career has been predominantly centered in Nashville from the very beginning. Perhaps this was an attempt not to assign a "big city" reputation to Nashville (her new home). Furthermore, many country musicians (and, indeed, celebrities in general) have revealed that Nashville is "different" from many big cities and entertainment centers in the USA; they have expressed that they can live "normal" lives in Nashville, and that they can go about their daily lives with little to no interference from paparazzi and press. Thus, in this regard, Nashville maintains a bit of a "small town" feel for many artists. Thus, Manhattan would provide a more appropriate juxtaposition to small-town Checotah. Artists like Taylor Swift (Rogers 2014), Keith Urban and Nicole Kidman (Watts 2014), and numerous others have discussed their reasons for living in/moving to Nashville (Sherwin 2013).

<sup>7</sup> Oklahoma also appears as the setting for her 2012 hit single "Blown Away" (*Blown Away*), about a young lady grappling with her decision to wake her abusive alcoholic father during a tornado, ultimately locking herself in a storm cellar and leaving him asleep on the couch. Chris Tompkins and Josh Kear wrote the song with Underwood in mind (WZTV FOX17 2013).

she was the third daughter of three girls, and her father was praying for a little boy (carrieunderwoodVEVO 2012). Although the song may be semi-autobiographical for Underwood, the shift from regional to national space removes the level of intimacy she had achieved in “Ain’t in Checotah Anymore.” The same can be said of her lyrics for “Thank God for Hometowns” (*Blown Away*, 2012). Written by songwriters Luke Laird, Ashley Gorley, and Hillary Lindsey, the song speaks of the sense of security and comfort of hometowns, referring specifically to small communities that are a welcoming space for individuals who may feel “lost out in this crazy world.” The narrative is written in a way that suggests familiarity between the singer and the town of which she sings, but the absence of a place name or other geographic or topographic descriptors suggests instead that this is meant to be a generic or archetypal space—a place that fans from any small town in the rural US south could relate. Even her recent hit “Blown Away,” which is set in Oklahoma, refers to place in a generic way that suggests that the place name could easily be swapped out for another. From her debut as a country artist (following her 2005 *American Idol* win) to her current status as one of the genre’s super stars, Underwood’s relationship to Checotah has gone from the foreground to the background of her career. I do not mean to suggest that she has cut ties with her hometown. On the contrary she has maintained very strong ties to Checotah; she has even founded the Checotah Animal, Town, and School foundation that helps with a variety of needs and services in her hometown (discussed below). But as she navigates her career within the dynamics of soft shell artistry, the focus of her narratives have become less geographically specific, less personally intimate, and thus more inclusive to a wider variety of listeners.

Another way in which artists strengthen ties to their homeplace is through active community involvement. Both Parton and Underwood have continually invested time and money in their home communities.<sup>8</sup> Parton’s story is well known: she has built a business empire on her family’s story, notably in the construction of *Dollywood*, a theme park that features traditional crafts and music of the Smoky Mountain region and a replica cabin of her Tennessee Mountain Home. While this is indeed a business venture, Parton uses this

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<sup>8</sup> Parton and Underwood are just two examples of artists giving back to their communities. Their stories are elaborated here to demonstrate the depths of their relationships to their hometowns. Other country artists (as well as those from other genres) certainly contribute to their communities.

theme park and her Dollywood Foundation to bring awareness to the life and traditions of rural Appalachia, while at the same time creating jobs for its citizens. She has also created the Dolly Parton Imagination Library, which began as a book distribution program to provide books to children in Sevier County until the age of five. Today, this program has expanded to other local communities in the USA, Canada, and the UK (<http://www.imaginationlibrary.com>). In 2009, Underwood established the Checotah Animal, Town, and School Foundation (C.A.T.S.), an organization that helps with a variety of needs and services in the community. For example, her foundation partnered with ACM Lifting Lives to provide new instruments for music programs in Checotah (C.A.T.S. 2009). Two years later, C.A.T.S. provided a big holiday surprise to all of the local schools through donations amounting to \$350,000 to fulfil their needs of computers, physical fitness equipment, band uniforms, and more (C.A.T.S. 2012). By maintaining their ties to their hometown, Parton and Underwood demonstrate the importance that Sevierville and Checotah have played in their upbringing, and their philanthropic work allows them to give back to communities that helped shape their identity.

These examples demonstrate several ways in which country musicians address their relationship to both city and country, exploring the urban-rural tension as they negotiate their place within a new environment and cultural space. Although Parton has occupied a space in both the hard core and soft shell spheres of country—even moving over to popular music for a short time—she never fully left the music of her traditional Appalachian roots behind. *My Tennessee Mountain Home* was released at a pivotal moment in her career, when she needed to reclaim her career and redefine her artistic identity the most, but the musical styles of her roots remained an integral position within her musical sound and discography throughout her sixty-year career. While soft shell artists Mac Davis and Carrie Underwood also used their songs to demonstrate a strong attachment to place and a deep homesickness, the musical styles used to represent the urban and rural spaces in each song were not drawn from the regions mentioned in the narratives. Even though they used contrasting styles to represent the urban spaces of Hollywood and Manhattan and rural spaces of Lubbock and Checotah, the arrangements evoked stylistic stereotypes to represent each place. Davis drew on harmonica, pedal steel, pillowy strings, and acoustic guitar to describe Lubbock and a comping Rhodes to characterize Hollywood. Underwood's



arrangement remained within the realm of country music, but used a slower tempo versus up-tempo country rock sound to capture the pace of Checotah and Manhattan (respectively). Not surprisingly, the musical setting is integral to understanding the lyrical narrative, as the internal struggle unfolds through the juxtaposition or combination of contrasting musical styles. Indeed, in all three cases, musical codes and styles represent the different geographic spaces and they help characterize the environment described in the lyrical narrative. The musical setting also aided in tracking the song character's journal from home to the city and back home through shifting musical styles (as in Davis's "Texas in My Rear View Mirror"). Most importantly, these songs reveal that the traditions, values, and beliefs of their rural origins remain an integral component of their being.

Lund offers yet another approach on this common theme in country music. The artists above approach their narratives from *outside* their homeplace: the song protagonist leaves home for the big city and reflects nostalgically on the life, family, and community left behind. Lund, however, remains firmly planted in rural Alberta, and urban activity interrupts his sacred landscape. In his narratives, the urban-rural tension emerges in two narrative types. First, he addresses the urban-rural divide through songs that lament urban sprawl on his sacred prairie landscape. The city emerges as the evil, uncaring "other" encroaching on his beloved rural Alberta, natural animal habitats, and ranches. Second, it emerges as a result of a broken relationship: his former lover has departed for the city, leaving him back home to pine over her. Heartbreak is arguably one of the most common themes in country music, and it is interesting that even in songs about relationships that Lund creates a decidedly rural setting for his heartache and pain. As revealed in chapter 3, he has elaborated the tensions between the sexes through a narrative detailing interactions between himself and horses. The horses in "She Won't Come to Me" and "(You Ain't a Cowboy) If You Ain't Been Bucked Off" represent female counterparts, both of whom reject the singer-songwriter. There is an implied rurality to such narratives, as the horses in these narratives are still, in fact, horses, they merely represent the women in his life. The songs discussed here draw strong contrasts between urban and rural settings, placing a seemingly large distance between him and his former lovers—both geographically and culturally.

## 6.2 Alberta's Rural and Urban Spaces

That Alberta has been described through a predominantly rural lens throughout this project is perhaps misleading with regard to the province's topography, landscape, population, industry, and, by extension, its overall identity. The western Canadian province is, in fact, the fourth largest by population, with roughly 3.65 million inhabitants. While, like most other Canadian provinces and territories, a significant portion of the land remains untouched and undeveloped, one cannot assume that the rest of the land has been used only for herding livestock, planting crops, lumber, or excavating fossil fuel energy resources. Alberta boasts many urban areas of varying sizes, notably its two rival cities of Calgary and Edmonton, the fifth and sixth most populated cities in Canada. Although Calgary has been perceived as the Conservative centre for business and Edmonton as the Liberal heartland of government and education (Takach 2010, 152),<sup>9</sup> these cities actually have much in common, including prominent post-secondary education institutions, museums, professional sports teams in the National Hockey League and Canadian Football League, and thriving arts communities—to name but a few of its education and cultural institutions.

Since the twentieth century Alberta has been recognized as Canada's leader in the oil and gas industry. Its major cities are increasingly becoming home to many corporate head offices, including Canadian Pacific Railway Ltd., Shaw Communications Inc., and Corus Entertainment Inc. (to name a few).<sup>10</sup> The province has proven time and again leaders in innovative research in many sectors, including *technological* advancements made within the energy industry, as well as in fibre optics with the creation of the Alberta SuperNet; *infrastructure* in the construction of its sophisticated elevated pedestrian system

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<sup>9</sup> There is a long competitive history between Calgary and Edmonton. The rivalry actually predates white settlement. As Geo Takach (2010, 147-153) notes, the history of this class dates back to the northern Cree and the southern Blackfoot Confederacy, and then continued through the establishment of the first trading post (Fort Edmonton, 1795), the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway (Calgary, 1883), the naming of a provincial capital (Edmonton, 1905), the building of the first post-secondary institution (Edmonton, 1912), the first radio broadcast (Edmonton, 1922), and so forth. These cities are seen to clash politically (Conservatives in the south and Liberals in the north), in terms of their patterns of settlement (frontier town of settlers from the USA and Britain in the south and a multicultural society that includes Poles, Germans, Ukrainians and Czechs in the north), and culturally (uncultured Calgarians versus elitist Edmontonians). These are certainly gross generalizations that are not in fact reflective of the true identity of either city.

<sup>10</sup> The majority of the top-ranking Calgary-based companies are related to the energy industry and oil fields, including Suncor Energy, Imperial Oil, Enbridge Inc., and EnCana Corp (Calgary Economic Development 2013).

in Calgary, the Plus-15 Skyway; and *environmental efforts*, notably in Edmonton, which recycles wastewater, hosts the largest collection of advanced sustainable waste processing and research facilities, and proposes to be the first municipality to turn garbage into ethanol (Takach 2010, 300-01).<sup>11</sup> Alberta has also been a leader in *research* as the first province to create a provincial research organization called the Alberta Research Council in 1921; *medicine*, where researchers at the University of Alberta have made advancements in diabetes research through islet-cell transplantation; pioneering *paleontological* research on the behaviour, interaction, and evolution of the animal; and especially in *education* with the establishment of Athabasca University—the first and most successful distance learning institution in Canada (Takach 2010, 162-80). These are but a few of the province’s stunning achievements, demonstrating that there’s much more to Alberta than its rural and agricultural roots.

Yet, despite continual growth of its urban centres and these remarkable achievements in research, Alberta—southern Alberta in particular—has maintained a strong element of rusticity, or a “western frontier” identity. Indeed, the sense of “rurality” pervading Alberta’s image is represented in its very coat of arms, which captures the province’s varied (yet rural) landscape: the Rocky Mountains, the foothills, the grassland prairies, wheat fields, and the provincial flower (wild roses) at the base of the crest. These images, granted to the province by Royal Warrant of King Edward VII in 1907, have remained the predominant cultural symbols throughout Alberta’s history, and are the images that pervade the minds of all Canadians when reflecting on the western Canadian province (Canadian Heritage 2013). Even its two largest cities seem at odds with their urban landscape and makeup, as both are also home to the most important rodeos in the country, with the Calgary Stampede in the south and the Canadian Finals Rodeo at Rexall Place in Edmonton. While both cities are prominent urban centres of the economy industry, technology, and arts, they have each maintained ties to the rural activities of the province’s ranching heritage—something that cannot be ignored when discussing the cultural identity

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<sup>11</sup> The Alberta SuperNet is a high-speed fibre optic network that connects urban and rural communities in the province (including government buildings, health care facilities, schools, libraries, and municipalities). For more information, see <http://www.servicealberta.ca/AlbertaSuperNet.cfm>. The Plus15 (or +15) Skyway is the most extensive pedestrian skywalk system in the world at 18 km in length. The Skyway system can be viewed online, <http://calgaryplus15.com>.

of the province. Chapters 2 and 3 demonstrated that, while agriculture remains an important industry in Alberta, the traditions of open range ranching so prominently celebrated in the province in fact died out in the early 1900s. The province's nostalgia for this "western frontier" identity is integrally tied to Alberta's "desire for a unified aesthetic and social vision that existed during the short but meaningful era of the open range" (Turnbull 2009, 56).<sup>12</sup> Accepting and indeed continually adopting (or, perhaps adapting) this western identity and its accompanying cultural symbols, helps Alberta maintain its ties to a unique ranching heritage that blended styles and traditions from the USA, Spain, and Britain, while also projecting a distinctive identity within the country's social fabric.

The cultures and traditions of rural communities in southern Alberta have been at the fore of this project because they align with the reality and experiences of Lund's youth. The singer-songwriter has built a career on the premise that he writes songs about what he knows (Lund 2009b). Even though he has lived in Edmonton for more than half of his life, and has spent time living in large cities in the USA (notably Austin, TX, and New York City), his discography represents rural Alberta, the culture to which he seems to feel most strongly connected. His rural roots run deep, and his music has been a vehicle through which he has been able to honour his family's heritage, as well as the oft-overlooked ranch and rodeo community in which he grew up. As with many country artists, and indeed individuals, the experiences of his youth have helped to shape his identity and attachment to place.

### **6.3 Lund's Alberta**

Lund's songs and music videos present an overwhelmingly rural portrait of southern Alberta, describing life, work, culture, and traditions of ranchers and rodeo cowboys from the region—not just their present, but also their past. The narrative of his songs unfold in a variety of Alberta's bucolic landscapes from the horse corrals in the video for "We Used to Ride 'Em" to the "Little Foothills Heaven" hideaway in the Rocky Mountains to the fields

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<sup>12</sup> Here, Turnbull is drawing on Mary-ellen Tyler's 2004 conference paper entitled "'Nice City: Wonder What It Will Look like When It's Finished': A Case Study of Calgary, Alberta—Past Present, and Future."

and forests presented in “This Is My Prairie” (to name a few). Lund honours these landscapes and fights to protect them; he even mourns the loss of those that he was too young to witness. Indeed, several of his songs reveal nostalgia for a terrain he has only heard about from his ancestors. For example, in “Especially a Paint,” he laments not having the privilege of knowing southern Alberta “like the old boys did chinooked and mountain viewed,” and that the old cowboys knew “that you can’t keep a loop on paradise.” The images that emerge from Lund’s lyrics are that of a sacred or spiritual terrain, a paradise that disappeared before he could experience it, one that continues to erode as a result of urban sprawl (“The Truth Comes Out”) and expanding industry (“This Is My Prairie”). Urban environments seem to loom in the background of these songs, but they emerge as the enemy, always looking for ways to encroach on his beloved landscape and family land.

When towns and cities do emerge in Lund’s narratives, they are a place to go to for entertainment, but not to live. In “(Gonna) Shine Up My Boots” (2002), he describes preparing for an evening out on the town, and the ritual of shining up his boots, scraping a bit of money together, and going into town to meet a “lovely lady.” But even in his lyrical daydreams, his song protagonists return to the countryside: he sings about winning big in gambling and buying himself and his lovely lady a ranch with a Palomino herd. Directed by Joel Stewart and filmed near Didsbury, AB, Lund’s (2007a) video for this song begins with him shining his boots and getting into his truck to drive to town (Fig. 6.1). In the refrains and verses, the camera captures him in profile as he drives his truck, adding passengers in each section of the song. During instrumental transitions between the refrain-verse sections and during the instrumental interlude, the truck makes stops to pick up these characters in his song at their house or on the side of the road, and the police even pull them over (presumably for too many people crammed into the truck and back cab). But it is likely that these secondary characters to the narrative never get into the truck, as they fade from the video in the transition between verse 4 and the final refrain, and Lund drives down the country road by himself. Lund does not step out of his vehicle in the entire video, leaving some ambiguity as to whether or not he actually made the trip.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Lund’s songs about gambling also suggest a slightly more “urban” setting. But even in these narratives, the setting has more of a “small town” vibe than that of a populated city. Consider, for example, “A Game in

Despite the fact that Lund lived in Edmonton for nearly two decades, in his music, his *persona* seems to be unable to imagine living in the city. Indeed, the majority of his song narratives unfold in rural spaces. When songs reference events from the his real (and often times current) personal life, his more “idealized” artistic voice instinctively turns to the landscape of his youth, establishing a *persona* that inhabits the countryside. Such a technique does not just create distance between Lund and his audience (allowing him to guard the intimate details of his real life), but it also allows him to further elaborate the aspects of his rancher/cowboy *persona* and that *persona*’s strong connection to rural southern Alberta. In both “Alberta Says Hello” and “September” Lund, the singer-songwriter uses the disintegration of “Lund the person’s” romantic relationships to further define “Lund the *persona*’s” relationship to rural Alberta, painting urban landscapes as uninviting. In the music video for “September,” in particular, Lund’s *persona* has visions of wandering through deserted city streets, hauling his saddle behind him as he searches for life, companionship, meaning, and his place amongst the concrete, steel, and glass of the high rise buildings. In both songs, his *persona* finds both personal comfort and a sense of belonging in a cabin nestled in the foothills. When this landscape is threatened by the presence of dangerous wildlife or natural gas excavation projects, Lund’s *persona* (and perhaps Lund the person) becomes increasingly protective over the region and the place he calls home, and turns to song to address the issues impacting local communities and wildlife in rural southern Alberta.

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Town like This” (on *Losin’ Lately Gambler*), in which Lund expresses his preference for gambling in a small town than in Las Vegas. The lyrics can be viewed at <http://www.cowboylyrics.com/lyrics/lund-corb/a-game-in-town-like-this-28822.html>

Figure 6.1 “(Gonna) Shine Up My Boots,” video narrative through refrain and verses



[Opening frames over instrumental intro]



[Refrain/Verse 1: One long shot of Lund driving, ending with him turning toward the camera.]



[Refrain/Verse 2: One long shot of Lund and his first passenger.]



[Verse 3: One long shot of Lund and his first 2 passengers. Notice the empty back cab.]



[Refrain/Verse 4: One long shot of Lund and full front and back cab.]



[Refrain: Passengers fade from cab, leaving long shot of Lund alone in the truck.]



### *6.3.1 Urban Sprawl and Rural Conservation Issues*

Human activity has had a significant impact on Alberta's landscape and environment. During the centuries in which Aboriginals roamed the grassland, parkland, and forested regions of the province, "they did little to disturb the delicate checks and balances of the natural world" (Hardy 1971, 276). They wandered freely and made use of the land's resources and wildlife for shelter, protection, and food, but their nomadic lifestyle meant that the landscape remained undisturbed from permanent settlement. With the arrival of the white man, however, the landscape slowly started to change, picking up pace after the turn of the twentieth century as communities, cities, and industry began to develop. Since the influx of settlement after 1900, aboriginals have been dispossessed and forced into reservations, grasslands have been cultivated by horses and ploughs, forests have been cleared for timber, and natural gas wells and oil derricks now dot the landscape. Farms, industries, and cities sprawl where moose and elk once fed and the bison and pronghorn roved (Hardy 1971, 276).

Urban, agricultural, and industrial settlement has each taken their toll on Alberta's rural landscape and, by extension, its environment. Both plant and animal have been impacted by settlement in Alberta. With settlement and population increase came the development of urban centers, agricultural ranch and farmland, and routes of transportation, each destroying the natural vegetation and thus interrupting the food cycle. In the 1800s oxen and horses were the primary form of "farm power," so homesteaders focused primarily on breaking and cultivating the open fields of the parkland and grassland regions. Once tractors and bulldozers were brought into the region in 1925 and in the mid-1940s, respectively, however, large-scale cultivation began as ranchers and farmers cleared the aspen groves to make way for more crops: "The machine either pushed over full-grown trees and piled them for burning or else, equipped with a blade, but through saplings as if they were matchsticks," clearing thousands of acres (Bird and Bird 1971, 136-37). The destruction of vegetation and wooded areas forced many animals out of their natural habitat and impacted food supply. Charles D. Bird and Ralph D. Bird (1971, 149) have discussed how, as a result of this change in the food cycle, bison, wapiti, moose, and mule deer have been forced out of their parkland habitat or exterminated. Just as agriculture has impacted



the landscape and ecosystem to the south, the fossil fuel energy industry has had a serious and dramatic effect on the northern Boreal forest region. As discussed in greater detail in chapter 4, it is important to acknowledge that the oil sands operations north of Fort McMurray where surface mining has decimated hundreds of square acres of boreal forest and wetlands. Perhaps even more devastating, however, is the impact on environment and the significant air and water pollution that has resulted in deformed, tumour-ridden aquatic life, and increased health issues for the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation Community (Kelly et al. 2010).

Hunting has also played a significant role in changing the shape of Alberta's ecosystem and food cycle. Fur trading and hunting for food and sport had significantly reduced the numbers of the province's wildlife. Perhaps the biggest issue for animals in the grasslands of southern Alberta were the United States farmers who migrated north in the mid- to late-1800s. The slaughter that occurred during this period was for both profit and sport. Some "destroyed bison when they invaded their grazing lands," while others came out to shoot what they thought were "buffalo." As Webb, Johnston, and Soper (1971, 103) have revealed, "to add to the destruction, a market was created in the United States for 'buffalo' hides for leather belting, for 'buffalo' robes and coats... and for salted 'buffalo' tongue."<sup>14</sup> They indicate that for about 25 years roughly 100,000 bison hides were shipped down the Missouri river a year. With the exception of the tongues, the meat was just left to rot on the plains. With the bison nearing extinction, the aboriginals needed to seek a new source of food, and began hunting the pronghorn and other animals (Webb et al. 1971, 104-06).

Although ranching, farming, and hunting were responsible for the demise of the bison, wapiti, and pronghorn (as well as the grizzly and black bears, wolf, kit fox, and mule and white tailed deer) on the Albertan prairies, important work has gone into relocating and creating new habitats to protect these species. The Federal Government set up Nemiskam National Park in south central Alberta to help protect the dangerously low population of the pronghorn. They herded 42 pronghorn into the Park in 1922 and, within 25 years, the park

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<sup>14</sup> These authors indicate that the farmers from the USA confused the northern humpbacked shaggy-haired wild ox with the buffalo.

was abolished because they had successfully regenerated the population (Webb et al. 1971, 106). In 1906 Elk Island National Park east of Edmonton was reserved for the wapiti population, while the wood bison have found their new home in the northern Wood Buffalo National Park sheltered in the Boreal forest. While many criticize the oils sands for their negative impact on land and environment, the Conservation and Reclamation Regulation has mandated that big oil project return soil to its equivalent land capabilities. In the early 1990s Syncrude, in collaboration with Fort McKay First Nation, began reclaiming land as Beaver Creek Wood Bison Ranch. Originally, the project was allocated 25 hectares, but by 2001 had expanded to 340 hectares. They began with 32 bison relocated from Elk Island National Park in 1993, and have the long-term goal of establishing 2,000 hectares of open pasture that could support more than 1,000 wood bison (Phillips 2001, 19). Despite these important initiatives put forth by provincial and federal government, and by local first nations working together with oil companies, the days of bison, pronghorn, and wapiti roaming and indeed owning the Albertan landscape can never be recaptured. The tales of the shaggy-haired bison dominating the visible landscape, a sea of wood bison, are now part of the province's lore passed from generation to generation and rest only in the imaginations of today's youth.

### ***“The Truth Comes Out” (2005)***

Conservation has been an important issue for Lund. In the Glenbow Museum exhibit, he featured “The Truth Comes Out” to focus on conservation issues in southern Alberta. In the explanatory plaque, he (Lund 2013c) wrote the following:

Humans have been affecting wildlife populations here since Europeans arrived, and probably before. Fencing interrupts wildlife migrations and urban sprawl puts pressure on animal habitats. Resource development and recreation are pushing further and further into what used to be wilderness.

Predators that used to be wary of humans are now unafraid and roam into populated areas. This is not good for the humans or the animals. We've seen more cougars and grizzlies on our ranch in southwestern Alberta lately than ever before. Seeing a grizz [*sic*] on the place was rare during my childhood; my uncle spotted four this year. “The Truth Comes Out” also alludes to the absence of the buffalo that

sustained the Blackfoot and Cree and roamed Alberta's plains until they were hunted to near extinction.

Lund points to a current conservation issue for ranchers and communities lying near the border mountainous or wooded areas: wild (and potentially dangerous) animals entering into populated areas. These animals, especially the grizzly bears, are threatened by the loss of their habitat (Neilsen et al. 2006). Recent studies have examined the negative impact of new roads through once roadless forest ecosystems as a contributing factor to grizzly bear mortalities. The study reveals that greater research should be conducted on road placement, because their proximity to water and food sources increase chances of grizzly bears foraging near the sides of a road in areas of high population density demonstrating that the bears were not interested in the roads, but these roads had been placed right through their preferred habitats (Roever et al. 2008a/b). Regardless the attractant, the encroachment on the natural habitat of Albertan wildlife has, in some regions, led to the increased instances of these animals foraging for food where they should not be.

Instead of using a more traditional verse-chorus structure for "The Truth Comes Out," Lund uses a form in which he begins and ends with the chorus lyrics, but has a string of verses in between. The narrative does not tell a clear story, as his other songs do, but instead ruminates about the fate of his beloved southern Albertan land and the rate at which the entire ecosystem is changing as a result of human activity. Lund sets a very dark and contemplative tone for the song from the first lines of the chorus, where he reveals from the very outset of the song that the "truths" are becoming evident to him. While it is not immediately apparent to the listener what these truths may be the opening chorus and first two verses allude to the Native cultural tradition of the sweat lodge ritual, but could likewise point to the lonesome cowboy sipping whiskey while guarding his herd of cattle by the embers of a campfire over night. The "truth" emerges to the song protagonist as the fire dies down, as he watches the embers glowing, and hears the west wind moan. The first two verses continue to draw out and explore the imagery of the crackling fire, the smoke curling up into the air, and the cleansing nature of this ritual. In the third verse, Lund as protagonist shares the stories that have been circling around his mind as he stares into the burning fire, revealing a genuine concern for the land surrounding him. In verses 3 to 5, this protagonist relates stories about cougars coming into his family's yard and stealing colts,

the effect of global warming on winter climate, and the appearance of grizzly bears on Lee Creek—grizzlies, he sings, “where there was no grizzly bears before.” Both the cougars and the grizzly bears, as the song narrative suggests, have been slowly and boldly roaming into populated areas, due in large part to the fact that their own habitats are being destroyed through development and industry. Just as the Aboriginals on the prairies turned from hunting bison to the pronghorn a century earlier, these animals are increasingly seeking new sources of food and even shelter. After reflecting on these tales, the narrative returns to brooding mood of the first verses hinting at the warnings that had come from their ancestors and grandfathers (now voices from the grave).<sup>15</sup> He concludes by revealing that the antelope now mourns the buffalo, hinting not just at the decimation of the buffalo population, but also that the loss is felt deeply by the animals as well. The antelope (or pronghorn) and buffalo (or bison) once roamed the prairie together. Webb et al. (1971, 104) have indicated that the mammals were “uniquely fitted for co-existence,” as the bison fed primarily on grass, while the pronghorn preferred broad-leaved perennials (cacti, rose, and sage).

The song may only make one small reference to a geographic landmark, but it is enough to situate the narrative regionally and, for locals, capture the personal nature of the lyrics. The song narrative is situated around Lee Creek, which rises on the slopes of Montana’s Chief Mountain and runs through the Lund family ranch near Cardston. Lee Creek holds important childhood memories for the singer-songwriter; in interview Lund stated, “I grew up fishing on it, swimming in it and riding horses through it” (Waugh 2012). In addition to these personal references to place, the fact that Lee creek rises in the slopes of Chief Mountain hints also to aboriginal culture, as this historic landmark is the sacred and powerful place to the Blackfoot Confederacy (which has bands in both Montana and Alberta). Chief Mountain is situated in Montana, so close to the Canadian border that it can be seen as far north as Lethbridge on a clear day.<sup>16</sup> While the cowboy and the aboriginal come from very different cultural backgrounds, they share an interest in maintaining the

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<sup>15</sup> Lund made a similar reference to the premonitions of the older generation in “Especialmente a Paint,” when he sings about the ranchers knowing that that “paradise” disappears over time, referencing the spiritual nature of the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains.

<sup>16</sup> Chief Mountain can be seen clearly in the distance of the photo of ranchland in Cardston, Alberta in the following online travel guidebook ([http://www.travelguidebook.com/index.cfm?inc=place&place\\_id=1800](http://www.travelguidebook.com/index.cfm?inc=place&place_id=1800)).

spiritual qualities of the landscape and preserving the habitat for the animals. Both ranch and landowners in Cardston and the Blackfoot Confederacy have been fighting off big oil companies or interest from outside companies wishing to explore the land for resources. “The boom of Calgary has created a demand for rural acreages in southern Alberta,” as companies seek land for oil, gas, windmill, uranium, and residential development, all of which places greater demands on water resources (Mason 2008). The Blackfoot Confederacy in Montana faces some of the same pressures, as they are currently in a battle to protect their place of worship and the home of grizzly bears from natural gas exploration (Puckett 2014). While the voice here may indeed be Lund’s *persona* ruminating on the changes to the landscape of his youth, it may also be another local figure affected by these issues (a protagonist), but simply portrayed by the singer-songwriter. Because he does not offer a complete description of the protagonist’s identity, the singer-songwriter creates some ambiguity here and demonstrates how these changes affect both cowboys and aboriginals, both of whom have played a role in the changes in the ecosystem. While the white man has certainly made significant changes to the landscape and ecology of Alberta in general, and southern Alberta in particular, the aboriginals contributed to the decimation of the bison and pronghorn population. Thus, Lund’s songwriting here has (as in other songs) offered multiple perspectives from the real person, to the *persona*, to the song protagonist, demonstrating the power of the song narrative to elaborate several identity levels.

Just as the singer-songwriter had created an ominous mood-setting arrangement for “No Roads Here,” the musical setting of “The Truth Comes Out” also evokes a dark and foreboding atmosphere. This song draws on the same instrumentation as “No Roads Here” (chapter 1), but instead of painting a sonic picture of a mysterious land, this song’s setting captures concerns of Lund’s *persona* over the fate of the continually changing ecosystem.<sup>17</sup> The musical setting creates this contemplative atmosphere through its cyclical melodic and harmonic structures. Composed in D minor, the chorus and verses cycle through the same three-phrase melodic structure through the entire song, which avoids traditional “country” chords and instead continually cycles through non-conventional harmonies (Ex. 6.1). By

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<sup>17</sup> Tammy Rogers plays the fiddle in this song (as she had on “No Roads Here” from the same album), but Harry Stinson replaces Brady Valgardson on the drums on this track.

repeating the same basic melodic and harmonic pattern through the entire song, the musical setting establishes a contemplative mood to match the song narrative, and builds in intensity through instrumental layering and increasing volume through to the instrumental interlude following the fifth verse.

The song opens with pitch bends on the electric guitar played with a “bottleneck” and the fiddle playing a high D tremolo over the acoustic guitar doing single strums of the harmonic structure and the bass playing a faint D drone. This opening, which returns at the song’s close, establishes both the foreboding mood and the sense of space that slowly emerges throughout the song. The electric guitar and fiddle drop out of the arrangement after this opening, leaving just the acoustic guitar strumming a single chord at the start of each phrase while the bass bows the root of each chord. The bass then drops out as well, leaving just the acoustic guitar to accompany Lund in the first verse. From this point the arrangement builds through a layering of instruments over the acoustic guitar in each verse to follow. It begins with a plucked descending bass line and rolls on the cymbals in the second verse, to a the bass playing broken fifths (D-A, C-G, B $\flat$ -F) over a slow train-beat on the drums in the third and fourth verses. Straight eighth notes are played with brushes on the snare, with accents on beats 2 and 4, and the kick on beats 1 and 2. The electric guitar joins this arrangement in the fifth verse, adding pitch bends at the mention of changes in winter weather, followed by the fiddle playing a mournful melody for the grizzly bear losing its habitat in the sixth verse. The arrangement has built to this point in the song, pausing for a sorrowful and contemplative instrumental interlude. This full arrangement remains through the final verses until the repetition of the opening chorus, which returns to the acoustic guitar and bowed bass line before melting back into the tremolo, pitch bends, and bass drone of the opening. The musical setting ends exactly where it started, perhaps a comment on how, despite local interest in protecting the land and wildlife there have been no positive changes in the situation.

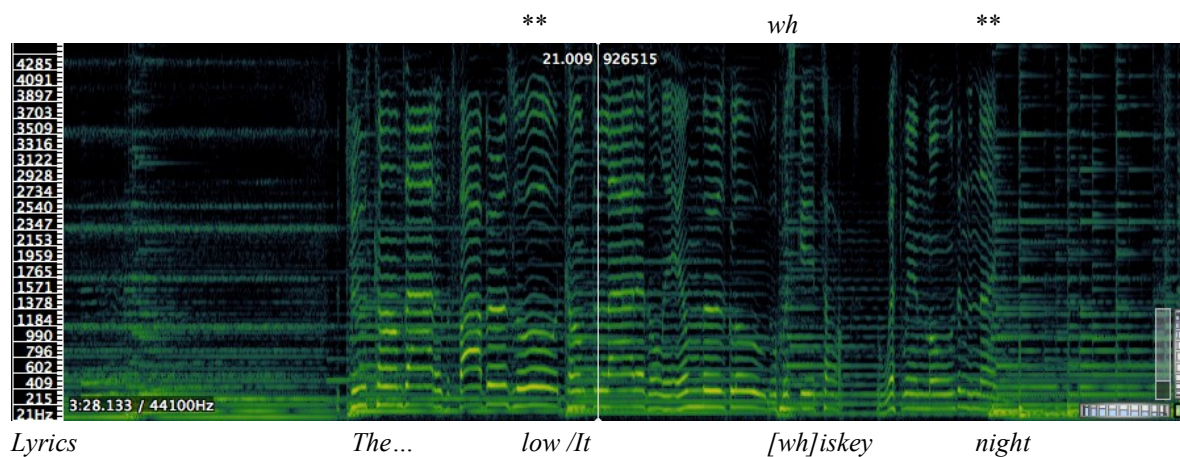
Example 6.1 “The Truth Comes Out,” melodic and harmonic structure

The musical score for "The Truth Comes Out" is presented in two systems. The first system features a vocal line in 4/4 time with lyrics: "The truth comes out as the fire burns low, it comes to light as on-ly em-bers glow, the". Below the vocal line are two piano accompaniment staves, A.G. (right hand) and D.B. (left hand). The A.G. staff shows chords for the first and second measures, and the D.B. staff shows single notes. Roman numeral chord labels 'i' and 'VII' are placed below the piano staves. The second system features a vocal line with lyrics: "whis - key talks, — the west wind moans in the night —". Below it are piano accompaniment staves for A.G. and D.B. with chord labels 'VI' and 'i'.

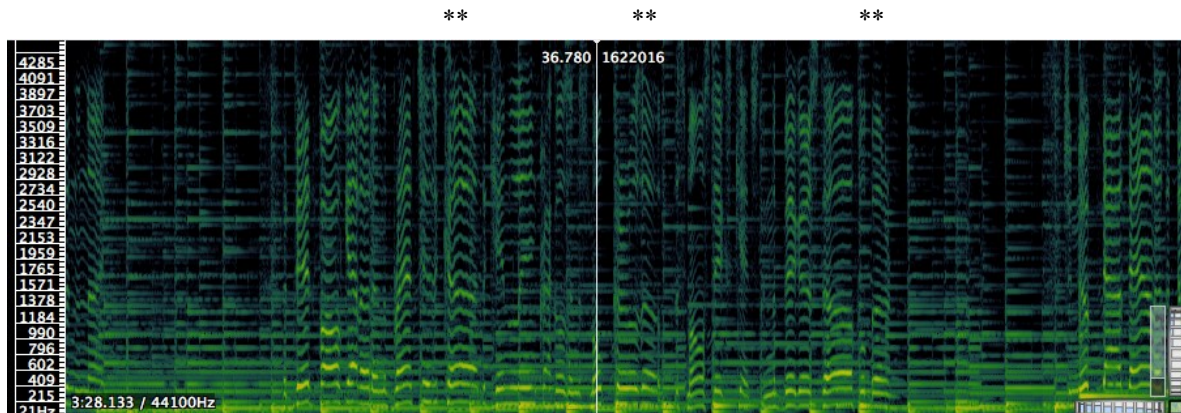
Lund’s vocal performance captures both a sense of space and the contemplative nature of the lyrics; it also presents an emotional reaction to the subject of the song narrative. First, as in “No Roads Here” and “Chinook Wind,” there is a short echo effect on his vocals. The use of echo on these specific songs suggests an intention to create a sense of outdoor space, as each song narrative takes place in fields or on the mountainside (in the case of “The Truth Comes Out”). There is a slight hoarse nasalized quality to Lund’s voice in this song, which emerges most noticeably on the ends of phrases where he slides downward to conclude the line. These vocal slides (portamentos) have been linked with depths of feeling and sincerity and described as a method of showing sadness or frustration (Leech-Wilkinson 2006, 249). The spectrogram in Ex. 6.2 provides a visual representation of the vocal slides at the end of each phrase in the chorus and first verse, demonstrating how Lund articulates the vocal gesture and the relative size and shape of each slide. The slides are of varying lengths, with the shorter slides (on “night,” “up,” and “burn”) sounding more strained, drawing out the frustration behind the lyrical narrative. These

slides are prominent throughout the song, keeping the singer’s emotions right at the surface of his performance. Lund also has a slight breathy voice on the word “whiskey,” with an aspiration of air on the “wh” at the beginning of the word. He does this again in verse seven on the “wh” of “white.” In the final statement of the chorus, his voice is harsh and creaky on the word “glow.” Fernando Poyatos (1993, 238) has suggested that such a paralinguistic qualifier can be representative of repressed anger, a fitting emotion for an issue close to Lund’s home and heart. The paralinguistic qualifiers in Lund’s vocal performance further enhance the protagonist’s (and perhaps even Lund’s and/or his *persona*’s) anger over the situation and his disappointment in mankind for their involvement in destroying this sacred landscape and home of animals that are increasingly becoming endangered. The vocal performance, and indeed the song narrative, suggests that Lund relates to the issues raised in this song on multiple identity levels: indeed, he is not just assuming the role of song protagonist ruminating over these issues, but he is also an individual who understands (first-hand) the impact that urban sprawl has had on his homeland. His personal knowledge of these regional issues certainly influences his singer-songwriter identity, which (in turn) infuses his artistic identity with a strong conservationist voice for protecting the rural Alberta.

Example 6.2 “The Truth Comes Out,” spectrogram of chorus and verse 1







Lyrics:                                    *The dead... cut / The kind... up/The small... burn...*

Note: Vocal slides are marked with a double asterisk (\*\*), the aspiration with italicized *wh*

The official music video for “The Truth Comes Out,” directed by Trevor Smith, provides strong visual references to support some of the ambiguities in the song narrative (Lund 2007c). Lund shot the dark video for “The Truth Comes Out” on Highwood River, just north of Cardston and Chief Mountain. It appears as though there is even a shot of Chief Mountain in the video (at 01:00), but the fast moving clouds obscure the mountain’s notorious long overthrust fault peak. While it was not meant to be a “big issue thing” as Lund relates, “we dug up my old saddle, some trapper’s boots and my old Winchester 94 and went with it” (Waugh 2012). Yet, the video offers just as sharp a commentary as the song lyrics. Directed by local Calgary filmmaker Trevor Smith, the video opens with a short fifteen-second prologue of the sights and sounds of Alberta’s natural landscape (sounds that are not heard on the song recording itself): water rushing down a creek, a lonesome mountain top, and the sound of winds rushing through the prairie grasses.<sup>18</sup> The wind and grasses fade to a black screen, the pitch bend of the electric guitar sounds and the video narrative begins with still shots of foggy mountains, a bare tree, a green hillside, and a fenced ranch land with the Rocky Mountains in the distance—each shot changing with the acoustic guitar strum (Fig. 6.2). When he begins to sing the chorus, we see Lund as

<sup>18</sup> Trevor Smith also directed “I Wanna Be in the Cavalry,” “A Game in Town like This,” and “We Used to Ride ‘Em” (discussed in chapter 4).

protagonist walking through ranch land along a creek (possibly Lee Creek) at dusk, with his Winchester 94 rifle in hand. He then sets up camp on a mountaintop, guarding his land as a cowboy guards the cattle he is herding over night. As he sings about gathering branches and kindling crackling, Lund as protagonist prepares and lights a fire, then settles in for a night on watch. For the remainder of the video he sits at the fireside singing his song while strumming his acoustic guitar, with flashes of a cougar lurking in the woods behind him. The sequence of images suggests that this protagonist is keeping guard, watching for the cougar (or bear) and protecting his land. The video features other animals native to the region, including a bison herd and a pronghorn, the grizzly bear, and a wolf – featured in short shots as though flashes in the protagonist’s (and perhaps even Lund’s/his *persona*) mind while he sits by the fire. At the close of the instrumental interlude the top of a tipi structure enters the video, and returns on the line “the red man’s warmer, but the old man’s old” providing the only visual reference to aboriginal culture.

Figure 6.2 “The Truth Comes Out,” instrumental introduction

The figure shows a musical score for the instrumental introduction of the song "The Truth Comes Out". The score is arranged in four staves: L.S. (Lap Steel), A.C. (Acoustic Guitar), V. (Violin), and D.B. (Double Bass). The music is in 4/4 time and features a key signature of one flat. Above the score are four small landscape photographs: a cloudy sky, a silhouette of a tree, a mountain peak, and a field with a fence. The L.S. staff has a melodic line with a pitch bend indicated by an arrow. The A.C. staff has a chordal accompaniment. The V. and D.B. staves have sustained notes with long slurs.

Note: Arrows in the lap steel staff indicate pitch bends as a result of bottleneck

In December 2008, Lund played a benefit concert in Pincher Creek, AB, to help fund the Chief Mountain Cumulative Effects Study. According to an article in the *Canadian Cowboy Country Magazine* (Mason 2008), a concerned group of residents from Cardston and Pincher Creek banded together to commission a study that would examine the effects of cumulative land-use trends in the area. The study has grown, in large part, out of a concern for the land and water supply, as external investors seek to purchase ranch land for a variety of explorative purposes. The CMS study, supported in part by the Lee Creek Landowners Group (of which Lund's mother Patty Lund is a member), assessed the footprint of human activity in southwest Alberta, specifically in the Chief Mountain region near Cardston. Lund and the Hurtin' Albertans helped to raise roughly \$20,000 for the cause (Waugh 2012). Although he may live in the city, this particular issue remains an important cause for him, as these lands are his sanctuary and the keeper of his childhood memories. He also laments any environmental or human activity that results in destruction of its beauty and natural ecosystem, as made evident in the songs discussed in the first chapter.

### ***"This Is My Prairie" (2009)***

These issues emerge in "This Is My Prairie" as well, where the energy industry threatens to encroach on the protagonist rancher's beloved family ranch land. Even though fossil fuels (coal, natural gas, oil sands) are naturally occurring resources that lie deep within Alberta's soil, the methods of extraction have a significant and damaging impact on land, environment, health, and by extension, the livelihood of affected landowners including ranchers. For both aboriginals and ranchers/farmers, groups of people who have worked with the land and made it their home since the province's beginning, the energy industry is increasingly viewed as a commercial enterprise from the city that has little to no regard for the province, the ecosystem, or the people who make their living off the land. The narrative suggests that the fossil fuel energy industry is a group of outsiders from the city (who are situated predominantly in Calgary) with "big money" and strong connections to lawyers and government. These are ties that the little man, the rancher, does not have and cannot afford. As discussed in chapter 4, the song protagonist's frustration with the industry (as

voiced by Lund) lies not with the men and women who work in the oil rigs (as he understands their need for gainful employment), but rather with the provincial government and urban-based commercial enterprises—commonly referred to as “Big Oil” (Phillips 2011, 43). Of course, the narrative does not actually point fingers to specific companies or the government, but rather, Lund’s protagonist continually refers to an ever-present “they.” Thus, instead of naming the rancher’s enemy, he refers instead to the energy industry at large in an “us” or “me” versus “them” manner, drawing a boundary line between the ranchers and the oil companies. By referring to the industry as “they,” the narrative also establishes a sense of distance between these groups of people, not just geographically (urban versus rural) but also (as suggested in the fourth verse) financially and morally. By providing this platform for the often-overlooked rancher (and, by extension, any rural-based individual fighting to protect their land from development) Lund’s song highlights the urban-rural tension at the core of Alberta’s fossil fuel energy debate.

“This Is My Prairie” brings much-needed attention to the issues that ranchers face, including the industry’s impact on health of family and livestock, and, most importantly, provincial law regarding natural resources. The singer-songwriter indeed outlines a very real issue that many ranchers, including his own family, has had to negotiate in order to maintain the integrity of their land, but also conform to provincial laws (which, for many, is unavoidable). By pointing out the issues arising from exploration projects, the song’s narrative subtly implies that they are a result of greedy urban-based companies that see rural Alberta as nothing more than a large territory of land waiting to be developed. This sentiment is echoed in the visual narrative of the music video; by opening with images of the large excavator wheels and buckets digging up Alberta’s soil, Lund and Griwkowsky were able to capture a sense of impending doom for the landscape and animals presented in the remainder of the video. This machine is used to represent the land-hungry industry, and is presented in a way that implies they are looming on the borders of the rancher’s land. The song suggests that energy companies do not understand the impact that CBM or oil sands exploration has on rural residents and the significant damages that could arise should there be accidents on a work site. Ranchers and their land, it would seem, are expendable in such a scenario, where the most important thing is the extraction of fossil fuels. The rancher of rural Alberta is presented in this narrative as an individual who lack the necessary funds

to protect his land, thus establishing a significant financial gulf between urban and rural communities. There is no real resolution for this rancher, however, as the sense of defeat at the song's end suggests that, despite his protective instincts and grandfather's rifle, Lund's protagonist cannot win this battle. This song, and this issue, will thus remain a battle between the values and ideals of urban enterprise and rural families and communities.

### *6.3.2 City versus Country: Exploring Broken Relationships*

Lund has written very few relationship or love songs. While love songs do emerge in his albums, they tend to use ambiguous relationships between man and horse as a metaphor for relations between the sexes (as discussed in chapter 3). In his video blog for "September," a song about the dissolution of a brief relationship that seems to have unfolded over a summer in New York, Lund (2012k) stated the following about love songs:

I don't really write many love songs... It seems to me that mainstream radio, whether it's pop or country or whatever, that love songs are kinda fake because a lot of songwriters seem to use relationship songs as a sort of default setting when they have nothing else to sing about or write about. Or maybe they have to? I don't know what it's like in their world. But for me, I usually write about horses, guns or whatever, 'cause it interests me, or politics or whatever I'm into at the time. But occasionally I write a love song because I'm actually going through something, and so when I do... I try not to get too sappy, but it seems like almost all of my love songs end up veering into horse metaphor territory, and this ["September"] is the only one that didn't; although, it does mention cows.

This comment is, perhaps, a dig at the commercial music industry, and maybe even Nashville, TN specifically—a city known for having an abundance of songwriters who participate in scheduled writing sessions and retreats. Regardless the exact target, Lund's statement reveals a great deal about what feeds his writing process. The singer-songwriter has continually preached writing about what he knows and communicating the experiences of those around him; this has led to a diverse discography of cowboy tales, rodeo songs, and stories about life and culture in southern Alberta. Thus, when relationship songs do emerge, they come from, as he says himself, a very real place in his life.

The songs considered in chapter 3 looked at his use of metaphor, and how, even in love songs, his ranching heritage filters into his stories. The love songs in this chapter continue the tradition of drawing from his ranching heritage, but do so by following the more traditional country versus city narrative structure, where an urban-rural tension bubbles to the surface of Lund's songs addressing broken relationships. No longer the preferred mountain getaway for Lund and his "little gal" ("Little Foothills Heaven"), rural Alberta emerges as the space in which the singer-songwriter is most at home, a place where he finds refuge and mourns the loss of a former lover ("Alberta Says Hello," *Losin' Lately Gambler*) or reflects nostalgically on things past ("September," *Cabin Fever*). These narratives refer to specific urban spaces, yet they are not the enemy as before; in these songs the city is a somewhat alien environment, one in which he does not find comfort. While he understands the need of his former lovers to move forward with their lives, he does not ascribe to their same desire for living in a cold city. His narratives reveal a strong preference for the slow pace, manual labour, and intimate connection to the land and his heritage.

### ***"Alberta Says Hello" (2009)***

On *Losin' Lately Gambler* Lund included his mournful "Alberta Says Hello," a message to a former lover who has left him (and Alberta) for life in Montreal. This is the only song on the album with no dedicatory or explanatory inscription in the liner notes, perhaps a sign of the extremely personal nature of the lyrical narrative and his attempt to guard the intimate details of the story behind the song text. While the song narrative is indeed about the disintegration of an important long-term relationship (Quill 2009), Lund's (lack of) liner notes and song narrative give a rare glimpse into the inner world of the singer-songwriter. Or, at least, the version of his world that he wishes to share with his audience. Regardless of the circumstances that led to the departure of Lund's former partner, what is most striking is the way in which he attempts to negotiate his new life without her. The song narrative is structured through a series of messages that Lund's *persona* protagonist sends his former lover through an intermediary, in hopes that his words will reach her and convince her to come home to him. Each line in the verse begins with the request to his

(presumably) friend to “tell her” something about Alberta and his regret for causing their situation. I adopt the term “*persona* protagonist” here, to point to the double nature of identity unfolding in this song: the narrative voice in his song is not merely the message of a song character, but that of Lund’s *persona* as well. To be more precise, Lund’s *persona* is the song protagonist. Verse 1 begins with his reaching out to her, saying that “Alberta says hello” and that he really wishes she would return home. In verse 2 Lund informs her that life has not changed in her absence: winters remain cold, he uses the same old wood stove, and that the Oilers are scoring goals. In the chorus, Lund reveals that he has spoken with their mutual friends (naming them in the lyrics), and even though he found it challenging to make it through the fall without her beside him, he is “glad to hear she’s doin’ well in Montreal.” Following the chorus, Lund’s *persona* protagonist reveals in verse 3 that he misses her laugh, is sorry for his actions, and would not make the same mistakes again if he could have “one more chance.” The chorus repeats and the song closes with a reprise of the first verse, allowing him to end on the opening line of the song, coming full circle: “Tell her that Alberta says hello.”

Despite having a lively career on the road and a house in the city, Lund’s *persona* protagonist suggests a life of solitude and personal reflection back in Alberta, while his former partner builds a new life in Montreal. Lund positions the province of Alberta against the city of Montreal, playing with the contrasting sizes of a large province (661,848 km<sup>2</sup> of area) with a (comparatively) smaller city (1,545 km<sup>2</sup>) (Statistics Canada 2005).<sup>19</sup> In cartographic terms alone, Montreal would appear as nothing more than a large dot in the middle of the open space of the western Canadian province. Yet Lund does not need to *elaborate* these contrasting images: in much the same way as Lynn, Aldean, and Corbin proclaim the virtues of “being country,” the singer-songwriter mentions Montreal in the chorus, but then describes elements of *his* Alberta in the rest of the song. The singer-songwriter subtly plays with his audience’s knowledge of these contrasting places so that the mere mention of Alberta and Montreal conjures rather stereotypical images of vast prairie lands, wheat fields, mountain ranges, and sparsely populated rural communities for the province against high rises, bustling commercial centre, highways and interchanges,

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<sup>19</sup> For the total area of Montreal, see Statistics Canada 2014a.

and a densely populated city.<sup>20</sup> Lund refrains from describing Montreal, choosing instead to describe the “Alberta” that waits (and indeed hopes) for her eventual return. Alberta remains cold and snow-filled—unchanged in the absence of his former partner, as though time had stood still. The reference to his old wood stove (verse 2) suggests a more rural than urban setting, creating an image of Lund hunkering down in a secluded wood cabin (perhaps the cabin built with Lynn Jensen). The narrative creates a strong impression of Lund hibernating in isolation for the winter, waiting for the snowstorms to pass, with the hope that (with the arrival of spring) she may return to him and to Alberta.

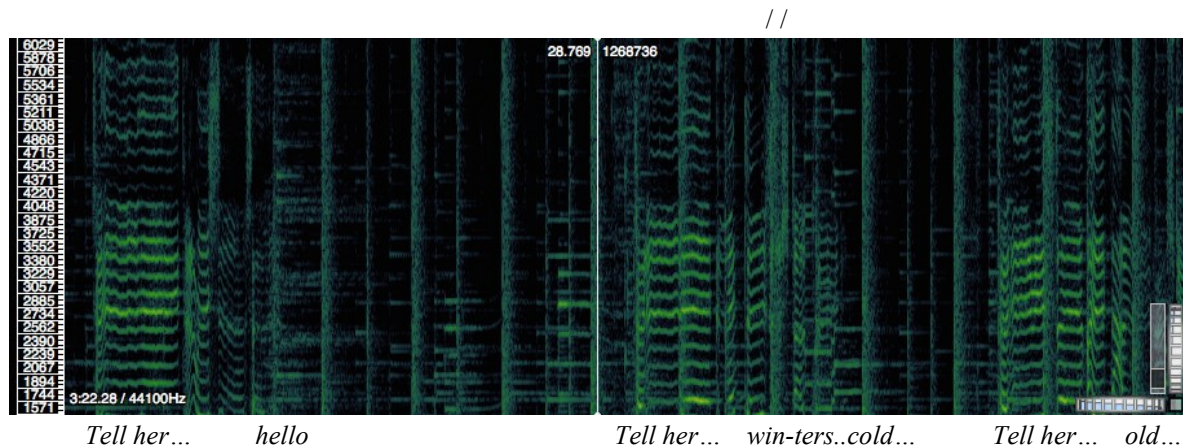
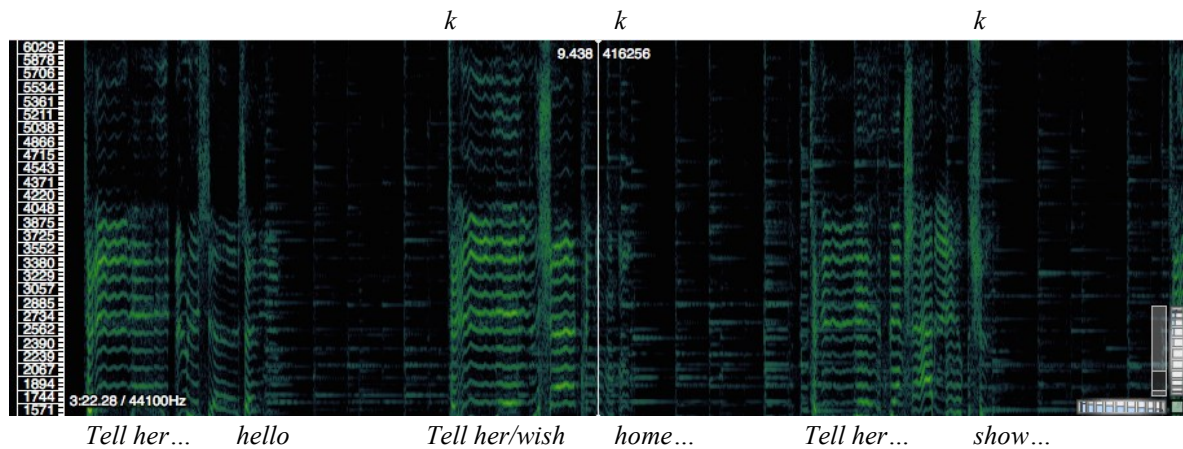
Lund’s vocal performance and the musical setting capture the sense of loneliness in the lyrics from the top of the track. Lund sings the first line of the song alone, with the acoustic guitar entering on the word “hello” at the end of that line. As illustrated by the slight wavering of the vocal reading in the spectrogram in Ex. 6.3, his nasal voice is hoarse and, at times, sounds strained. This is especially true of the second line of the first verse, where there is a sense of tightness in his vocal cords, producing a cracking sound as he forces out these emotionally painful words. While the overall vocal quality in the song is that of hoarseness, his cry breaks further emphasise his emotional state and heartache (see verse 2 in Ex. 6.3). Cry breaks are used sparingly yet effectively throughout the entire vocal performance, notably in the chorus, where Lund emits a sense of desperation for her to return. When combined with his hoarse or cracky voice, the cry breaks emphasizes his sadness and loneliness and suggests a very real, raw, or even authentic performance of the emotions behind the lyrics.

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<sup>20</sup> It should be noted that this would be true primarily of a Canadian audience. Lund’s audience in the USA (or around the world) may not have such images accessible in their mind just at the mention of a place’s name.



Example 6.3 “Alberta Says Hello,” spectrogram of verse 1 and 2



Note: In this spectrogram, a *k* indicates a crack due to vocal strain, and a / indicates cry break.

The harmonic structure and musical setting create a space of longing through the progression of chords within the phrase and the use of specific instruments traditionally invoked to capture this emotion. The chords change mostly at the end of each line in the verse, creating a sense of longing for the next stage in the verses’ D major harmonic progression. At the end of the first verse, again, on the word “hello,” the lap steel, double bass, and drums join the setting, creating a pillowy dream-like feel for this lament. The lap steel echoes Lund’s vocal melody and even cry breaks, concluding his phrases with winding lines and pitch bends that seem to wander in a lonesome manner through the

setting. The lap steel then marks the transition into the chorus and the emphasis of the subdominant key area of G major (concluding eventually back in D). In the chorus Harry Stinson provides back up vocal harmonies to Lund on the first and third lines of the chorus, where he mentions that he is glad to hear she is doing well in Montreal (line 1), but that he had a difficult time getting through the fall (line 3). While the chord changes occurred toward the *end* of each phrase in the verses, the harmonic language shifts in the chorus so that the changes take place earlier in the phrase. In this subtle way, the simple change in the placement of the chord changes in the song's harmonic structure suggests a contrast of the wandering loneliness of Lund back in Alberta versus (perhaps) the quicker pace of life in Montreal. This is not to say that the setting emphasises urban environments, as it certainly does not; but rather, it represents Lund's inner acknowledgement that life outside of his lonely bubble is still moving and possibly much more quickly than his current pace.

The musical setting sets up a kind of dream-like rural space. As I (Watson 2014, 64) demonstrated in my analysis of Mac Davis's "Texas in My Rear View Mirror," specific arrangements of instruments can characterize changing geographic places and cultural spaces in popular song. The musical setting for "Alberta Says Hello" suggests a similar arrangement, just on a smaller scale. The song opens and closes with Lund and his acoustic guitar, creating a strong image of a lonely cowboy passing along his simple message to his former lover. Where Lund had sung the first line of the song unaccompanied, when he repeats this text about Alberta saying "hello" in the last line of the song, he is accompanied only by the fading out sound of the dominant chord that he strummed in the third line of the verse. Everything in between these two verses (verse 2, chorus, verse 3, instrumental interlude, and chorus) unfolds in the larger setting of lap steel, double bass, and drums. This musical space has an almost cinematic function, bringing the audience into the headspace of the song protagonist as he filters through all of the things he wishes he could say to his former lover. Gérard Genette (1980, 234-35) has called this type of transition in the narrative voice as "metalepsis," which he defined as "any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narrate into the diegetic universe," where the narrator passes from one narrative level to another. In this case, the narrator shifts from a physical to internal or emotional space: from (perhaps) asking his friend to tell his former lover that Alberta says hello to thinking (or speaking) to himself about all of the things he wishes he had the courage to

say. Even in this space Lund emphasizes a rural scene, predominantly through the long and meandering (and often chromatic) pitch bends of an instrument traditionally used in country music to signify lonesomeness. Ultimately, Lund's *persona* protagonist returns to reality and the solitary setting of himself with the acoustic guitar, and the decision to send her just a simple message about Alberta saying hello.

The urban-rural tension lies in the background of this, as Lund plays subtly on popular concepts of the two places referred to in the lyrics. The city of Montreal emerges as far removed from his reality in Alberta, which he characterizes as rural through reference to his old stove, and the cold, snowy weather. In this way, he establishes a great distance between himself and his former lover through geography, weather, and cultural space. Alberta, which he has continually characterized through a rural lens throughout his discography, remains firmly rooted in this cultural space lyrically and instrumentally. These tensions are more prominent in the lyrics, musical setting, and video for "September," Lund's 2012 single from *Cabin Fever* that laments the loss of another love to the city.

### ***"September" (2012)***

In his lead single off of his 2012 studio album *Cabin Fever* Lund pleads with a summer love to stay with him through September, instead of departing for New York City. Not surprisingly, the singer-songwriter came to terms with this heartbreak through his relationship to, and understanding of, rural and urban spaces. In the seventh webisode of his video series "What That Song Means Now" Lund (2012k) revealed that he wrote "September" while living in New York visiting a friend just before the album's recording sessions began.<sup>21</sup> Perhaps disappointed to be leaving this friend behind, "September" can be read through Joli Jensen's country versus city narrative paradigm: as he had with "Alberta Says Hello," Lund reverses the traditional structure so that the female character leaves *him* behind in the Rocky Mountains. Despite the fact that it was *Lund's* departure from New York that inspired this song, the reverse narrative put forward in "September"

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<sup>21</sup> Lund (2012k) revealed in his webisode "What That Song Means Now #7" that "September" was one of the final three songs written for the album (with "Gettin' Down on the Mountain" and "Dig Gravedigger Dig"), which he admits are his favourite tracks from *Cabin Fever*.

suggests that the singer-songwriter used the situation to reinforce his *persona*'s connections to place and to the geographic and cultural spaces in which he feels most at home. Thus, instead of being associated with the comfort and security of a female figure, the countryside represented in "September" is the setting for Lund's *persona* as a solitary cowboy ambling through life in rural Alberta. The city, specifically New York City, is certainly alien to his *persona*, but not dehumanizing or unfriendly. The overriding sentiment is that of a broken-hearted cowboy trying to make sense of the turn of events as he now prepares for a life of solitude in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains.

Throughout the narrative of "September" Lund's *persona* compares the landscape, lifestyle, and pace of the rural and urban locations, unfolding in a way that suggests this song could have been his own kind of personal therapy as he worked through this personal situation to find some understanding in the female character's decision to leave for the city. Unlike "Alberta Says Hello," he offers descriptions of *both* landscapes in this song. Southern Alberta is presented once again as already exhibiting cold weather at night in September, with picturesque views of ranch land and mountains, and moving at a slower pace (than the city). Despite this pace, however, he reveals that he still had much to do in order to prepare for winter, notably selling off the cattle. In his description of New York City he draws on common lifestyle stereotypes of living in large cities, including youth "starving in the city" as they try to establish themselves in a new environment and living in a tiny apartment, one situated specifically on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. The timing of this break up is certainly important: September marks the end of the more carefree summer season, and the return to responsibilities and preparing for the long, cold winter season. Also the beginning of the academic year, September often signifies the start of new adventures and life milestones (hence the departure for New York). For ranchers, September likely signals the end of a cattle season and the push to sell off stock and prepare their property (buildings, livestock, and even crops) for the winter months. He admits that he "know[s] there ain't much to do" in southern Alberta and that "there ain't much glamour on the old back quarter," but his contrasting imagery of New York reveals that, while he does not really understand the allure of living in cramped quarters, he does appreciate his lover's desire to explore life in an exciting city. This sentiment emerges after he refers to her tiny New York City apartment, when he acknowledges: "I guess there's times that a

thousand acres in the Rocky Mountains can't compete with that." This hook was pivotal for Lund (2012k), who revealed that the line gave him the chills when he first wrote it. Such a sentiment is typically stated in the opposite direction, where seeing or living in such a stunningly beautiful landscape is a privilege that cannot be rivalled by any other location. Yet even though he comprehends and supports her decision to leave, the lyrics display a hint of disbelief that anyone could part ways with the region and its natural beauty. At the close of the song the listener is left with the mental image of a solitary cowboy preparing for yet another long, cold winter in Alberta on his own. These sentiments are further elaborated in the musical setting and, especially, in the stunning music video, which highlights the urban-rural tension lurking not only in the song narrative, but also within Lund's singer-songwriter conception of these contrasting spaces.

The musical setting for "September" creates a sense of rural space through its simple arrangement of acoustic guitar, double bass, and drums that features Siemens' twangy surf guitar sound. The setting evokes a quiet intensity, which the band achieves through an almost subdued performance that combines Lund's soft strumming of the acoustic guitar, Ciesla's plucking of the bass line, and Valgardson's nearly whisper-quiet brush work on the snare drum. Over this contemplative setting, Lund's vocals and Siemens twangy guitar remain at the fore of the song seemingly conversing like the two characters in the song narrative. While the surf guitar sound harkens back to perhaps more up-tempo 1960s surf rock subgenre, the style invoked by Siemens has a more twangy country feel. The sound here is reminiscent of Chris Isaak's popular song "Wicked Game" (1990), which opens with the distinctive two-note motive of James Calvin Wilsey's electric guitar played through a spring reverb and uses a vibrato arm to bend pitches downward to create ethereal reverberant tones.<sup>22</sup> Using this technique, the long downward moving pitch bends of Siemens guitar captures the sorrow of the lyrical narrative, while also evoking a sense of rurality through its twangy quality.

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<sup>22</sup> Reviewer Steve Huey (of AllMusic.com) has described this opening motive as feeling "like the sonic equivalent of a brief but queasy zero-G drop in the pit of one's stomach, sliding just a bit further down than the ear expects before resolving onto stable ground" (Huey 2015b). Interestingly, "September" and "Wicked Games" have strikingly similar arrangements which make use of acoustic guitar, bass (upright in the former, electric in the latter), brushes on snare drums, and lead electric guitar.

Written in E major, the song's harmonic structure strongly emphasizes the pitch G#, the third and quality-defining pitch of the tonal centre for "September." In his webisode for "September" Lund (2012k) revealed that the major third in the tonic chord was a crucial interval to bring forward in this song, as it helped him achieve the "sweetness" he was seeking in the harmonic setting.<sup>23</sup> Not only does he stress the importance of assuring its presence in the underlying harmonies, but the G# is further emphasized by both the electric guitar in the instrumental introduction and Lund's vocal line, both of which begin and end their phrases on the third (G#), while the acoustic guitar and double bass provide grounding with the full tonic chord. Where Wilsey's guitar sounded "other-worldly" and brooding as it bends up and down a perfect fifth interval (B-F#) in a Dorian mode, Siemens' opening arpeggiated major chord that lands on the third scale degree seems almost hopeful, as it slides through the E major instrumental opening (Ex. 6.4). Siemens ornaments his opening solo with pitch bends on the longer-held notes, sliding upward into them, capturing the sense of longing about to unfold in the lyrical narrative. This instrumental opening captures, in just ten bars, the conflicting emotions at the core of the song: the wistful tone of the lyrical narrative and electric guitar pitch bends seems at odds with the sweet hopefulness of the harmonic structure and the slightly up-tempo rhythm, a musical way of highlighting the emotional turmoil in the song. From the E major verses, the chorus shifts up to the second scale degree into F# minor, pulling that nostalgic or regretful thread through his admission that he and his beloved Rocky Mountains cannot compete with the promise of excitement in the city. Indeed, there is a sense of regret over the loss of a love, while also a sense of hope and belonging in the choices the song protagonist has made to remain in the country.

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<sup>23</sup> Lund (2012k) revealed that he uses a capo on fret 2, allowing him to play in D major (verses) and E minor (choruses), but have it sound in E major and F# minor.

### Example 6.4 “September,” instrumental introduction

The image displays two systems of musical notation for the instrumental introduction of "September." The first system includes three staves: Electric Guitar (top), Acoustic Guitar (middle), and Double Bass (bottom). The Electric Guitar part features a melodic line with eighth and quarter notes, including slurs and ties. The Acoustic Guitar part provides a rhythmic accompaniment with a steady eighth-note strumming pattern. The Double Bass part plays a simple bass line with quarter and eighth notes. The second system continues the arrangement with three staves: E. Gtr. (top), Ac. Gtr. (middle), and D.B. (bottom). The Electric Guitar part in this system includes a triplet of eighth notes and a long, sustained note. The Acoustic Guitar part continues with its strumming pattern, and the Double Bass part continues with its bass line.

The acoustic guitar, double bass, and drums maintain the harmonic and rhythmic support for Lund and the electric guitar. The electric guitar seems to echo or converse with his vocal line. Sometimes these fragments actually echo or imitate it, but mostly Siemens inserts rising and falling gestures at the ends of phrases, or four or five-note motives that weave around the melodic line (see verse 3 in Ex. 6.5). In the chorus, and as Lund sings his vowelized yodels (more below), Siemens plays arpeggiated or rolled chords in a manner that might be reminiscent of marking a “dream sequence,” especially in film, as the chorus lyrics here refer to “picturing” or imagining how the other character is living in the city (Ex. 6.6).<sup>24</sup> Thus, here too, as in “Alberta Says Hello,” Lund’s *persona* crosses the narrative boundary, this time capturing the shift into his emotional headspace through musical means. It also seems representative of this fleeting relationship: the guitar dances through the musical setting, slipping away from the straight rhythmic and harmonic structure provided by the rest of the instruments. Although the pitch bends and twang of the electric guitar do evoke a twinge of sadness over the dissolution of the relationship, it continually

<sup>24</sup> One example of the use of arpeggiated, rolled or glissando gestures marking a “dream sequence” is the 1992 film *Wayne’s World*, in which Wayne and Garth sing a descending gesture while wiggling their fingers ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y\\_76RK\\_5bBs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y_76RK_5bBs)).

ducks or dips away like a free spirit, unable or unwilling to be confined to the an unglamorous rustic setting.

Example 6.5 “September,” interaction between voice and guitar (verse 3)

The musical score is presented in three systems, each containing four staves: Voice (Soprano), Electric Guitar (E.Gtr.), Acoustic Guitar (Ac.Gtr.), and Double Bass (D.B.). The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are: "sold mmm Stay with me through Sep - tem-ber\_ Yeah, I know there ain't much to do And I guess I did my sha-re of star-ving in the ci-ty I was young once too". The voice part features a melodic line with some rests and a "mmm" vocalization. The electric guitar part provides harmonic support with sustained notes and some melodic fragments. The acoustic guitar part plays a consistent rhythmic pattern of chords. The double bass part provides a steady bass line.



Example 6.6 “September,” interaction between voice and guitar (chorus 1)

I can pic-ture how you're li - vin' In a ti-ny — fourth floor

Electric Guitar  
 Acoustic Guitar  
 Double Bass

flat There's times that a thou-sand a-cres and the Ro - cky moun-tains can't com-pete with

E. Gtr.  
 Ac. Gtr.  
 D.B.

that Ooo ————— o - o - o - ooo a - ooo o - o -

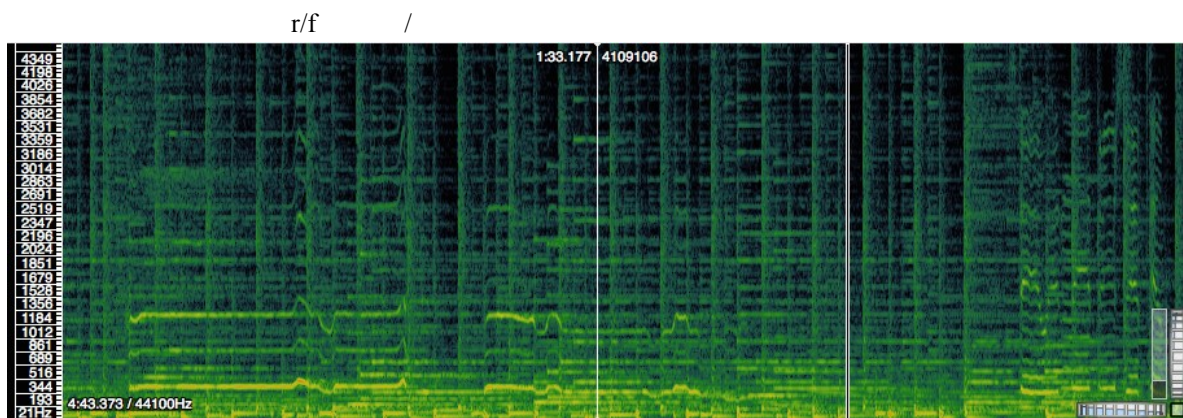
E. Gtr.  
 Ac. Gtr.  
 D.B.

The image shows a musical score for a song in E major (three sharps). It consists of four staves: a vocal line at the top, followed by Electric Guitar (E.Gtr.), Acoustic Guitar (Ac.Gtr.), and Double Bass (D.B.). The vocal line includes lyrics: "o - ah - ooo" followed by a long note, and "o - o - o - o - o - o - o - ooo". The instrumental parts provide accompaniment for the vocal line.

The sorrow expressed in the electric guitar shifts into nostalgic regret in Lund’s vocal performance. There is a slight hoarseness to his vocal performance so that, when emphasized on key moments in the lyrical narrative, he emits subtle crying gestures. The vocal strain on the word “summer” or “nights” in the first two verses, for example, evokes Lund’s *persona*’s (and even the singer-songwriter’s) despair, which is heightened through the slight tremulous voice as he reaches into his lower register on the word “New York” (verse 1 and 6). What is most striking about his vocal performance, however, are the subtle cry breaks that occur throughout the entire song. These breaks, marked in each word by a backslash (/), occur predominantly at the end of the word “through” or in the middle of “Septem/ber” on the first line of each verse. They also occur in the words “ni/ghts” and “co/ld” (verse 2), “ai/n’t” (verse 3), “fli/ght’s” (verse 4), as well as in “h/ow,” “t/imes,” and “Ro/cky” in the chorus, to name the most prominent of these subtle gestures. Lund does not emit full (or obvious) cry breaks, but rather subtle cries that seem to be released as a side effect of the strain and inner struggle to rein in the character’s emotions, at least while singing the song message. After each chorus, he finds the reflective space in which he can let go and let out longer fully vowelized cries, singing long-held quasi pitch-bending “ooos” in a way that mimics the electric guitar. As outlined in the spectrogram of Ex. 6.7, these vowelized cries rise and fall like a yodel, and there is even a full cry break that occurs as a result of the microtonal shift into the falsetto. With reverb applied to his vocals, these cries seem to float through the recorded track in a way that suggests a voice being carried away in a mountainous landscape. Reverb plays a significant role here, as it helps to

establish a sense of the mountainous rural space that was captured in the music video. This space is most prominent in the vowelized cries, as well as in the sixth verse, where Lund sings the lyrics of verse 1 unaccompanied. In this final verse, the echo has a slight reverb applied, at a fixed delay of roughly an eighth note; with only one repetition, the echo is most prominent at the end of a line or where there is a pause in the phrase, notably on “September,” “summer,” and “last.” His voice here carries in a manner suggestive of the outdoors, as though it is trailing off as he moves through the mountains. While one might assume that Lund’s *persona* is singing directly to his former lover in this song narrative, his performance and the use of echo and reverb suggest instead that these are his personal thoughts, that is, not just the thoughts of the protagonist *persona* (the lonesome cowboy image created through his music), but also the singer-songwriter. This reflective setting of Lund working through his emotions on his family ranch in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains elaborates the solitary cowboy metaphor and demonstrates his attachment to place. While he vocalizes his upset over the loss of this summer fling, his love for and deep connections to rural Alberta seem to assure this cowboy that he will find inner peace.

Example 6.7 “September,” spectrogram of vowelized cry after chorus 1



Note: “r/f” indicates the rise and fall and “/” the cry break in this sung yodel.

Directed by Trevor Smith, the music video for “September” elaborates Lund’s inner turmoil surrounding both the two geographic spaces the demise of this summer fling (Lund

2012d). As producer John Kerr revealed about the video, they had “set out to create a distinctly Albertan and haunting Rocky Mountain vision of the solitary cowboy, broken-hearted, and preparing for a cold winter of solitude” (Kerr 2013). As the protagonist undertakes the many ranching tasks to prep his property and livestock for the winter, he has visions of alternate solutions to dissolving the relationship: he imagines himself living in New York or his former lover in his beloved foothills landscape. Neither image, however, lives up to the fantasy of the summer love. Lund does not belong in the urban landscape, as it feels alien, cold, and even more isolating than living alone in rural Alberta. Likewise, his summer love seems restless in the foothills, ultimately fading from his dreams and leaving him behind to face September on his own.

Lund worked with John Kerr and Trevor Smith to create the video of “September,” which was shot entirely in southern Alberta. The countryside scenes were filmed at John’s Swinging 7 Ranch and The Crow Ranch near Longview, AB (Crowsnest Films 2014). This particular region of southern Alberta is notable not just for its location in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, but also for its location on Alberta Provincial Highway 22, known affectionately as “Cowboy Trail” because it passes through stunning ranch land territory. Thus, not only did this location provide the ranching landscape needed for the cowboy’s tale, but it also boasts the remarkable backdrop of the Rocky Mountains—an important geographic marker in the song narrative. The signage and architecture captured in these scenes points strongly to the shooting location of downtown Calgary. The narrative layer that captured Lund singing in an empty loft-style building was actually shot in the old Simmons Mattress Factory in Calgary. The scenes capturing Lund wandering through empty city streets were shot along 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue SW in Calgary. The glass and steel architecture of this area of Calgary helped to draw out the cold and uninviting feeling of the urban landscape that the country singer sought to develop in the narrative.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> While the lyrical narrative points specifically to New York City, it seems likely that they chose to shoot in Calgary not just for legal ease and to avoid having to deal with permissions and fees to shoot in the American city. It is possible that they also chose this location for its architecture and for the fact that they might be able to shut down the street for the shoot at a time that would not interrupt business. Photos from the “September” video shoot can be viewed on the Crowsnest Films Facebook page, <<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.194764467320220.44284.162441410552526&type=3>>.

As with Lund's other music videos, Kerr and Smith drew on montage-style editing to develop a complex video narrative that elaborates these daydream sequences of the singer-songwriter as protagonist searching for his place in the city or of his lover wandering through the foothills, all while he reflects on the breakup as he goes about his daily ranching activities. The directors used a variety of techniques, including editing, lighting, and defining urban/rural landscapes, to establish this narrative layering. In this video, montage style editing allows for the seamless movement between reality and fantasy, blurring the lines between these two states and creating strong correspondences between the lyrics, music, and video images. Lund plays the role of a narrating protagonist in the video, relaying the song story from three different locations in a way that seems to suggest narration in real-time, or, to put it another way, as though the video is capturing reflective moments in which the video's protagonist is *writing* the lyrics of the song. The video recreates a space that suggests that this lonely cowboy character of Lund's *persona* is either speaking or singing to himself, revealing all of the things he wish that he *could* say to his former lover. In some frames, there is a sense of disbelief that anyone could reject this landscape as he gazes over his family land and beyond to the stunning Rocky Mountains on the horizon. In his present-day narrator role, Lund appears first in the old Simmons Mattress Factory in Calgary staged to look like an empty loft apartment, singing the song with his acoustic guitar as he walks around the room and reflects on the demise of the relationship (Fig. 6.3). He then appears alone on the front porch of his foothills cabin (Fig. 6.4) or with his horse as he goes about his daily tasks (Fig. 6.5), placing him in the setting that he had wished he could share with his summer love. Thus, he has a homodiegetic narrator role in the music video, capturing the double nature of Lund's role as both narrator and protagonist of the story.<sup>26</sup> In this case, he is also the songwriter self-consciously telling his own story while crossing the metaleptic boundary into the emotions of his headspace as images of his daydreams enter not just his mind, but also the video narrative.

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<sup>26</sup> In *Narrative Discourse* Genette defines homodiegesis as a narrative in which the "narrator present as a character in the story he tells" (1980, 244-45).

Figure 6.3 “September,” Lund singing in abandoned warehouse



[00:25]

Figure 6.4 “September,” Lund singing on front porch of cabin



[00:41]



[01:17]

Figure 6.5 “September,” Lund singing in the fields



[00:53]



[02:09]

Before Lund daydreams about his lover remaining with him in the foothills, he tries to imagine himself living in the city. He first pictures himself as he reminisces about his days as a starving artist in the city (verse 3), with images of himself looking up at steel and glass high-rise buildings, or standing in front of them with his saddle and tackle on the

ground beside him (Fig. 6.6). He stares with an open mouth at all of the buildings blocking his view of the land. Despite the fact that he is clearly surrounded by a number of impressive buildings, it is *Lund* who stands out in this setting: he clearly does not belong in this landscape. This sequence of images presenting this daydream narrative layer marks the transition to the first chorus, where Lund can be seen hauling his saddle around the city streets. The sidewalks and streets are empty save for a few parked cars as he walks down the street, looking lost and alone as he tries to find his way in this urban environment. The narrative shifts back to the present tense, where images of Lund singing on the worn porch of his foothills cabin or riding his horse through an open field support the mention of the wide-open space and Rocky Mountains. In the first chorus images of Lund surveying the urban and rural landscapes reveal his amazement with these contrasting environments: the shock over how foreign the cold and uninviting cityscape feels as opposed to the amazement that anyone would leave the open and inviting countryside. Images of Lund in the city start to taper off from this point: two shots appear in verse 4 and in chorus 2, and one final image of the singer-songwriter carrying his saddle through the streets appears in the final yodel of the song. These images are prominent in the video narrative at the start of the song, a reflection of his attempt to imagine living in the city. Yet, his gestures and awkward stance in the deserted streets demonstrate how out of place he feels there. Indeed, the correspondence of the vowelized crying yodel with the fragmented shots of street lights or buildings suggests discomfort with the urban environment, an inability to picture a life there, and the sense that he would not know how to function in this space. The yodel here functions as his emotional response to the surrounding sights. He drags his saddle along with him, trying to find a place for his belongings, but in order to survive in the city he understands that he would have to leave that part of his identity behind.

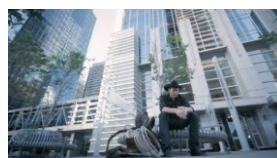
Figure 6.6 “September,” Lund wandering around empty city streets



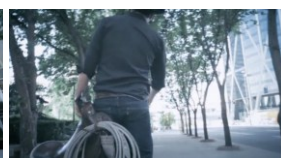
[01:05]



[01:10]



[02:19]

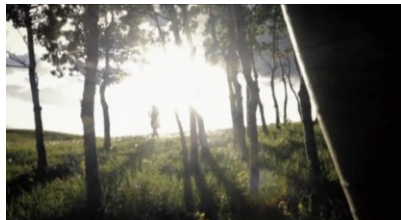


[02:31]



Images of Lund in the city fade from the narrative at the point of realization that he does not belong there, and he then turns to fantasizing about his lover staying with him in the country. Lynn Jensen's daughter Leah Jensen plays the female fantasy-character in this video. Although the first image of this woman occurs in the instrumental introduction, where the third image of the video opening shows her backside as she gazes off into the Rocky Mountains, her role in his dreams emerges with the instrumental interlude. In the shots capturing this daydream sequence, the audience does not see her face; she is, as Kerr (2013) reflects, "just a memory that never turns her face back to us—always leaving over the hill." Images of this woman seem almost otherworldly, as bright beams of sunlight provide incredible backlighting that illuminates the landscape around her as she moves between the trees in the foothills (Fig. 6.7). In some frames, the lighting causes glowing effect on or around her body, emphasizing that these moments are not reality, but rather an illusion. She never remains within reach: she is always a few steps ahead or off in the distance, slowly fading not just from view, but also from memory. The final shot of this female character is a completion of the very first image: in the introduction she stared off into the Rocky Mountains and in the outro the camera focuses in on her hand as she walks away (Fig. 6.8). Everything between these two shots is a fantasy: Lund's dream would be to see his summer love remain with him in Alberta, wandering through the trees, at peace with her life with him in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. As this pivotal moment of her walking away flashes in his mind, Lund is reminded about his fate, not just of solitude, but also the strong sense of belonging that he feels in southern Alberta.

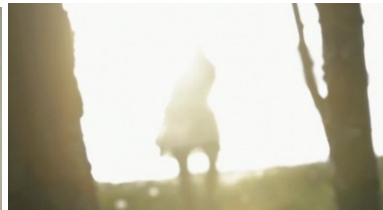
Figure 6.7 "September," fantasy images



[02:46]



[03:09]



[03:17]



Figure 6.8 “September,” love interest walking away



Introduction [00:06-00:07]



Outro [03:41-03:52]

The transition from the instrumental interlude to the final verse marks the climax of the video narrative. Figure 6.9 provides a map of the correspondences between lyrics, music, and images in this section of the video. The instrumental interlude marks the moment in which Lund allows himself to fantasize about his summer love and imagine what it would be like seeing her wandering through the trees as he does his chords. The section opens with Lund riding his horse along a hill ridge, and then alternates between shots of the woman in the trees and the singer-songwriter on the horse. Although the characters are in the same geographic location, lighting helps to establish two different states: a darker, cloudy sky marks Lund’s reality as he rides his horse through the landscape, while the bright beaming sun that provides backlight to the trees and woman characterize the dream-space. The electric guitar’s pitch bends accompany these images, where shots of Lund coincide with the long-held twangy pitch-bends of the starts of phrases and images of the woman are paired with the faster-moving windy melodic gestures. Thus, these two individuals are not only defined visually through lighting, but also through musical gestures in which pitch bends characterize the lonesome cowboy and the flirty melodic gestures capture the woman’s free-flowing movements through the trees. Yet this is all a dream, and the transition to the final verse marks the moment that Lund is snapped back to reality.

Lund sings the final verse unaccompanied, except for Valgardson on the drums, who plays a simple beat that imitates a slow, heavy heartbeat on the bass drum and brushes on the hi-hat. As Lund sings the lyrics of the opening verse again, he stares right into the

camera's lens as though he is pleading one final time for his lover to stay through September. This strong gaze into the camera frames the first verse: shots of Lund singing directly into the camera (for the first time) hold for six beats at the start and end of the verse, with the remaining images of the daydream sequence unfolding in between them. Through the instrumental interlude to the first image of the young woman in verse 6, the shots capturing her movements become increasingly brighter and closer, to the point where she is right in front of the camera but the sun completely washes out her face at the end of the first phrase in the final verse. Following this washed-out shot, the lighting softens, and she moves further from the camera, marking the marks the crucial moment of realization that she is gone, she is not real, and the Lund is alone in the foothills. The final shot of her illuminated by the sun's rays occurs before the final chorus, which occurs in one long shot of Lund singing along with his horse in an open field (end of Fig. 6.7-6.8). In the two previous chorus sections, images of Lund in the foothills are juxtaposed with shots of him wandering aimlessly around the city while carrying his saddle. In this final chorus, however, the video captures him in his rural element, accompanied by his loyal horse companion with the Rocky Mountains looming in the background.

The saddle, like the Rocky Mountains, is an important cultural symbol throughout the video. Like a piece of clothing or even Lund's guitar, the saddle goes everywhere with him. It emerges in the video narrative as artefact that he identifies with the safety and security of home. In this way, it functions almost like a security blanket. Perhaps more importantly, the saddle is a strong visual code that helps define his relationship to place. The saddle clearly does not belong in the urban landscape: there are no fields, no horses, and no sign of companionship. Unlike the uninviting cityscape, the foothills of the Rocky Mountains are presented as warm, open, and welcoming to this lonesome cowboy. While the singer-songwriter remains on his own in the rural setting, he is never truly alone, as he has a horse by his side. The saddle, like him, has a purpose in this rural setting. Here, he does not wander aimlessly and wonder about what he would do in this environment; rather, in the foothills, he has land and property to maintain, livestock to care for, and a horse as his companion. Daily chores on the ranch provide purpose and a deep sense of belonging.

Figure 6.9 “September,” instrumental interlude to final verse



Electric Guitar

Acoustic Guitar

Double Bass



E.Gtr.

Ac.Gtr.

D.B.



E.Gtr.

Ac.Gtr.

D.B.

mmm \_\_\_\_\_ Stay

Detailed description: This figure presents three systems of musical notation for an instrumental interlude. Each system includes staves for Electric Guitar, Acoustic Guitar, and Double Bass. The music is in 4/4 time with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The first system shows the Electric Guitar playing a melodic line with a long note, while the Acoustic Guitar provides a steady accompaniment of chords and the Double Bass plays a simple bass line. The second system continues this pattern with a more active Electric Guitar line. The third system features a vocal line (labeled 'mmm') and a 'Stay' instruction, with the Electric Guitar playing a sustained note and the Acoustic Guitar and Double Bass continuing their accompaniment. Two small landscape photographs are placed above each system, and a larger one is at the bottom.



with me through Sep - tem-ber — Su - mmer di - dn't last

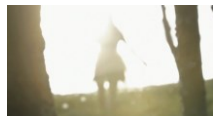


And ther ain't no - bo - dy in New York Ci - ty who could need you half as

E.Gtr.

Ac.Gtr.

D.B.



bad I can pic-ture how you're li - vin' In a

E.Gtr.

Ac.Gtr.

D.B.

Although there a profound sense of loss emerges in the narrative of “September,” the music video demonstrates Lund’s realization that he would have had to give up even more to remain in this romantic relationship. Leaving the beloved foothills region of southern Alberta is a sacrifice that he seems unwilling to make. This is made all the more interesting by the fact that, in real life, he lived in Edmonton for more than two decades. While this could simply be a case of a singer-songwriter drawing on and modifying a popular country music narrative device to tell a story, the fact that Lund (2012k) admitted in his webisode for “September” that his love songs emerge from real experiences in his life suggests a re-evaluation of one’s connection to place following the dissolution of his relationship. When faced with questions about defining his homeplace in the wake of the breakup, he instinctively turned not to his Edmonton-based home, but rather, to the foothills landscape in which he was raised. As with most of the songs in his discography, the cowboy and his relationship to land emerge as a crucial way in which he negotiates his own relationship to place. In so doing, he continually demonstrates both his attachment to this rural southern Alberta landscape and a strong sense of identification with the traditions, values, lifestyle, and culture of the region. About one year following the release of “September,” Lund put his Edmonton home up for sale so that he could move closer to his family (Huffington Post 2013b). Whether that means his hometown of Taber, nearby Calgary, or one of the smaller rural communities is not known; regardless the location, the move south marks Lund’s return home, a desire to be closer to his family and roots, and (perhaps) the ability to become a more active participant in the cultures and traditions about which he writes.

#### **6.4 Summary**

The songs analyzed in this chapter reveal diverse conceptions of place and, more specifically, the relationship between the country and the city. While, as Joli Jensen (1998, 29-30) aptly pointed out, an urban-rural tension underscores many country songs, Corb Lund’s music highlights the complex ways in which individuals respond to these cultural spaces, and, by extension, the profound impact that these spaces have on one another. Perhaps stereotypically, his narratives characterize the country as a cultural space that honours the past and traditions and the city as a place of progress and modernization. Both “The Truth Comes Out” and “This Is My Prairie” demonstrate the significant impact that

urban sprawl has had on rural communities in southern Alberta. The construction of new transportation routes through natural habitat regions, for example, has forced many animals to wander into neighbouring villages and towns to find food, shelter, and safety from trucks and other vehicles on these roads. The appearance of cougars and bears on ranches in the foothills can be a serious cause for concern, as these animals can pose very real danger for the safety of individuals and livestock. And while simply spotting one of these animals lurking on your property can be terrifying, the fact that this threat can be *seen* means that, in many cases, there could be time to alert families and neighbours and call animal control for help with safely removing these animals. One growing threat that cannot be seen, however, is the presence of pollutants from the fossil fuel industry that affect health, land, and environment. With the exception of the physical presence of land rigs and other industry machines and tools, the dangers remain invisible to the eye. By the time pollutants are identified, it is often too late: in most cases, health and/or environmental issues emerge well in advance. Furthermore, the ambiguity surrounding the provincial laws regarding land ownership often puts ranchers at a significant disadvantage, as many remain confused about their rights and obligations with regard to denying access to sites of interest. The presence of both wild animals and of the energy industry in rural communities raises serious questions about land conservation, as well as health and safety. Drawing on real events that threatened his immediate and extended family, Lund bring attention to these issues in his songs. He also highlights the conflicting ideologies of urban-based industries occupied with expanding their reach and traditions and values of rural communities seeking to protect the health and wellbeing of their families and agricultural businesses.

Interestingly, Lund offers a profound exploration of his relationship to urban and rural spaces through songs about broken romantic relationships. In both “Alberta Says Hello” and “September” he drew on the popular country versus city narrative paradigm used in country music to tell stories about the end of two important relationships. Instead of following the traditional structure in which the protagonist reflects on a rural home from his/her new life in the city, he offers a complex adaptation of the narrative and instead remains firmly planted in rural Alberta, where he mourns the loss of a female romantic partner who has left him and moved to the city. While he images these great loves building new and successful lives in Montreal or New York City, Lund recounts lonely days being hunkered down in his cabin (“Alberta Says Hello”) or riding a horse and preparing for a long and cold winter alone in the foothills (“September”). Despite having lived in a city for just over twenty years, the lyrics and video for “September” defines urban spaces as cold, isolating, and alien in comparison to the open and welcoming landscapes of the foothills. Instead of writing about the place in which he actually resided at the time of these breakups (Edmonton), Lund instinctively returned to his roots in southern Alberta, the geography of his youth, strongly suggesting the importance of this geographic and cultural space within his artistic identity.

## Conclusions: “Geo-Cultural” Identity

“I think regionalism is important, otherwise all songs are distilled to a common denominator.”

Lund on regionalism in songwriting (Dudley 2011)

“Hurtin’ Albertan” has become a “theme song” for Lund and his band of the same name, as they tend to perform this song in concert sets just before he introduces his band members. While the song offers a light-hearted sarcastic humour in its description of Alberta and its surrounding provinces, the elements chosen to describe these regions and their relationship to one another highlight the complexities of Albertan identity. Co-written with fellow Albertan singer-songwriter Tim Hus, “Hurtin’ Albertan” is sung from the perspective of a grading operator and rodeo rider as he hauls his horses behind his dually diesel pickup truck and recounts his reflections on what it feels like to return home after trips on the rodeo circuit. Hus is featured on the recorded track from *Hair in My Eyes like a Highland Steer* (2005), performing the role of the Hurtin’ Albertan’s voice as spoken over the CB radio, providing narrative information about the protagonist’s route home from rodeos in neighbouring provinces. These spoken-word interludes reveal the Hurtin’ Albertan’s profession (a grader) and his reason for being on the road (hauling his horses home after a weekend at the rodeo). In these sections Hus also offers witty sarcastic commentary on the regions through which he is driving: Montana, British Columbia, and Saskatchewan.

Hus recorded two versions of the song for his 2006 album *Huskies and Husqvarnas*. The first version included Lund performing the spoken-word CB radio interludes of the horse-hauling “Hurtin’ Albertan.” In Hus’s track, the “Hurtin’ Albertan” is an oil rigger and not operating a grader, offering another perspective of the demanding lifestyle of working-class labourers in Alberta. Lund’s spoken-word CB radio interludes are much easier to

understand, as he clearly enunciates his dialogue. However, their commentary is quite similar: they follow the same routes through Montana, British Columbia, and Saskatchewan and poke fun at the same elements of weather, wildlife, and landscape in each region. The second version, included as a bonus track on Hus' album, contains additional verses written by the two songwriters. This alternate version, further cements the "hurtin' Albertan" within the province's culture and tradition. While this version pokes fun at some of the province's stereotypes (from hunting gophers, to drinking Pilsner beer, to the notion that Alberta is nothing but ranchers and drillers), the narrative pulls on Lund's personal and family history in southern Alberta (describing his long roots in the ranching and rodeo cultures of the foothills landscape), creating a "backstory" for the horse-hauling Albertan trucker.

As in many of his songs, Lund describes the geographic regions through topographic features, nature, and wildlife. As the Hurtin' Albertan drives through Montana (verse 1), British Columbia (verse 2), and Saskatchewan (verse 3) toward Alberta following weekends at the rodeo, the song's descriptions suggest that the protagonist feels uncomfortable in these regions. For example, the second verse finds him traveling east from British Columbia, recounting the windy passes and treacherous turns, revealing that the Pacific Standard Time zone creates an unsettling feeling inside of him (leaving his heart in his throat). He expresses relief to be crossing back into Alberta, ending each verse with an important reflection on how the roads improve as soon as he enters his native province. Whether or not the roads actually improve is not important; rather, the crucial idea expressed here considers the feelings of security and comfort that individuals find in regional landmarks and boundaries—creating that unconscious feeling of familiarity and being "home."

In the song's chorus Alberta emerges as a province of riches and hardships, and its residents as honest, hard working individuals who are just doing their best to get by. The Hurtin' Albertan sings of having too much oil money, acknowledging that even though Alberta has been blessed financially as a result of its several oil booms, its success has come at a high cost on both personal and provincial levels: Alberta's landscape and environment has been destroyed for the fossil fuels beneath its soil, and residents living



near projects sites have suffered increased health issues as a result of water and air contamination. Furthermore, individuals working in the oil sands (directly and indirectly) have made significant sacrifices for their province on a daily basis. These challenges have been discussed throughout the dissertation, notably in chapter 5, which outlined some of the challenges that individuals working in the oil sands face and the sacrifices made to secure gainful employment and support families. These challenges are not specific to the oil sands, but to many individuals working in the very demanding working-class industries. A hard labourer, perhaps grading roads to the oil sands northern Alberta, this Hurtin' Albertan likely lives a challenging lifestyle of long, mentally and physically exhausting hours on the job, and spending his weekend chasing the rodeo circuit—sometimes only winning enough money to cover his entry fees.

A neotraditionalist song, the musical setting draws on the style conventions of the trucker subgenre in a manner resembling the music of Dave Dudley. The trucker subgenre emerged in the 1960s as an expression of working class culture and a musical variation of honky tonk and rock-inflected country music (Erlewine 2015), and focused on the lives and work environments of long-haul truckers. This style, as exemplified in the “Hurтин' Albertan,” features twangy electric guitar, spoken word narratives (mimicking CB trucker-speak), train beat, and an uptempo rhythmic gait well-suited to moving at about 100km/h on the highway (Murphy 2014, 207-08). While lyrically, the song expresses the title character's solitary existence as a modern-day “diesel cowboy,” the musical setting captures the sense of movement as he drives along these windy roads and narrates his travels. The combination of Lund's nostalgic narrative and the up-tempo trucker style expresses the complex nature of Lund's persona and his notion of Albertan identity: the “hurтин' Albertan's” continual reference to regional ranching and rodeo traditions (coupled with the activity of hauling horses to and from the rodeo) suggests a rural upbringing for the truck driver, who is now forging a path for himself outside of the rural ranching traditions of his childhood.

Through the Hurтин' Albertan's travels, Lund seeks to define the uniqueness of Alberta's landscape and identity over that of the prairie and mountainous regions at its borders to the south, west, and east. Alberta often stereotypically gets lumped in with its

prairie and mountainous neighbours, all of whom have active farming, ranching, and rodeo communities as well. Yet, grouping the province with its neighbours ignores the features that make Alberta a unique and distinct region for the individuals residing there. Lund defines Alberta's geographic positioning in the chorus, as "east of the Rockies and west of the rest," seeking to mark out the region as distinct from the provinces (and states) surrounding its borders. This distinction is also captured through the song character's incredibly strong sense of place and self-identification with the landscape and culture of the western Canadian province. The song narrative underscores the sense of security one associates with their homeplace, such as feeling the change in road pavement, air quality, and even time zones, as well as the comfort felt with the return to daily routine. Although, with the exception of changes in road pavement, these aspects remain intangible, each can be felt within an individual's core and body, and can affect the ways in which individuals relate to a specific region's environment.

These unconscious associations are likewise felt through one's relationship to a place's cultural space and the traditions that have historically defined a region. Lund's "Hurtin' Albertan" displays a strong connection to rodeo, as he spends his weekends driving to and from rodeos in neighbouring provinces. Thus, when he describes the landscape, environment, and communities of these neighbouring regions, there seems to be an intimate familiarity with each place, suggesting a life-long dedication to following the circuit. The narrative suggests an individual deeply committed to the rodeo circuit (an activity integral to the province's heritage), even as he forges a path for himself outside of the rural ranching traditions with which the cowboy sporting event is usually (stereotypically) attached. Although his descriptions of each region suggest a deep knowledge of rural ranching traditions (notably through his reference to the Chilcotin buckaroos or gopher-infested ranches in Saskatchewan), the protagonist is a grader operator. What lies under the surface of this narrative is a comment on the sacrifices many Albertans make to secure gainful employment in order to live decent lifestyles and support families. As Geo Takach (2010, 35) has observed, the rural way of life is slowly losing ground in Alberta. While the agricultural industry remains a strong force in the western Canadian province, the number of young individuals *entering* the profession is dwindling. As the high cost of land drives ranchers east, the younger population is flocking to the more

profitable energy industry in droves. The Hurtin' Albertan could be seen as a representation of this shift in Alberta's economic and industry structures (from agriculture to energy). He is, like many others, a modern cowboy with one foot firmly rooted in rural culture and the other negotiating his position within the province's changing culture.

### **7.1 Country Music's "Hurtin' Albertan": Defining "Geo-Cultural" Identity**

To say that rural southern Alberta has had an impact on Corb Lund's identity and career would be an understatement. As this dissertation has revealed, the alt-country singer-songwriter has continually turned to aspects of his Albertan heritage to inform his songwriting. While some of his songs have drawn on stories from his own personal experiences ("Steer Rider's Blues," "The Truck Got Stuck," "Alberta Says Hello," and "September"), others have been inspired by events in the lives of his relatives and friends ("Talkin' Veterinarian Blues," "Buckin' Horse Rider," "We Used to Ride 'Em," "Roughest Neck Around," and "This is My Prairie," to name a few). His songs not only define the province's diverse landscape and unpredictable weather patterns, but also provide critical commentary on the aspects of rural Albertan culture, politics, and traditions that have shaped Alberta's history and identity. Although he remains fairly apolitical in his writing, he has not shied away from controversial topics, and has used his music to explore important issues related to expansion of the fossil fuel energy industry into rural Alberta and the impact of urban sprawl on local ranching communities. In songs of this nature, Lund often uses a method of story-telling that is more observational in tone; instead of pointing fingers and drawing out "us" versus "them" style narrative arguments, he offers commentary about both sides of a particular debate. As such, he creates space for dialogue, allowing his fellow Albertans to think more critically about how a particular issue impacts each participant. In so doing, he does not alienate members of his audience, realizing that individuals involved in these larger discussions care deeply about the province and its future.

In order to unpack the role that songs about the homeplace play in shaping Lund's identity, this dissertation has considered layers of signification surrounding the singer-

songwriter. Genre and musical style, levels of artistic identity, and geographic-cultural (“geo-cultural”) association have been integral components in this discussion, quite often overlapping, establishing the multi-layered context in which the Albertan singer-songwriter exists. Through an examination of musical and cultural codes and conventions of the country music genre and the levels of self-representation in song lyrics and videos, I have sought to understand how place-based narratives invoke a variety of senses of place and articulate key elements of his artistic identity. In the end, this three-part analysis has enabled me to interrogate the ways in which country artists use their music to explore and define their connections to the heritage and culture of their origins.

### *7.1.1 Genre*

Genre has proven to be integral in this discussion, not just with regard to elements of musical style, but concerning the articulation of an artistic identity as well. Indeed, the analyses have demonstrated that genre codes, musical styles, and the cultural spheres of hard core and soft shell artistry play a significant role in the ways in which country artists seek to define their sound, their voice, their identity, and their community. While artists within both cultural spheres have addressed place in song, Peterson (1997, 150-55) has argued that the level of specificity and intimacy fluctuates from one to the other both lyrically and musically. The opening section in each chapter has surveyed these contrasting reflections on place. While soft shell artists draw on place-based narratives to define their connection to rural communities, they often do so in generic terms or through place archetypes. Songs like Little Big Town’s “Boondocks” or George Hamilton IV’s “Abilene” refer to rural life in a way that appeals to the sensibilities of individuals from small towns across the southern USA. Hard core artists, such as Lund, strongly stress their origins, revealing deep connections to the geography, cultures, and traditions of their homeplace. These narratives are written in a way that reveals elements of a singer-songwriter’s character, contributing to the construction of his/her artistic identity.

As an alt-country singer-songwriter, Lund’s musical language articulates key elements of hard core country identity. Crucial to this cultural sphere is an emphasis on

traditionalism and “authenticity”—that is, a focus on personalized experiences written in a way to suggest that these stories are honest and accurate representations of who the artist is as an individual. His artistic *persona*, like that of many hard core artists (such as Dolly Parton or Butch Hancock), is that of a man telling stories about events in his *real* life in Alberta (specifically rural Alberta). And indeed, Lund’s lyrics *do* communicate stories about his life: he has spoken about his youth as a steer rider, trying to pull his truck from the mud, and even the dissolution of his romantic relationships. Although he sometimes reimagines these experiences (notably by placing his song protagonist in the Rockies in “September”), they involve concrete and personal situations that unfolded in his life, and express a range of complex (and possibly very real) emotions. His songs also share stories about his relatives and friends, using their experiences as a way to comment on specific/current topics, memorialize an individual, or relay an aspect of the province’s history. Even though these stories are not about Lund himself, they are about individual in his world and, as such, reveal much about his relationships and the cultures and traditions in which he participates (or has participated in the past). Lund has always stressed the importance of “writing what he knows” (*Losin’ Lately Gambler* [2009]), and this personal standard has resulted in a heightened level of intimacy in his songwriting completely in line with Peterson’s observations on hard core artists. As a result, this personalized artistic voice has established a complex web of narrative identity (discussed below), but ultimately results in a genuine or “real” personality (see section 7.1.2. for more on matters of identity).

Musically, Lund’s language is stylistically diverse. This eclecticism is in part a result of the alt-country sphere within which Lund functions as a singer-songwriter, but it also reveals the influence of his jazz studies and speed metal band past. While country music is often mocked for the reliance of I-IV-V harmonies, Lund’s music often steps outside of that harmonic framework, pulling on minor and augmented chords from the musical vocabulary learned in his college years. Even his most traditional sounding songs, like “This is My Prairie,” step away from these “cowboy chords” to more complicated harmonies that allow him to fully express the sombre funereal tone in the instrumental bridge (which is, in itself, a stylistic anomaly of the strophic ballad form). The jazz influence is also prominent in the upright bass and vocal performance of “We Used to Ride ‘Em,” which has an almost lounge feel in the verses. The use of distortion on “Gettin’

Down on the Mountain” suggests musical influence outside of country music as well, a reference to harder rock and metal styles of the singer-songwriter’s youth. Beyond these examples, Lund’s language is characterized by a blend of traditional country styles, in his folk-like “This Is My Prairie” and “Chinook Wind,” his use of the western swing style in “Little Foothills Heaven” and “Cows Around,” and his up-tempo rockabilly sound in “Steer Rider’s Blues” and “We Used to Ride ‘Em.” While these styles are not tied to the geographic region of southern Alberta (in the way that Parton’s songs draw on rural Appalachian conventions), Lund evokes each style to capture a very specific environment for his narratives. For example, the western swing style helps to capture the joy and happiness he finds at his family’s “Little Foothills Heaven” (ranch), a style routinely evoked to praise the virtues of life in a specific region, notably regions in the “West.” And while he uses the traditional western swing arrangement in this song, “Cows Around” employs only an acoustic and electric guitar, double bass, and drums in its sarcastic ode to the “joyous” life of working with cattle. One of the most striking correlations of style emerges in the rockabilly framework of “Steer Rider’s Blues.” Reminiscent of early Elvis Presley or of Johnny Cash’s characteristic train-beat rhythm, Lund drew instinctively on a style that captured not just the imagery of a quick-moving steer, but also the youthful exuberance of a musical sound that changed the face of popular music in the 1950s. Indeed, this style exudes a dynamic energy synonymous with youth and the nervous excitement of a teenage male eagerly waiting for his chance to ride a bull.

In addition to drawing on these diverse musical styles, Lund’s arrangements make use of musical codes in order to reference or connote extramusical themes. For example, his use of non-traditional country music instruments in “This Is My Prairie” allows him to add musical depth to the song, and further establish the funereal tone. The song opens with a sombre harmonium chorale, features a horn solo at the instrumental bridge, and closes with a IV-V-I cadence in the harmonium, functioning like a ceremonial prelude, interlude, and postlude of a religious service. The use of these instruments conjures images of saluting a fallen soldier, the soldier here being Alberta’s land and rural residents who are losing their battle to protect their ranches and family from the energy industry. Indeed, the horns in particular seem reminiscent in tone to militaristic salutes, further marking out this sentiment. Lund evoked this militaristic feel again in his tribute to Calgarians following the

2013 flood; the repeating snare drum beat in “Blood, Sweat and Water” alludes to a militaristic salute that builds in volume (and intensity through the addition of other instruments) through the bridge section—a technique that can stimulate heightened emotional tension.<sup>1</sup> In addition to evoking this extramusical imagery, Lund’s arrangements have also captured mood and sonic portraits of place. Both “No Roads Here” and “The Truth Comes Out” use instruments to dramatic effect. The use of drones and a sparse guitar solo in the former creates a foreboding atmosphere and desolate landscape full of danger and mystery for this lone cowboy to explore in “No Roads Here,” a song that re-imagines his family’s stories about their migration to southern Alberta through the eyes of a lone cowboy. Using the same instruments, Lund’s setting of “The Truth Comes Out” uses a cyclical melodic and harmonic structure to create a contemplative atmosphere for this rumination over the fate of southern Alberta’s changing ecosystem.

Lund’s musical settings also get into the psyche of his song protagonists. In “Chinook Wind,” for example, the repeated strumming pattern on Lund’s phased acoustic guitar (causing the root chord tone of D to resonate after he strums the chord), coupled with the lap steel’s wild whipping riffs around the static vocal line, paint not just a picture of the harsh west winds, but also of the rancher’s psychological stresses (Lacasse 2000, 195-208) over this constant and unpredictable force in his life. In “Cows Around,” Lund references Johnny Cash’s version of the classic “(Ghost): Riders in the Sky,” incorporating a slap bass accompaniment to connote the charging hooves of cattle taunting the rancher as he rattles off names of cattle. This performance conjures images of a man driven insane by his cows, as he deliriously rambles names to himself. This dissertation has shown that, throughout his discography, Lund has used motives of short repeated or cyclic patterns to highlight the persistence of harsh elements (“Chinook Wind”), a circularity or inability to move forward (“The Truck Got Stuck”), or to capture a sense of monotony or routineness to daily activity (“Talkin’ Veterinarian Blues”). The examples are almost limitless in Lund’s discography, as he seems to continually seek unique ways in which he can capture the sounds or atmosphere of place, the mood of a song, the relationship between an individual and his/her

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<sup>1</sup> This gradual build (in volume, number of instruments, and intensity) is similar to the classical compositional technique used by Maurice Ravel in the opening of Bolero (1928) or even of the second movement of Dmitri Shostakovich’s Leningrad Symphony (No. 7 [1941]).

surroundings, and even the psychological state of his song characters. His writing often displays a cinematic quality in this regard, showing his interest in making strong connections between the musical setting, the lyrical narrative, and the identity of his song characters. This stylistic and compositional diversity demonstrates how deeply rooted Lund is in alt-country and in the genre's tradition of story-telling.

### 7.1.2 *Levels of Artistic Identity*

By digging deeper into song narratives, each chapter has unpacked complex webs of identity, exploring the levels of narrative voice and how singers-songwriters draw on real, lived experiences to construct their artistic identity. As such, this often creates ambiguity about where the *real* person ends and the *persona* or song *character* begin, heightened in songs that have strongly autobiographical (or near-autobiographical) narratives. And this is precisely the type of relationship that is important within country music narratives, demonstrating an element of what Fox (2009, 115) calls “authentic sincerity” regarding an artist's personal life and similarities to the men and women in the audience. These relationships become even more specific in songs that are lyrically (and even musically) connected to place. While, on one level, Lund's use of regional themes allows him to address a range of socio-political, cultural, and environmental issues, it also provides him with a way of defining his relationship to place, his artistic identity, and his position within the genre.

The analyses in this dissertation expanded on Frith's (1996) and Auslander's (2004) work on the artistic *persona*. What emerged through these analyses was a much more complicated web of self-identification than either theorist accounted for in their writing. While the levels of *real* person, artistic *persona*, and song *character* remain, three additional levels emerged showing the complex nature of defining an artist's public image, when that image is heavily reliant on autobiographical information. In addition to the *real* Corb Lund, the *singer-songwriter* emerged, that is, the individual self-consciously telling (and indeed re-imagining) these personal stories in song through a process of autofiction. The term “autofiction,” coined by French writer Serge Doubrovsky, combines the



contrasting styles of autobiography and fiction, in which an author (or songwriter) recounts his/her life experiences, but modifies (or re-imagines) certain details (characters, settings, etc.) in the service of a narrative's exploration of deeper meanings or relationships.<sup>2</sup> Thus, through songwriting, Lund becomes the author of his autofictional *persona*, thus bridging the gap between the *real* Lund and the *persona* Lund. While this form of autofictional writing style is present throughout his discography, its presence is perhaps most apparent when multiple identity levels are in play. For example, if the song protagonist bears strong resemblance to Lund and his *persona*, then this sense of autofiction intensifies. As the analyses here have shown, within the realm of the lyrical narrative, Lund (as a real person and artistic *persona*) assumes the role of *narrator*, *protagonist*, and other *secondary characters*, using his voice to narrate or enact their story, which is, at times, his own story. The relationship is much less confusing when it is clear that he assumes the role of narrator; this is a narrative strategy that audiences can easily decipher not just because of the narrative stance, but because these stories tend to be clearly about someone else as well. Indeed, it is clear in "Buckin' Horse Rider," "Manyberries," "Talkin' Vet Blues," "Blood, Sweat and Water," and "Roughest Neck Around" that Lund is singing about someone else, telling the stories of these individuals. The stance becomes a murkier when he assumes the role of the protagonist (or secondary character), and more so when that protagonist is Lund's *persona*. For example, Lund assumes the role of a rancher in both "Chinook Wind" and "This is My Prairie," but this rancher is not meant to be him, he is simply embodying the role of protagonist. But, in songs like "Alberta Says Hello" and "September" (perhaps more than others), where the song protagonist is clearly an autofictional "Corb Lund," trying to find the line where the *real* Lund ends and the *persona* begins can be challenging. These narratives provide a glimpse into his world, but that world is always a version that he *chooses* to share with his audience.

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<sup>2</sup> French writer Serge Doubrovsky coined this term in 1977 to describe the narrative style of his novel, *Fils*, which recounts the events of his life but employs unconventional syntax, chronology, and perspective in order to (intentionally) disrupt autobiography. Doubrovsky explained his term on the back cover of the novel, stating (1977, 10): « Autobiographie? Non, c'est un privilège réservé aux importants de ce monde, au soir de leur vie, et dans un beau style. Fiction d'événements et de fait strictement réel; si l'on veut, autofiction, d'avoir confié le langage d'une aventure à l'aventure du langage, hors sagesse et hors syntaxe du roman, traditionnel ou nouveau. » This can be translated as follows: "Autobiography? No, that is a privilege reserved for the important people of this world at the end of their lives, in a refined style. Fiction, of real events and facts; autofiction, if you will, entrusts the language of an adventure to the adventure of language, outside of the wisdom and the syntax of the novel, traditional or new." Thus, based on this explanation, autofiction can be loosely defined as a fictionalization of real events and facts.

According to this autofiction model, by definition, Lund's *persona* is very close to his *real* person. By this, I mean that the singer-songwriter's real life experience influence and unfold in his song narratives, blending reality with fiction. In an attempt to define the genre of autofiction, Philippe Gasparini (2008, 297) stated the following:

Autobiographical and literary text that features numerous oral qualities, formal innovation, narrative complexity, fragmentation, separation from the self, disparateness and auto-commentary, which tends to problematize the relationship between writing and experience.<sup>3</sup>

This definition hits at several elements of autofictional writing relevant to Lund's style. First and foremost Lund, as singer-songwriter, re-imagines his life events not just to create some separation from his real self (thus maintaining distance between his personal life and fans), but also as a form of auto-commentary, as a way to write his identity. In so doing, like autofictional novelists, he challenges the relationship between songwriting and personal experience, each time finding new ways to re-imagine life events in the service of self-exploration and/or the construction of his artistic identity. Throughout his career, Lund has rooted his identity geographically through strong associations with the countryside and cowboy culture. The *real* Lund has lived in the city for over twenty years, but the *persona* (and *protagonist*) Lund inhabits rural spaces in his songs. That is not to say that he does not know of what he speaks; on the contrary, this dissertation has demonstrated in each chapter that Lund remains connected to his rural southern Alberta roots and to the issues that affect ranching and rodeo cultures in the province. Lund's *persona*, in fact, seems to have never left the family ranch even though the *real* individual did in the late 1980s. In returning to his roots to inform his identity, Lund has been able to fully explore the range of issues affecting his family and community; in so doing he uses this knowledge to elaborate his rancher/cowboy *persona* and maintains a strong connection to his origins. He is, however, sensitive of his cowboy image: "I'm awfully sensitive about it, though. I know guys who are still working cowboys. So it's a bit like saying you're a street hustler, even if you're not anymore" (Wheeler 2012). While he may not have participated in the family ranch for over two decades, he maintains his ties to the tradition through his childhood memories and

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<sup>3</sup> The original text reads as follows: "Texte autobiographique et littéraire présentant de nombreux traits d'oralité, d'innovation formelle, de complexité narrative, de fragmentation, d'altérité, de disparate et d'autocommentaire qui tendent à problématiser le rapport entre l'écriture et l'expérience" (Gasparini 2008, 297).

through his family members that have remained on the family land. Thus, instead of living the life of a rancher, he has spent much of his adult life singing about his former ranching life and the lives of family and friends in the profession. His songs tell not just his story, but *their* story as well, becoming the soundtrack to life in southern Alberta.

### 7.1.3 “Geo-Cultural” Identity

At the core of this dissertation is the notion that we can learn a lot about country artists from their origins, but also that country artists draw on their origins in order to reveal elements of their identity to an audience. For some artists (largely those within the soft shell sphere), this tends to be done through publicity materials or in one or two songs over the course of a career. For others, specific places provide the geographic and cultural context for an artist’s career, allowing him/her to hinge their entire artistic *persona* on diverse conceptions of place and on the values and traditions of a working-class culture to which they no longer belong. Dolly Parton, Butch Hancock, and even Merle Haggard are strong examples of this hard core artistic strategy. Corb Lund has proven to be an artist deeply attached to his roots. Even though he has toured the world performing his music, and spent time in several cities (including Austin and New York City), he readily admits that he feels his Alberta pulling him home: “I’m attracted to it. It gives me a sense of belonging. That foothills terrain is close to my heart” (Dudley 2011). This deep sense of place remains at the fore of his discography.

Lund’s discography relays aspects of Alberta’s history, often placing himself or his family members as central characters in the story narrative. The dissertation’s case studies began through Lund’s re-imagining of his ancestor’s migration north into Alberta, describing the province’s desolate landscape and traces of aboriginal heritage with which they were greeted at the turn of the twentieth century. Through songs about the weather, ranching lifestyle, veterinary medicine, strong rodeo culture, and fossil fuel industry, Lund documents Alberta’s story and, at the same time, his family’s position within that story. These songs reveal not just a pride in his family heritage—and the role his parents have played, in particular—but also an incredible attachment to and sense of place. The majority

of the songs considered in this dissertation reveal a deep emotional attachment to rural southern Alberta; his songs speak with great pride of the traditions and cultures of the community in which he was raised. The Alberta presented in many of his song narratives (at least in chapters 2 to 4) seems to be the province of his youth; his song protagonists seem to be traditional cowboy-style figures who ranch and ride broncs (or steers), each character demonstrating a strong attachment to the landscape (even if frustrated by the wind). This attachment has only been magnified by his family's more than century-long tenure in the region and their reliance on the natural world (Cantrill 1998, 303). As such, songs like "This Is My Prairie" and "The Truth Comes Out"—songs in which the characters grapple with very modern-day issues—reveal frustration and indeed desperation over the state of affairs and the potential loss of land to industry. Both songs exhibit protective instincts over the land, not just for his family's sake, but also for the aboriginals who inhabited the province before settlement in the late 1800s. There is almost a sense of disbelief that this land could be lost, that the decades that his family put in building a homestead could one day be at risk. Thus, the songs in chapter 5 paint a picture of today's Alberta, describing the impact that developing the energy industry has had on the province's ranching heritage—not just in terms of land ownership, but also the high incidence of individuals leaving the farm to find gainful employment in the oil sands. With this comes nostalgia for the simpler times, for a sacred time when the land had yet to be touched by industry. Although not analyzed in this dissertation, in "Especially a Paint" (discussed briefly in chapter 2) Lund reveals a deep regret over the disappearance of a landscape he never truly knew. He sings of a "cathedral" and a "paradise," speaking nostalgically and almost enviously about the good old days, singing mournfully that "she disappeared too soon."

An urban-rural tension is certainly present in today's Alberta, as in Lund's discography. While the province has retained its rural ranching and rodeo image, its traditions and values are often at odds with the vision of urban-based companies seeking to expand their projects into the countryside. This issue remains at the core of "The Truth Comes Out" and "This is My Prairie," both of which address the impact of urban sprawl on rural Alberta. Although he draws on iconic imagery of the country and city, his narratives often present diverse conceptions of these spaces, and reveal his own inner turmoil

surrounding his rural “cowboy kid” upbringing and current urban life (Lund 2012a). His music exposes the tensions that exist between urban and rural Alberta, while, at the same time, shaping his artistic identity as an individual deeply rooted in the traditions of his ranching heritage. Indeed, Lund’s family roots run deep in southern Alberta, with both sides of his family history dating back to the turn of the twentieth century. The Lunds and maternal Ivins’s have been present through every stage in Alberta’s history, from the 1905 establishment as a Canadian province, through the heyday in open-range ranching, the first Calgary Stampede (1912), the 1947 oil boom that shifted the province’s economic structure, and the development of oil sands and coal bed methane extraction practices. Through it all, the foothills family homestead (Bar X Ranch) has remained largely intact and a central location for family members to find comfort and security from the harsh realities of the world (Lawrence 2014). While each of the songs interrogated in this dissertation demonstrate Lund’s relationship to his rural Albertan roots and the conflicting urban-rural tensions that reside within his sense of self, “Hurting Albertan” provides yet another layer to this discussion. The protagonist portrayed by Lund in this song illustrates the modern generation of young Albertans, an individual trapped between the province’s rural and urban cultural traditions, trying to find the balance between the two spaces. Like the rough neck, the “Hurting Albertan” represents the exodus of young men and women leaving rural communities for gainful employment as a heavy equipment operator (or oil rigger) elsewhere. In fact, Lund’s discography seems to be a reiteration of the “hurting Albertan.” Whether through the humorous song about his truck getting stuck in the mud and the comedic attempts to pull it out, or relaying the struggle of trying to plant crops when the “Chinook Wind” blows all of the “good dirt east,” Lund places himself in stories about the hurting rural communities. As journalist A. J. Mangum (2012, 5) writes,

[Lund] writes from the unmistakable perspective of a young westerner, one for whom changes in his landscape are unsurprising, but nonetheless heartbreaking. For Lund’s generation and those that have followed, making a living strictly from the land is less common, and staying connected to one’s cowboy roots requires effort. It’s a perspective the musician ably documents.

The singer-songwriter maintains his connection his cowboy roots through his music. By drawing on personal stories of friends and family surrounding him, he brings much-needed attention to the issues that ranchers face in their struggle to protect their families,

livelihood, and ranch land that has passed through multiple generations. In each of these songs, especially “Hurtin’ Albertan,” the attachment to the rural homeplace remains, as does the passion for the cultural activities that define their childhood experiences. Thus, the “Hurtin’ Albertan’s” chase for the elusive rodeo buckle remains a symbol of the homeplace and of the rural life that they can no longer return to.

Lund’s songs demonstrate an undeniable sense of geographic-cultural association. He invests the landscape of rural Alberta with meaning, inscribing his stories on her as if to bring her to life and impart identity to this vast territory. Through his narratives, Alberta has transformed from a desolate landscape to a rancher’s paradise, to a thriving rodeo culture, and to a sacred “foothills heaven” to protect from outsiders. She has been largely rural and, although she has been a source of frustration for her residents (with unpredictable weather that makes ranching and farming a challenge), she has represented traditional agrarian values and beliefs. This is Lund’s Alberta, and in these stories the audience finds not just the singer-songwriter’s origins, but his “geo-cultural” artistic identity as well. Alberta is not just the place in which he lives: it is the place with which he identifies. His emotional attachment to Alberta runs to his core because this is the land that four generations of his paternal and maternal families sought out to *make* their home at the turn of the twentieth century. Cantrill (1998, 303) has pointed out that an individual’s sense of place is magnified by the duration of tenure and reliance on the natural world, and in Lund’s case his family’s tenure dates back to the first days of the province, growing and expanding together, dependent on one another for survival. Lund’s sense of self (his identity) and sense of place (his attachment to Alberta) are so intimately connected that they have become intertwined throughout his life. Regionalism is important to him (Dudley 2011), but it is not just a case of finding a unique voice within today’s country music industry. Rather, it is the lens through which he understands and processes changes social, political, and cultural structures, and the lens through which he seems to want to see himself. Lund has not lived the life of which he sings for over twenty years, yet he continually re-imagines or constructs his personalized experiences on the rural landscapes of his youth. In so doing, he demonstrates just how deep his attachments are to rural southern Alberta, and to the geography, landscape, history, and cultures of the region.

## 7.2 Methodological Considerations and Further Research

There are a number of ways in which this particular topic could have been approached. For example, I could have conducted an ethnographic study, in which I would have interviewed Corb Lund, his band, and family members, and even members of the community in Taber and Cardston (in southern Alberta). This type of study might have revealed deeper (or perhaps just different) insights into the connections between Lund, his music, and his rural origins, while also shedding light on audience reception and the ways in which individuals identify with his music (or not), using his songs as anthems for aspects of their daily life. But the goal of this dissertation was not to examine the singer-songwriter's *intention*, but rather to *interpret* how his music, videos, interviews, blogs, and museum exhibit contribute to establishing his artistic identity. Because Lund has been so prolific with his own blogging (video and written) and has continually veered toward the regional in interviews, a significant body of ethnographic material already exists. These ethnographic documents are crucial to this project, as they are all part of the "story" that he has been communicating to his audience through various forms of media (song lyric, video narrative, promotional interview, researched museum exhibit, and so forth). My object, then, was to examine Lund's stories and messages, and to interrogate how each contributes to the construction of an artistic identity strongly rooted in narratives of place.

Another way in which this topic could have been addressed is through an examination of place songs throughout the genre's history. This type of historiographic study would certainly have allowed me to outline the tradition of place songs more thoroughly, and really flesh out the different types of responses to place. While an extensive study of place songs in country music would be valuable, to be sure, the process of analyzing a number of songs, by many artists and about a variety of places, would not have allowed me to unpack issues pertaining to geography and culture in a specific region. The dissertation would have thus been a survey of themes, rather than an investigation of the inner workings of the cultures and traditions of place through the songs of a country artist. Realizing the benefit of discussing the genre at large, I found that it was important to frame Corb Lund's music within the context of genre (specifically soft core and hard shell responses to place), and so I chose instead to start each chapter with a survey of prominent

(classic) themes within the country tradition. This also allowed me to bring in literature that I might not have otherwise had a chance to discuss in a project focused solely on Lund.

Finally, I could have chosen one specific theme, landscapes, for example, and analyzed the country music repertoire addressing topographic features of place. This type of study would have been interesting for considering not just the ways in which an artist “sees” and understands the physical environments of his/her origins, but it would also have compared representations of landscape as presented through songs by a variety of artists, taking into account different class perspectives, stylistic influences, and, perhaps most importantly, time period. As such, the dissertation could have focused on “landscape” songs in carefully selected regions, including Alberta, West Texas (Lubbock, specifically), and Virginia (to name a few locations commonly described in song narratives). Indeed, exploring music in this manner would have likely revealed fascinating observations about how landscapes (and an artist’s perception of landscape) have evolved over the course of the last 120 years. However, limiting the dissertation to one single theme would not have allowed me to look a fuller picture of a specific place. While we can glean a lot of information about place from landscape songs, even *more* can be revealed in songs about its climate, occupational practices, cultural and leisure activities, environment, and even the relationship between urban and rural spaces within a larger province or state. The present topic allowed me to achieve this goal.

In addition to these potential promising approaches, further research could work to unpack the role that place songs play in constructing identities of country artists within the soft shell and hard core spheres of songwriting. While each chapter was framed with a discussion of soft shell and hard core songs on specific themes, it seems obvious that there is room in scholarly discourse for a thorough (perhaps book-length) study on how artists from each cultural sphere construct elements of their artistic identity through regional themes. Peterson laid the groundwork for this type of study in his seminal monograph, *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity*, but more critical investigation needs to be done in order to really understand these deep bonds between country artist and place. This dissertation was certainly influenced by Peterson’s work, and sought to expand on his ideas as they pertain to Lund and his hard core artistry, but could not provide the same in-



depth investigation of soft shell artists. This type of project would inevitably run into similar issues of repertoire selection and thematic focus, but could easily be solved by choosing songs that charted on *Billboard's* Top Country Songs, which would mean that the study's repertoire had regular radio airplay, and was thus available to a wide audience (rather than limited to individuals who buy and listen to entire albums). This study would allow us to look not just at specific or archetypal "places" and/or the artist's identity, but also at the country music fan base, providing valuable insights into the types of themes and issues with which the general population interacts and finds personal meanings.

An in-depth exploration of issues of nationalism versus regionalism during times of growing international tensions would be another fascinating avenue to explore. Here I think specifically of events of the last decade and a half, and the place-based rhetoric of country music following the devastating events of 9/11. Country music has a long history of expressing geo-cultural identity, to be sure, but there is often a resurgence of such themes during times of increased political tensions, including World War II (1939-1945), the various stage of the Cold War (1947-1991), the Vietnam War (1955-1975), and following 9/11 (Schmelz 2007; Willman 2005; Wolfe and Akenson 2005). As Cecilia Tichi has noted (1994, 18), country music has always enabled us "to see vital parts of the national identity that otherwise are hidden, obscured, overshadowed." Indeed, in the months and decade following the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, country music artists turned increasingly to place-based narratives and nationalistic anthems as a way to define the nation, its people, its values, and, indeed, remind citizens of the "American dream." But just as nationalism and unity became a prominent issue for some, regionalism became an important theme for those who sought to define *their* place within the USA when the spotlight continued to focus on international relations over local issues. Quoting psychologist Stephen Frosh (2013, 87-88), Travis Stimeling (2015) has noted that the recent growth of songs about the "homeplace" in country music suggests a level of nostalgia "for more certain times, in which [...] 'identity' was stable and one's social role [was] clear and secure," and may very well be connected to the "rapid pace of life in the early twenty-first century." This project could investigate not just the songs charting on *Billboard's* Top Country Songs list, but also those included on the highest selling albums in the decade following the terrorist attack, and consider how country musicians evoked place

in their songs to negotiate their national and/or regional geo-cultural identity in a post-9/11 America.

### 7.3 Final Thoughts

There is a popular saying that “where you’re from says a lot about who you are.” This saying is frequently invoked to capture the important role that the “homeplace” plays in shaping an individual’s character, values, and beliefs. While this relationship is not always easy to define, it gets to the heart of an individual or community’s relationship to place and acknowledges the impact that social, political, environmental, and even religious structures have on personal growth and sense of self-identification of its residents. Furthermore, these geographic and cultural environments are not just the place in which individuals learn how to function in the world, but they provide a sense of rootedness and belonging as well. This popular phrase has been evoked recently in discussions regarding a country artist’s identity. Nancy Cardwell (2011, 1), for example, opened her monograph on Dolly Parton with this phrase, introducing the singer-songwriter through her poor rural upbringing, arguing that the Smoky Mountains influenced her music and career. The relationship was also highlighted in April 2011 at an Academy of Country Music special entitled “Girls Night Out: Superstar Women of Country,” an event that honoured female artists for their career accomplishments.<sup>4</sup> During the show each artist was saluted by an industry colleague and presented with a video that shared aspects of their story, mapping out their life experiences from their small-town or rural origins to present-day star status. In his tribute to his Sugarland bandmate Jennifer Nettles, Kristian Bush (2011) drew on this saying to introduce her video, suggesting that the singer’s hometown of Douglas, GA, shaped her values and character. The special concluded with the honourees together on stage singing Loretta Lynn’s “Coal Miner’s Daughter,” a classic example of autobiographical county narrative

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<sup>4</sup> The artists honoured at this event include The Judds (most award-winning female duo), Loretta Lynn (for her 50-year career as leading female country music artist), Reba McEntire (for having won female vocalist more times than any other artist), Martina McBride (for her continual dedication to raising social consciousness about domestic violence), Carrie Underwood (only female in the Academy to win Entertainer of the Year twice), Miranda Lambert (only female artist in the Academy to win Album of the Year twice), and Jennifer Nettles (one of only two female artists to have both performed and wrote a Song of the Year). For more information on the event see “ACM Girl’s Night Out,” *T4C*, Retrieved 26 July 2012, <<http://top40-charts.com/news.php?nid=66040>>.

and homage to the homeplace. Through these videos and Lynn's song narrative, this ACM special underscored not just the important relationship between a country artist and his/her origins, but also the genre's tradition of invoking narratives of place in both publicity and song lyrics as a way to reveal elements of an artist's character. Place-based songs have remained an important vehicle for country artists seeking to maintain connections to the geographic roots and communities in which they were raised, underscoring the ways in which their origins have impacted their life and identity—whether positive and negative.<sup>5</sup> Thus, it is not just a matter of a geographic region unveiling elements of an artist's character, but rather, of a country artist consciously *drawing on* place to articulate elements of his/her identity.

Corb Lund's music has provided an interesting case study for examining the complex nature of this relationship and artistic strategy. By analyzing his music, this dissertation has explored the multitude of ways in which the singer-songwriter has drawn on his personal and familial experiences to define his relationship to place and, by extension, construct the "geo-cultural" elements of his artistic identity. Regionalism has been and continues to be a key ingredient in his songwriting; Lund is currently in the studio recording his eighth album and, if his recent concerts are any indicator of the tone of the album, his fans can expect this focus to remain a critical part of his work. At the 2014 Interstellar Rodeo in his former hometown of Edmonton on "Corb Lund Day" (Corb Crew 2014b), Lund treated his fans to a performance of a new song, "S Lazy H," which recounts a brother and sister's struggle over the family ranch land (Lund 2014a). A sixth generation rancher, the young male protagonist took over the family land from his parents, working alongside his father until he passed away. His younger sister, however, moved east to pursue post-secondary education, where she eventually met and married a lawyer. When financial crisis hit the family homestead, the younger sister and her husband saw "a whole lot of value in the S Lazy H" ranch, and fought for their stake in the family land, which they ultimately sold to a developer who builds rows of houses on the land. The brother

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<sup>5</sup> Indeed, this dissertation has pointed to lyrical narratives that have both embraced and rejected place, including Dolly Parton's *My Tennessee Mountain Home* and the Dixie Chicks' "Lubbock or Leave It" (respectively). Yet even in a contentious relationship between artist and place, as with Natalie Maines of the Dixie Chicks, an audience can still learn a lot about an artist's origins, as a community's cultures and traditions could influence an individual to seek a different environment, one in which they can thrive.

tried, but failed, to ranch his remaining portion of the land, with the bank foreclosing on the property. This song, like “This is My Prairie,” has hit close to home for many ranching Albertans. As one fan commented on the performance video, “so many ranches are going through this these days,” pointing out that these are “the struggles that make Alberta what it is, [are] all but forgotten” (Lund 2014a). Thus, once again, Lund proves his ability to address relevant and serious issues affecting rural Albertans, highlighting the financial challenges that young ranchers face and the emotional attachment to land—only magnified by the duration of tenure (often generational) on that land. The song narrative reveals how deeply in tune Lund is with the evolving cultures and traditions of his rural origins, using his position as a platform to share and bring awareness to these types of stories. But more than telling the story of suffering Albertan ranchers, “S Lazy H” demonstrates Lund’s commitment to maintaining the artistic identity that he has spent the last twenty years constructing through his music. Like all of the protagonists he has portrayed in song, this story’s rancher is another iteration of the “hurtin’ Albertan,” of the young man trapped between the shifting cultures of modern society, clinging to the rural traditions of his family heritage. His songs reveal a longing for simpler, more certain times, precisely what Frosh (2013) referred to as nostalgia for a time when an individual’s social role was clearly defined. In the case of Alberta’s working class, and exemplified in the juxtaposition of traditional ranching and rodeo culture with the province’s increasingly industrial reality, the need for the “Hurtin’ Albertan” exists. Through Lund, he represents the rural communities struggling to retain their cultures and traditions, and to protect the ranches that have sustained multiple generations of a family. Beyond bringing attention to these issues, “S Lazy H” demonstrates Lund’s commitment to maintaining the artistic identity that he has spent the last twenty years writing through his music. A self-stylized “hurtin’ Albertan”, this song, and its many iterations, reinforces Lund’s intimate connection to and rootedness in the geography, culture, and traditions of his origins, all while strengthening the role that such narratives play in defining the “Albertan-ness” of his “geo-cultural” identity.

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### **Maps:**

*Coal Bed Methane Deposits – Alberta, Canada*. Scale 1 cm = 55 kilometers approx. Base data: ArcCanada 3.1, ESRI Canada Energy Resources Conservation Board, Alberta Geological Society: CBM Potential of the Alberta Plains - Ardley Coal Zone Boundary (GIS dataset), CBM Potential of the Alberta Plains - Drumheller Coal Zone Boundary (GIS dataset), CBM Potential of the Alberta Plains - Mannville Coal Zone Boundary (GIS dataset), 2009. Ottawa: Sarah Simpkin, University of Ottawa, June 2014.

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